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Refugee Resilience and Climate Justice within the Vietnamese
American Community in New Orleans, Louisiana

By

PETER NGUYEN
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

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in the

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of the

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DAVIS

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Dedication

Cho Ba Má và Chị Trúc
For Dad, Mom, and my Sister Trúc

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Abstract

Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in New Orleans have long endured strenuous hardships through Hurricane Katrina, illegal toxic landfill dumping, the BP oil spill, and many other environmental injustices. Outside media and academics have often portrayed this community as *resilient* in successfully rebuilding after hurricanes. However, this label can be harmful by overlooking the community's daily experiences, vulnerabilities, worries, and continued government negligence. This raises the question: In what ways and to what extent does understanding how the Vietnamese community in New Orleans negotiates resilience inform a deep examination of how refugee and immigrant communities navigate injustices and inequities within and beyond the contexts of climate change?

To understand the nexus of climate justice and resilience, I re-ground the meaning of resilience through a deep dive into examining *refugee resilience*. My use and application of *refugee resilience* contribute to the ongoing discourse that introduces a critical lens into how refugee and immigrant communities such as Vietnamese refugees engage in resilience and climate justice. Specifically contextualized within the Vietnamese refugee community in New Orleans, *refugee resilience* necessitates the acknowledgment of the strength and capacity of the community to adapt to significant disruptions while critically recognizing the challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities that they continue to face in the context of climate change. It builds upon the theory by addressing the structural disinvestment by governmental institutions that creates a false hope of supporting the community at the surface level through small grants but neglecting to address the systemic issues that are at the root of the problem.

Refugee resilience is examined through three themes that highlight the ways in which this community has been resilient: (1) social memory, (2) the role of community organizations, institutions, and local leadership, and (3) intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care. Each

of these three themes builds upon each other, as social memory informs the analysis of the ways in which organizations, institutions, and leaders engage with previous navigation of disruptions, which allows a deep understanding of intergenerational perspectives and trauma. Social memory emphasizes the importance of navigating past disturbances of war and hurricanes within the Vietnamese refugee diasporic community. The role that community organizations, institutions, and local leaders play is key in empowering and galvanizing community members to advocate for themselves while preserving a solid sense of collaboration. Lastly, listening to community members' perspectives and relationships with trauma provides a critical analysis of the challenges that the community continues to face amidst their successful attempts to rebuild and preserve their community from disruptions. These three themes are part of a non-linear approach where each of the themes accumulates an understanding of the other themes. This research builds upon Simi Kang's critique of resilience through a *refugee resilience* framework that cautions mainstream utilization of resilience but that further requires a critical analysis of how it is used and implicated for specific communities.

Keywords: climate justice, resilience, refugee resilience, Southeast Asian Americans, Vietnamese Americans

Chapter 1: Introduction

“[Resilience] might be a feeling versus a word. We’re refugees. That’s them being resilient, them overcoming the BP oil spill disaster. That’s them being resilient. They’ll just go through all the struggles because they’ve already done that but resilience to me is the ability to bounce back.”

- New Orleans East Community Resident



Figure 1. Image of VEGGI Farm Co-Op community garden. (Photo taken by Peter Nguyen)

Positionality Statement

Growing up with refugee parents who fled Vietnam, the first stories I heard about their journey to the U.S. as boat people were about the force of the ocean, making life and death unpredictable. My parents grew up in the Mekong River Delta and my father would always share memories from his childhood about how people would use the river to wash their clothes, bathe, and drink water. Although water quality in Vietnam during the 1950s would be considered “dirty,” compared to the water quality of today’s developed world, my parents would always try to make the best use through boiling, reusing water, and collecting rainwater. Stories such as these, and others about how my parents have had to endure hardships at refugee camps left an evocative impression in my mind about the vital importance of equitable access to water, rights, and resources.

My interests in environmental/climate justice and resilience stems from learning about my parents’ relationships with water both in Vietnam and the U.S. Seeing parallels between how my parents did not grow up with access to clean water in Vietnam and learning about how other communities face disproportionate pollution burdens inspired me to pursue community-engaged environmental justice research. Raised around community organizations, I am drawn to community-engaged scholarship as a practice that bridges community knowledge with advocacy research. My father, who has been involved in community organizing and social work in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago for over 40 years, inspires me to engage in this work not only through an environmental lens but to link it with social justice through an intersectional framework as issues faced in these communities overlap with systemic inequities and barriers. Drawing from him, I acknowledge the importance of centering marginalized perspectives in my

work towards community-oriented problem-solving. I extend this vision of community-engaged scholarship to my passions and research with the Vietnamese community in New Orleans.

As a person writing about the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, I believe it is important to acknowledge my positionality as a second-generation Vietnamese American who was raised outside of this community in Chicago. The fieldwork research that I conducted in New Orleans was my first time experiencing New Orleans as well as connecting and interacting with the Vietnamese community there. My position embodies an outsider perspective first, but also an insider being Vietnamese American and a child of Vietnamese refugees who escaped the war after 1975. I was very fortunate to be able to speak Vietnamese, even in a slightly different Southern dialect (compared to other provincial and Northern dialects), and to know my family's experiences, both of which allowed me to relate to New Orleans' Vietnamese community members' upbringing and journey to the U.S. through my family's experiences. I was able to connect with the youth, elders, multi-generational families, community leaders, business leaders, researchers, Catholic and Buddhist groups, and organizational providers in the community.

Conversely, both my identity as a second-generation Vietnamese American with Southern Vietnamese refugee parents and my ability to speak Vietnamese may have been a source of bias in interacting with elders similar to my parents who may have been more inclined to share their stories with younger generations. I was very touched that I was welcomed into and taken care of by the community almost as one of their own. I express deep gratitude for the generosity and kindness that Sông Community Development Corporation (Sông CDC) and VEGGI Farm Co-Op staff extended in connecting me with residents, inviting me to community cultural events, and wanting to help me as much as possible with my research. Being able to connect with them as Vietnamese Americans with similar struggles that my parents faced in the

U.S., I was able to see parts of the community gatherings and socials that were familiar to me growing up in the Vietnamese community in Chicago. They connected me with VAYLA and VIET staff, where the elders saw me as one of their children, which genuinely touched my heart. I deeply cherish this opportunity to connect with a Vietnamese community that I did not grow up around but felt as if I had known them for a while. While I am very fortunate to have connected with this community, my thoughts in this dissertation do not speak on behalf of the organizations and institutions that I interacted with.

Although this dissertation is not fully representative of all the voices of community leaders and residents, I want to preface that this work provides only a snippet into the lived experiences of this community. Being in a privileged position in higher education and having the opportunity to conduct this dissertation research, I am committed to elevating the voices of this community as well as other refugee and immigrant communities facing similar circumstances. My goal is to delve beyond this dissertation research and graduate studies into how this can be most useful for community leaders, residents, and organization staff to use, perhaps by highlighting the challenges and inequities to policymakers and funders. My hopes and plans are to funnel this to two main audiences: (1) raise awareness of the implications of resilience while strengthening the community resilience work and (2) centering the resilient spirit of the community through continued collaboration with community partners.

Motivations & Inspiration

As part of the Vietnamese diaspora, I have been privileged to visit other Vietnamese communities in the U.S. such as in Orange County, San Jose, Sacramento, Houston, Cleveland, my hometown of Chicago, and now New Orleans. It is touching to connect with folks from the same diasporic community who have resettled in other geographic locations. It is eye-opening to

see the solidarity of strengths and resiliency of our communities, as well as the challenges that they face. My family's, in particular, my parents,' journeys to the U.S. have been very much a resilient one to leave their home country of Vietnam, travel to refugee camps in Indonesia and Malaysia, and ultimately resettle here in the U.S. That inspired me to unpack what it means to be resilient as part of the Vietnamese refugee and immigrant communities, but to also celebrate the strengths and capacities to have established new homes after losing their country.

My reasoning for selecting the Vietnamese community in New Orleans as a case study site was due in part to four reasons: (1) the similarities in climate and livelihoods between the Mekong River Delta and coastal fishing communities in Vietnam with the Mississippi River Delta in New Orleans, (2) the nexus of my passions where all three elements of environmental justice, climate change impacts, and a Vietnamese community intersected, (3) the active embodiment of environmental justice activism, cohesive organizing, and intergenerational solidarity post-Katrina that I have not seen so actively expressed in this community as compared to other Vietnamese communities in the U.S., and (4) my original dissertation research was proposed to investigate how community-based adaptation was taking place within three rural communities in the Mekong River Delta in Vietnam, however, due to the COVID pandemic Vietnam was closed for two years that pushed me to pivot my project to another Vietnamese community in the U.S. who have experienced direct climate change impacts. My first learning of this community was through a documentary film called *A Village Called Versailles* in 2009 that conveyed the resilient story of the Vietnamese community immediately after the Katrina flooding and activism in fighting against an illegal landfill built next to the community. Since then, I have been captivated to understand more of these relationships and what resilience means at the grassroots level in relation to recent challenges of climate change and other issues.

Case Study Background

Resettlement History

To situate the context of this case study on the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, I want to first ground us in the history of their journey following the end of the Vietnam War to resettling in the Village de L'Est community in New Orleans East. The resettlement of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants¹ to New Orleans can be traced back to the aftermath of the Vietnam War in 1975. There were three waves of migration from Vietnam with the first being immediately after 1975, the second wave from 1977-1982 where most escaped as “boat people,” and a third wave from the 1980s towards the present that included more sponsored families (Dinh, 2009; Zhou & Bankston, 2000).² Through the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Act, the U.S. established a domestic resettlement program to admit 135,000 refugees from Southeast Asia, primarily from Vietnam, as a response to the humanitarian crisis (Campi, 2005). During this resettlement process, Vietnamese refugees were primarily relocated to four refugee camps, one of which was in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas (Clarion Herald, 2014; Nguyen, 2015). Many faith-based and non-government organizations (NGOs) were actively involved in helping to resettle refugees from these camps to various cities (Leong, 2007).

In May of 1975, Archbishop Philip M. Hannan of the Associated Catholic Charities of New Orleans visited Fort Chaffee and wanted to help resettle the Vietnamese families to New

¹ I am using both “refugee” and “immigrant” terms when referring to this community, as the community is primarily comprised of refugees but also includes immigrants who have come in later waves to the U.S. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as people who have fled their countries to escape conflict, violence, or political persecution to seek safety in another country (Betts et al. 2013). There are various immigration statuses ranging from economic, education, or sponsored immigrants. Many in this community have resettled as refugees fleeing the Vietnam war and persecution, while there are many family members who came as immigrants through sponsorship in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

² Not every Vietnamese person who resettled in the U.S. was under the refugee status. However, the initial waves immediately after 1975 were classified as refugees. There were other waves in the 1980s and 1990s such as in the 1990s that was under the U.S. Humanitarian Operation and resettled individuals who sponsored family members over.

Orleans where Catholic Charities could provide direct service support (Clarion Herald, 2014; Leong, 2007). Archbishop Hannan asked Catholic Charities to help find subsidized, low-income Section 8 housing for which he was able to sponsor 1,000 families (Clarion Herald, 2014; Leong, 2007). The Section 8 housing complex was called Versailles Arms in the Village de L'Est community, which many have also referred to this community as Versailles. Figures 2 and 3 show this Village de L'Est community in relation to the Greater New Orleans area. Figure 2 shows the Vietnamese communities in the red-shaded ovals. The rightmost oval is the Village de L'Est community and the other includes the spread-out communities in the Westbank.

As noted by the Archbishop and Catholic Charities' involvement, the majority of the refugees are of Catholic faith who came from the same villages in Northern and coastal Southeast Vietnam. Many of the families came from the villages of Phát Diêm and Bù Chu located in Northern Vietnam, which were already centered around the Catholic diocese, and migrated South during the 1954 migrations (Nguyen, 2021; Airriess et al., 2008; Vu & VanLandingham, 2009). Coming from the same villages, this was an already tight-knit community migrating to New Orleans. They were drawn to New Orleans initially because of the housing and financial assistance that Catholic Charities offered in addition to the similar climate. Immediately after resettling, the community built a longstanding institution of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Church that was established in 1976 and continues to be the glue of the community (Archdiocese of New Orleans, 2024). The Vietnamese Catholic culture creates a unique sense of community and connectedness through its parishioner network, which is further explored in Chapter 3: The Roles of Community Organizations, Institutions, and Local Leadership in Climate Justice.

This spurred a chain migration of family and friends from the same villages in Vietnam to migrate to Versailles, of which the Vietnamese community grew to 5,000 in 1990 (Leong, 2007). Now the Greater New Orleans Vietnamese community is home to about 17,000 people (New Orleans-Metairie, LA, 2023).

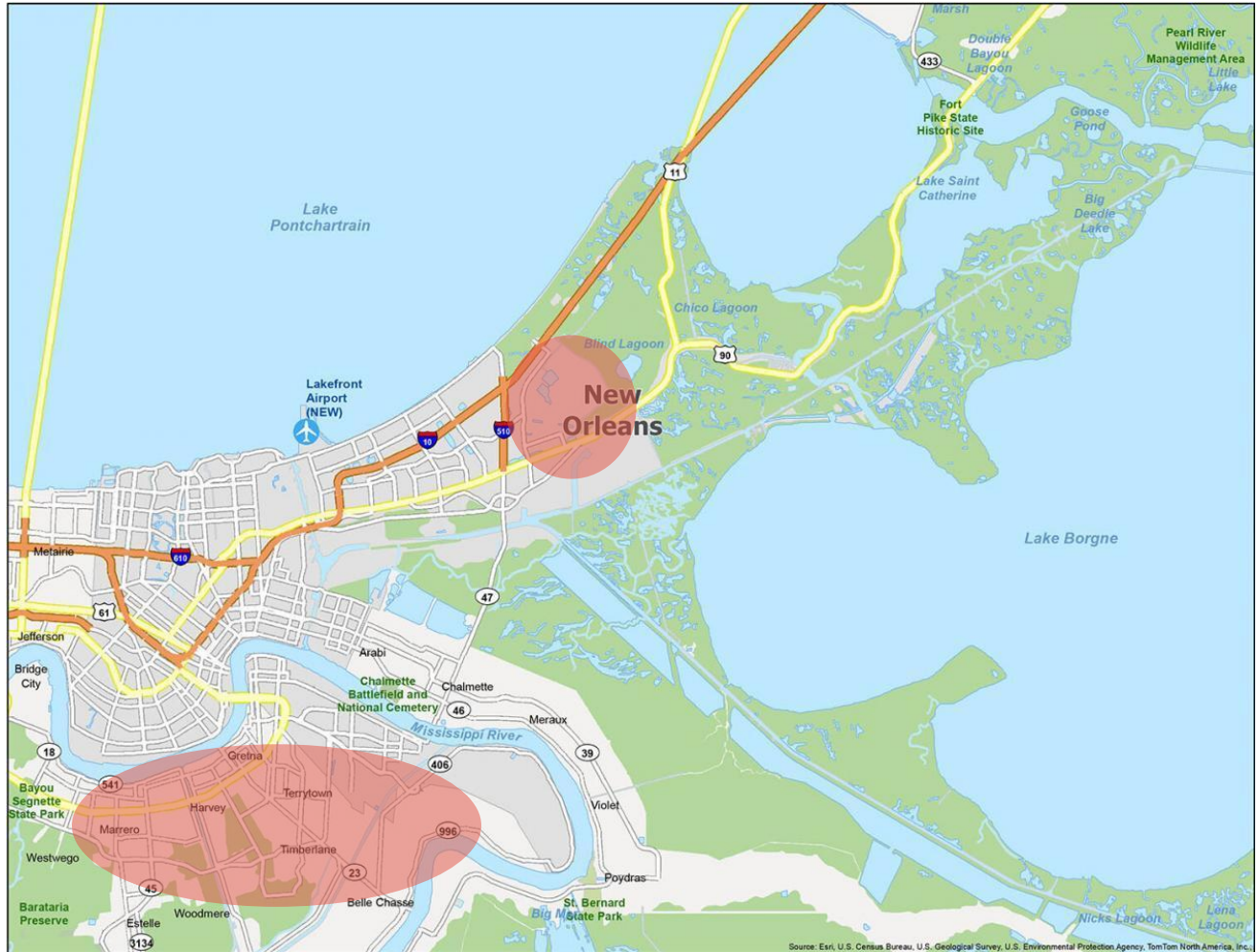


Figure 2. Map of Greater New Orleans showing the areas where the Vietnamese communities are located. There is the main and first community in New Orleans East called Village de L'Est. On the Westbank are less concentrated Vietnamese communities. (Map created via OpenStreetMap).

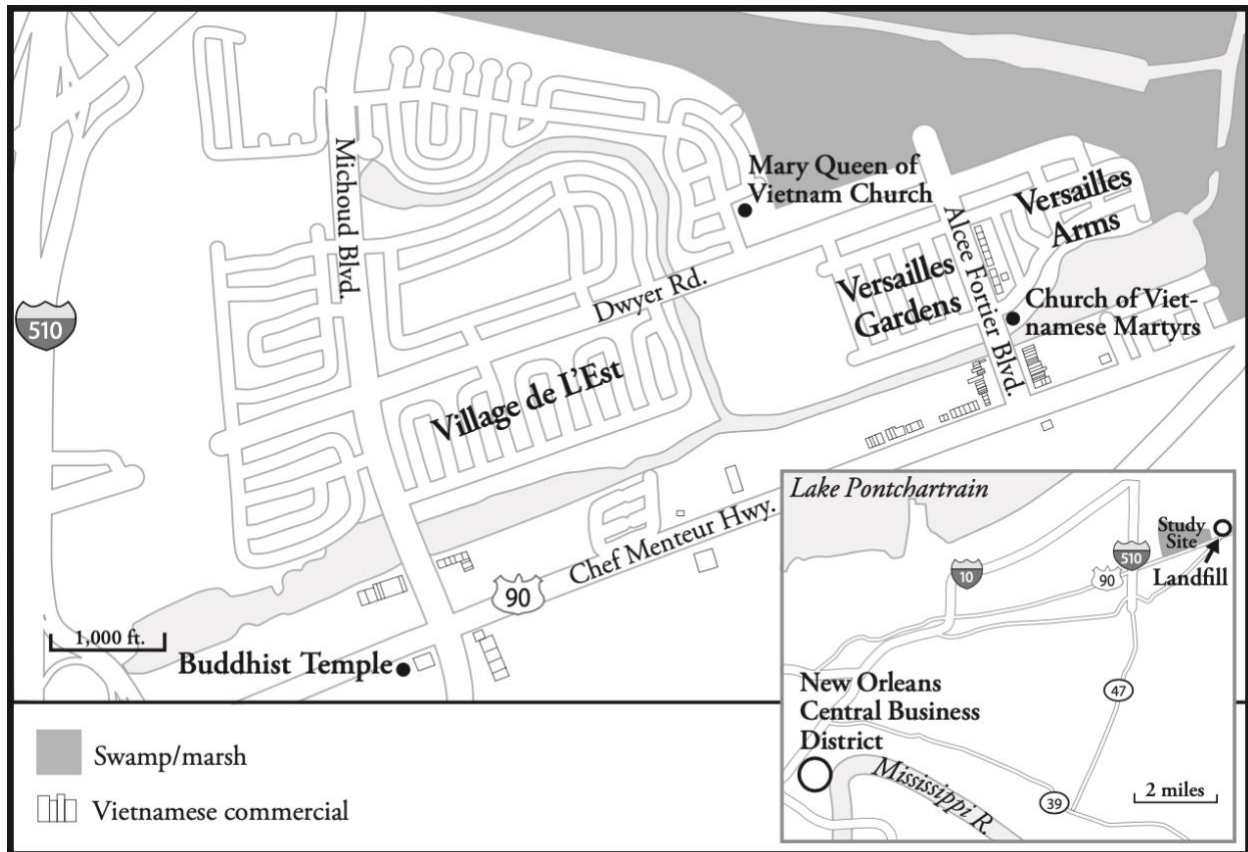


Figure 3. A map of New Orleans East showing the Vietnamese community of Village de L'Est, also referred to as Versailles. This shows where the original Versailles Arms apartments were located as well as the Mary Queen of Vietnam Church. The map in the bottom right shows how Village de L'Est is situated in relation to the New Orleans city center as well as the toxic landfill that was built next to the community (Leong et al. 2007; Neighborhood level measurements 2009; sourced from Airriess).

Geography of New Orleans

New Orleans has one of the most concentrated Vietnamese communities in the U.S. that faces significant climate change impacts (Nguyen, 2015; Leong, 2007). New Orleans has a very similar subtropical climate to coastal Southern Vietnam where many of its Vietnamese residents originally resettled from. Many Vietnamese were correspondingly attracted to New Orleans because of its similar environment of a sub-tropical climate and delta landscape surrounded by water that created the same fishing opportunities as back home in Vietnam (Clarion Herald, 2014).

What makes New Orleans an evolving place is its geographic location right at the heart of where the Mississippi River Delta meets the Gulf of Mexico. Being situated by the warm waters of the Gulf puts it right in the hot zone of hurricane paths that pose high risks of completely changing the landscape. Climate change has been a persistent reality for New Orleans residents, with the main risks including rising sea levels, increasing temperatures and heat stress, coastal land loss, land subsidence, poor air quality, changes in precipitation, and increased frequency and intensities of extreme weather events such as hurricanes and tornados (New Orleans Health Department, 2018; Landrieu and Hebert, 2017).

The fact that low-income communities of color in New Orleans are disproportionately more exposed to pollution and face structural and racial inequities can weaken their ability to adapt. In Village de L'Est of New Orleans East, the community is 45% African American, 45% Vietnamese, and 8% Latinx (Racial Wealth Divide Initiative, 2016). With a predominantly Black and Vietnamese community, Katrina further exposed those inequities by showing the incessant neglect and disinvestment where there was a pronounced delay in response times to this community. The breaking of the levee in New Orleans East that flooded much of the area led to property damage and lost homes. The response by the federal, state, and city governments was appalling in New Orleans East as it was one of the last areas to receive rescue teams, disaster relief aid, FEMA trailers, and property rebuilding assistance. This is a continuation of the government's failure to protect poor communities from environmental disasters, including neglect of low-income neighborhoods, and a large disparity of recovery resources and aid provided to African American working-class families relative to white and affluent communities (Broom, 2019; Bullard & Wright, 2009). Furthermore, for the Vietnamese community in New

Orleans East, these risks can greatly destabilize the residents' social networks and grassroots efforts in navigating these environmental and climate justice issues.

Research Objectives

Resilience has often been used very loosely when applied to certain communities, especially to refugee and immigrant communities. This label can have various harmful implications that overlook a community's daily experiences, strengths, vulnerabilities, and concerns. The Vietnamese refugee community in New Orleans has long endured hardships including Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the BP oil spill in 2010, illegal toxic landfill dumping in 2006, and many other environmental injustices. This raises my main research question: In what ways and to what extent does understanding how the Vietnamese community in New Orleans negotiates resilience inform a deep examination of how refugee and immigrant communities navigate injustices and inequities within and beyond the contexts of climate change?

To answer this question, I re-ground the use of resilience using a framework of *refugee resilience* to guide the understanding of the Vietnamese community's process in negotiating resilience and navigating climate justice. Building upon recent scholarship, my application of *refugee resilience* contributes to the ongoing discourse that introduces a critical lens into how refugee and immigrant communities such as Vietnamese refugees negotiate resilience.

Contextualized within this New Orleans community, *refugee resilience* necessitates the acknowledgment of the community's strength and capacity to adapt to significant disruptions while critically recognizing the challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities they continue to face. This builds upon existing understandings of resilience because it links resilience and climate

justice together while centering the vulnerabilities and inequities faced by refugee and immigrant communities.

In addressing the gaps of how climate justice and resilience intersect through an intersectional examination of overlapping vulnerabilities shown in refugee and immigrant communities, I delve into this study through three lenses that shape my main three chapters: (1) social memory, (2) role of community organizations, institutions, and local leadership, and (3) intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care. Each of the three lenses enriches the understanding of each other's themes, which together illustrate intersecting vulnerabilities and inequities faced in the community. Social memory informs the analysis of the ways in which organizations, institutions, and leaders engage with previous navigation of disruptions, which allows a deep understanding of intergenerational perspectives and trauma. Social memory emphasizes the importance of navigating past disturbances of war and hurricanes within the Vietnamese refugee diasporic community. The role that community organizations, institutions, and local leaders play is key in showing these vulnerabilities through their activism and mobilization against injustices. Lastly, listening to the community's perspectives and relationships with trauma provides a critical analysis of the previous challenges and potential triggering trauma that the community faces.

Chapter 2 establishes the refugee resilience framework while exploring how the social memory of navigating past experiences, communal leadership, and support through social networks and grassroots organizing inform the community's ability to adapt and recover from environmental disturbances. Chapter 3 looks at the role of organizations, institutions, and local leadership that are key in empowering and galvanizing community members to advocate for themselves while preserving a solid sense of collaboration. These organizations and institutions

have been pivotal in galvanizing residents in environmental justice activism, such as effectively fighting against an illegal toxic landfill post-Katrina in 2006. Lastly, Chapter 4 focuses on intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care that provides a critical analysis of the challenges that various age groups in the community continue to face amidst their successful attempts to rebuild and preserve their community from disruptions. Trauma grounds *refugee resilience* in recognizing and identifying the disinvestment and daily inequities that can be exacerbated by climate change impacts. Table 1 below shows the research questions used to examine each of these three lenses in detail.

Research Questions

Chapters		Research Questions	Methods
CHAPTER 2	Refugee Resilience: Re-grounding Resilience, Navigating Disruptions & Climate/ Environmental Justice within the Vietnamese Community in New Orleans	<p>a) How does the Vietnamese community define and negotiate resilience?</p> <p>b) What are the material and discursive implications of ascribing resilience to refugee and immigrant communities such as the Vietnamese community in New Orleans?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Field Observations</p> <p>Secondary Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oral History (Viet Chronicle Project) - Organizations Speaker Series - Podcast Interviews
CHAPTER 3	Refugee Resilience: The Roles of Community Organizations, Institutions, and Local Leadership in Climate Justice	<p>a) How have vulnerabilities and inequities related to climate justice shaped the community?</p> <p>b) How do organizations and institutions address these factors?</p> <p>c) In particular, how do local community organizations, institutions, and leaders reveal both the strengths and challenges of the community that are integral to refugee resilience?</p>	
CHAPTER 4	Uncovering Intergenerational Perspectives, Trauma, and Care in the Face of Climate Change within the Vietnamese Community in New Orleans	<p>a) How does examining intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and approaches to care contribute to refugee resilience within the context of climate justice in the Vietnamese community in New Orleans?</p> <p>b) How does this lens reveal the strengths and challenges within this community to address climate change impacts?</p> <p>c) How does this lens reveal ways to address the vulnerabilities and inequities faced by the community to climate change impacts?</p>	

Table 1. This table summarizes the three main chapters and the corresponding research questions and methods for each chapter.

Methodology

To fully understand how the Vietnamese community negotiates resilience, using a grounded theory approach was necessary to hear directly from the community residents themselves of their own interpretations of what resilience means for them in the context of climate justice as well as how resilience overlaps with other challenges that they currently face (Khan, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2017). Grounded theory provides the latest look into understanding the social interactions and networks of the community and how these intersect with climate change impacts and resilience. Using a mixed methods approach, I primarily employed a qualitative research study coupled with multimedia analyses. This included 16 semi-structured interviews; participant observations of community meetings, events, and informal conversations; multimedia analysis of podcast interviews and organization guest speaker talks; and thematic analysis of oral history transcripts from the Viet Chronicle project.

My fieldwork research site visits took place from March to June of 2022 and January to February of 2023. Based in the Greater New Orleans area, Louisiana, my study site was concentrated in the Vietnamese communities of Village de L'Est in New Orleans East as well as the Westbank neighborhoods including Marrero, Woodlawn, Avondale, and Gretna. I initially connected with staff from Sôg CDC and the Tulane University Center for Studies of Displaced Populations (CSDP). They generously facilitated connections with residents and leaders as well as directed me to other organizations such as the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA) and Vietnamese Initiative in Economic Training (VIET) who guided my questions based on emerging themes. These connections become a purposive snowball sampling approach as each person I talked to recommended other individuals (Noy, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews ranging from one to three hours were conducted with 16 community members that explored the relationships between previous migration experiences, resilience, climate change adaptation, and other concerns in the community. These were recorded with participants' permissions, kept confidential, and were anonymous. The demographics include ten who were first-generation born in Vietnam who migrated to the U.S. after the Vietnam War between 1975 and 1985. Of the remaining interviews, two were 1.5-generation and three were second-generation Vietnamese Americans. 14 of the 16 interviewees were of Catholic faith, and most were middle-aged and seniors with a couple of youths in their 20s and 30s. Additionally, there was a mix of interviewees who lived in different parts of New Orleans such as in the Westbank communities and the neighboring city of Metairie. The majority were residents who currently live or had previously lived in Village de L'Est. The interview protocol can be found in the Appendix.

Participant observations were equally an important second methods approach that consisted of observing community meetings, tours, socials, events, morning markets, religious services at Catholic churches and Buddhist temples, and engaging in many informal conversations with community residents. Most of my interactions with the community were through short informal conversations where I had higher accessibility through introductions made at community meetings and events.

The remaining approaches included thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, written field note observations, podcast interviews of staff from Sông CD, VAYLA's Sinews in the Cypress speaker talks, and transcripts of oral histories from the Viet Chronicle Project. Using NVivo 14 qualitative coding software, I coded for emerging themes. Thematic analysis was selected to explore the emerging themes of how the Vietnamese community shares their own

interpretations of resilience in their community and how they relate to their experiences as refugees and migrants. The inclusion of mixed media supplements direct interviews with community members that add a third-party observation and interpretation of the community's relationship with climate and environmental issues in addition to other community concerns.

Limitations to this study's methodology include the lower number of interviews of youth compared to middle-aged and elderly groups, which is partly attributed to the snowball connections and limited five-month fieldwork visit. The extended COVID pandemic also limited the visit duration, but it could have led to lower numbers of interviews due to certain folks still being wary of socializing and meeting people in person. Additionally, being physically separated from the community immediately after the fieldwork trip limited prolonged exposure and continued interactions with community members that could have potentially yielded more interviews and observations.

Theoretical Background Introduction

Woven throughout this study are two theoretical fields that this dissertation draws from as well as contributes to climate justice and resilience. I will introduce both fields and the refugee resilience framework that I developed in linking resilience together with climate justice along with their analyses of intersecting vulnerabilities, but the main chapters will delve into the history of the fields, gaps, and contributions of this research. Chapter 2 provides an overview and examination of resilience theory and how I re-ground the utilization of resilience through a *refugee resilience* framework that emerged from this research. Chapters 3 and 4 provide a deep look into climate justice, how it emerged out of the environmental justice movement, and how

the gaps of incorporating an organizational and intergenerational lens are key to enriching both climate justice and resilience.

Climate Justice (CJ) first emerged out of the Environmental Justice (EJ) movement in the late 1990s when EJ was aiming to expand to address the root causes of climate change and impacted frontline communities to the fossil fuel industries (Jafry et al., 2019; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). EJ principles and definitions of justice helped to conceptualize the foundation for CJ, which includes addressing “distributive inequity, lack of recognition, disenfranchisement and exclusion, and, more broadly, an undermining of the basic needs, capabilities, and functioning of individuals and communities” within the context of climate change (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 361). Amorim-Maia et al. (2022) push the field by calling for an intersectional climate justice that integrates compounding and overlapping vulnerabilities within local communities. One of the key sub-components of intersectional climate justice is promoting vulnerability activism and community resilience building (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). Much of the literature has attempted to delve into linking justice within climate justice and resilience in the past several years. However, there remains a gap in resilience that can integrate dimensions of intersectional climate justice into its framework and applications. This integration is needed to comprehensively understand how overlapping vulnerabilities are built on top of and can be exacerbated by climate change impacts and is also key to identifying systemic inequities.

Resilience has had a complicated and dispersed history, as it has been integrated into many disciplines. However, it historically arose from the physical sciences that were focused specifically on socio-ecological systems (Rana, 2020; Adler et al., 2015). Resilience has generally been defined as the “capacity to adapt, self-organize, learn, renew and develop” in the face of stresses or disturbances to a system (Adler et al., 2015). More recently, resilience has

been applied to climate change and natural disasters to address how communities can adapt and recover from climate change impacts (Rana, 2020; Carlson et al., 2012; Ossewaarde et al., 2021). In addressing communities' adaptative capabilities, there has been a call to address justice and power dynamics more within resilience, as resilience differs between types of communities. Resilience is a process where communities are on a continuum of having different levels of capacities and vulnerabilities. My main contribution builds upon Simi Kang's (2022) development of refugee resilience that provides a systemic critique of how resilience is used and its harmful implications for communities to potentially continue to be sacrifice communities because of their resilience. I add to this systemic critique but offer a different dimension in grounding the framework in this community's voices who have articulated themselves as proud of their resilience but elevating their calls to public authorities that they still face structural inequities and daily vulnerabilities. Refugee resilience aims to address the gaps of integrating climate justice with resilience, by incorporating a social memory examination, a localized look into organizations and institutions as staples driving resilience building, and integrating an intergenerational lens to explore various generational perspectives and trauma. These are key to understanding how resilience negotiation in this community reveals the strengths and challenges that they continue to face as well as ways to address those challenges moving forward.

Overall, my study contributes to the larger resilience field by integrating climate justice and more of refugee and immigrant community perspectives. Refugee resilience provides this link between climate justice and resilience that centers on how this community articulates their resilient practices as well as the vulnerabilities and inequities they still face. Centered in the community's voices, it provides an empirical contribution that also grounds theoretical contributions to both resilience and climate justice. I hope this research can be used by

policymakers, funders, and community organizations to inform grassroots efforts currently underway and future opportunities for community-led initiatives to address climate justice and the intersecting vulnerabilities related to housing, crime and safety, and access to social services. As summarized in the policy-practice recommendations table (Table 3) in the Conclusion chapter, there are applications in practice on the ground of how policymakers can create more programs and investments while integrating community voices into decision-making processes to address intersecting vulnerabilities. Funders can provide different avenues of financial and programmatic assistance to grassroots efforts. Community organizations can engage in more collaborative efforts with each other to bridge access to services while engaging with intergenerational justice.

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Chapter 2

Refugee Resilience: Re-grounding Resilience, Navigating Disruptions, & Climate/Environmental Justice within the Vietnamese Community in New Orleans

“Where there is a disaster there is a chance for the people who are involved in it to do something better. It can be financially, it can be emotionally, it can be love, it can be anything.”
- John-Hòa Nguyễn, Community Leader

Introduction

As articulated by John-Hòa Nguyễn, a leader in the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, the spirit of this community is to approach any challenge or disruption as an opportunity to grow and overcome. Members of the New Orleans Vietnamese community have faced many disruptions and physical relocations throughout their lives, including escaping war, hurricanes, tornadoes, oil spills, and toxic landfill pollution, yet they have always displayed strong resilience in overcoming these challenges. To examine how this community navigates all these shifts while preserving their sense of home and unity, one must consider the fluidity of New Orleans’ and coastal Louisiana’s environmental and cultural landscapes, which are continuously changing in response to climate change and racial politics.

In order to understand these dynamics, I must first revisit how the Vietnamese came to settle in New Orleans, which will be discussed in-depth in the latter Case Study section below. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, in 1975 more than one million Vietnamese refugees were displaced and 1.6 million eventually resettled in the United States. Approximately 2,000 Vietnamese resettled in New Orleans in 1975 and the Vietnamese community has since grown to about 17,000 people (New Orleans-Metairie, LA, 2023). As a coastal city, New Orleans has a very similar climate to much of Vietnam, where fishing and shrimping are common. Located at

the mouth of the Mississippi Delta, New Orleans is an evolving and transient place where the ecology and culture ebbs and flow in complex and unpredictable ways such as the way the environment changes with the Mississippi River flooding and eroding banks as well as the meshing of different ethnic cultures in both food and music. This is also a point of similarity to the Vietnam Mekong River Delta where many people have migrated from.

New Orleans exhibits this state of fluidity specifically because of how it is situated in relation to the water that encircles the city. As a coastline city that sits precisely where the freshwaters of the Mississippi River meet the saltwater of the Gulf of Mexico, this city flows with the state of water that surrounds it. Communities adapt to the fluctuations in the water levels of the river, nearby lakes, canals, and coastline through the growing of food and cultural programming related to Mardi Gras and other ethnic communities' holidays. Adding in the context of climate change, this area is constantly changing because of how it is situated within the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico which is vulnerable to hurricanes, which can quickly alter a region within a few days.

New Orleans is also situated in its rich influences of cultures from Native American, Spanish, French, Creole, Haitian, African and African American, Latinx, and, more recently, Vietnamese. However, there is not an abundant amount of written history on Asian Americans in New Orleans where the majority of the Asian American community is the Vietnamese population (Tang, 2011). Being forcibly displaced from their own home country after war, Vietnamese refugees had to establish their new lives in New Orleans while adjusting to a new country. Similar to other refugee and immigrant communities but with different homemaking processes, adapting to a new home away from home while remaining tight-knit with each other

has contributed to how the Vietnamese community has been characterized as resilient by mainstream media and academic scholars (Nguyen, 2021; Xu, 2017).

Vietnamese Americans in New Orleans and other parts of the Gulf South have long endured strenuous hardships through natural and man-made disasters including Hurricane Katrina, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, illegal toxic landfill dumping, and many other environmental injustices. Nonetheless, displaced Vietnamese Americans have exhibited strong community resilient strategies along the Gulf Coast, particularly after Hurricane Katrina. Since Katrina, resilience has often been ascribed to the Vietnamese community in New Orleans when describing their ability to quickly return and successfully rebuild. Two key questions are addressed in this chapter: how does the Vietnamese community define and negotiate resilience? What are the material and discursive implications of ascribing resilience to refugee and immigrant communities such as the Vietnamese community in New Orleans?

Described as very resilient by outside media and academic institutions, we must be mindful of how this term impacts the community. It can be harmful to the community by overlooking the daily experiences, vulnerabilities, worries, and negligence that governments still have for the community (Nguyen, 2021; Kang, 2022; Kaika, 2017). Thus, I want to re-ground the use of resilience by using the term *refugee resilience* to guide the understanding of the Vietnamese community's relationship with resilience and how they are situated within the landscape of New Orleans and the Gulf South. Refugee resilience is specifically defined in the Refugee Resilience Framework section below. Although the term resilience has been heavily critiqued, I use my variation of the term here to encapsulate the spirit of the Vietnamese community who identify and frame their experiences as being resilient in a historically and culturally specific way (Kang, 2022; Nguyen, 2021). As such, I am adding a more nuanced

understanding to the term that is grounded in the community's voices. It is critical to examine this community's resilient capacity, but *refugee resilience* further examines how this community is still underserved and overlooked in sectors such as disaster aid relief, access to healthcare and social services, and investment from local governments. As Vietnamese Americans and Asian American communities are understudied in climate and environmental justice literature, this study aims to contribute to research on resilience that includes the experiences of immigrant, refugee, and forced migrant groups (Xu, 2017; Sze, 2011; Ng, 2020; Patel et al., 2018). It is important to add to the literature the understanding of resilience in these communities, as there will be more immigrant and refugee populations with increasing climate change impacts.

Resilience

Before delving into *refugee resilience* and exploring its significance to the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, we must backtrack to contextualize the broader history of resilience and how *refugee resilience* fits into the larger theoretical landscape. Resilience historically arose from the physical sciences and has been widely used in many disciplines. It has evolved significantly after 2005 towards applications in socio-ecological systems and local communities (Rana, 2020; Adler et al., 2015). Resilience has generally been defined as the “capacity to adapt, self-organize, learn, renew and develop” in the face of stresses or disturbances to a system (Adler et al., 2015, p. 492). In the past two decades, the term resilience has evolved in its applications to climate change and natural disasters. Specifically, climate resilience is defined as the “capacity of a system to cope with a hazardous event or disturbance” and disaster resilience is defined as the “ability to resist or adapt to stress from hazards, and ability to recover quickly” (Rana, 2020, p. 2; Carlson et al., 2012; Ossewaarde et al., 2021). Both terms share the ability of a system or

community to adapt, recover, or return to normal from hazardous disturbances such as floods, hurricanes, storms, etc. In building resilience to climate change impacts, scholars have highlighted the importance of building capacities for learning and social memory within communities to support more effective responses to disturbances in places with more uncertainties (Ossewaarde et al., 2021; Wilson, 2015). These are key for vulnerable communities who live in places of constant change such as in New Orleans.

Communities that face higher vulnerabilities to climate change tend to be disadvantaged, low-income, displaced, and/or communities of color. Community resilience focuses on the community and social capital a community can draw upon to face challenges from stressors such as climate change impacts. As defined by Migliorini et al. (2023, p. 2), the “ability to recover from traumatic environmental, economic, or social events and to prepare for future adverse events is conceptualized as a set of adaptive capabilities categorized into community competence, information, and communications, economic aspects, social capital.” In addressing these adaptive capabilities, a critique of resilience and its sub-terms is that they do not address power relations and dynamics, thereby hiding the inequities that vulnerable communities face (Garcia et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a need to devolve power to communities to drive their resilience and adaptation planning as they are the ones directly impacted (Adler et al., 2015). One of the main issues surrounding power in resilience is that resilience and recovery efforts tend to be biased toward protecting privileged communities while neglecting disadvantaged communities (Garcia et al., 2022; Ossewaarde et al., 2021). Refugee resilience incorporates this challenging notion by examining the implications of describing a community as resilient while uncovering the inequities that these refugee and immigrant communities face.

Wilson (2015) notes that, when analyzing communities with regard to their level of resilience, there is usually a spectrum where more prepared, resilient communities are on one end and vulnerable communities are on the other. However, refugee resilience pulls from refugee and immigrant communities such as the Vietnamese community in New Orleans arguing that a community can be both resilient and vulnerable concurrently. The Vietnamese and other refugee experiences of dynamism in the face of profound and repeated displacements further challenge the concept of resilience that the community must return to their previous state of normalcy. Conversely, resilience can take different forms in bouncing towards a new system that can be transformative as conditions in precarious places can change and thus require constant and innovative adaptation strategies (Carlson et al., 2012, Ossewaarde et al., 2021). Refugee resilience offers one of several ways of understanding the community's circumstances and challenges to reduce vulnerability, but it must also be coupled with other adaptation and mitigation strategies within the larger systems that intersect with the community.

Refugee Resilience – Theoretical Field & Framework

Previous challenges to the traditional definition of resilience have underlined its limited framework and lack of approach to critically examining vulnerabilities and inequities faced by communities (Preston, 2021; Akbar, 2019). Authors such as Preston (2021), Simich (2012), and Akbar (2019) established a need to incorporate a social and community resilience framework that “stresses the transformative capacities of individuals, groups, and social institutions in dealing with challenges while simultaneously recognizing how power relations and institutional structures shape these capacities” (Preston, 2021, p. 1424; Simich, 2012; Akbar, 2019). Applying this framework allows us to understand the circumstances of the Vietnamese community, but

also to examine the underlying and often overlooked vulnerabilities and structural inequities that the community faces.

Pulling from Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Ghosh (2012), Pickren (2014), Preston (2014), and Kang's (2022) distinct uses and interpretations of refugee resilience that delve beyond what it means for a community to be resilient, I develop my own definition of refugee resilience that is grounded in this community's voices. I define the term *refugee resilience* as a quality that exemplifies the strength and capacity of the community to bounce back from significant disruptions (environmental, social, economic, etc.) while acknowledging the challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities that they continue to face. This is the core definition that grounds the basis of this dissertation, which I will use to unpack each of its sub-themes to establish a deep understanding of what *refugee resilience* means and how it emerged out of this Vietnamese community. What makes Vietnamese refugees important to the context of *refugee resilience* is their attachment to New Orleans as a sense of place, displacement and the mobility of home, language barriers, family separation, mental health, facing racism in the South, and enduring traumatic events from war and hurricanes. Refugee resilience additionally links the fields of climate justice and resilience, which has not been fully done by other resilience fields, by incorporating this dichotomy of acknowledging both the strengths and inequities within the community.

Refugee resiliency acknowledges the adverse impacts of disruptions both physically and mentally, while embodying the positive capacities of being able to overcome challenges and changes. As Hajdukowski-Ahmed explains, there is a correlation between resilience, creativity and political participation (Ghosh, 2012). Refugee and immigrant communities are able to reform and reprocess traumatic experiences and migrations of loss into a rebuilding capacity

(Ghosh, 2012). This relates to community members' feeling that these disruptive challenges are opportunities to innovate through adaptive practices that not only overcome those adversities but also strengthen the community.

Although Hajdukowshi-Ahmed pulls from their work on political refugees such as Palestinian refugees, this can be extrapolated to Vietnamese refugees similarly escaping political war and being displaced multiple times. As cited in Ghosh (2012), Hajdukowski-Ahmed states that refugee communities naturally regenerate a sense of communal identity in different places, and that creativity to change and grow are responses to countering displacement (Ghosh, 2012). Countering displacement is about “emphasizing those who have been displaced to remain active, potently political, and remarkably resilient even when they have very little access to official power” (Ghosh, 2012, p. XXII). The creativity and innovation by the Vietnamese community can be seen through their ability to generate their own agency and resilience through different modes. As illustrated by themes in the Findings, these encompass activism fighting against the illegal landfill and neglect by the City government, local leadership mobilizing grassroots organizing, and community organizations bridging the gaps in access to social, legal, and translation services.

Finally, this research builds upon Simi Kang's specific and extensive definition of refugee resilience that directly draws from their research in the Vietnamese community in New Orleans. Kang (2022) defines refugee resilience as a pernicious demand of Vietnamese Americans, because of how “successful” they are in adapting as refugees, to “bootstrap their way through ongoing and compounding disaster while being made expendable to environmental sacrifice” (Kang, 2022, p. 44). This term underlines the expectation that the Vietnamese community is “perpetually resilient” and therefore lacks the needed support while being made

expendable under environmental racism. Additionally, Kang incorporates a critical racial lens into how the Vietnamese community is situated within the white and BIPOC communities in the Gulf South. Refugee resilience is used to “deny support to Vietnamese Americans” but is also used as a racial triangulation that wedges this community against other BIPOC groups (Kang, 2022). My framework of *refugee resilience* builds upon Kang’s systemic critique of resilience that shows structural racism is justified through the Vietnamese community’s experience in being able to navigate any injustice. It is similar to Kang’s definition in acknowledging that the community still faces structural inequities and daily vulnerabilities, but it differs in centering community voices who have articulated and theorized themselves as being resilient. It contributes both empirically and theoretically by uplifting this community as an audience, while also elevating the community’s concerns of facing structural inequities and daily vulnerabilities to public and governmental authorities who have responsibilities in this.

The harmful expectations placed on Vietnamese Americans disregard the cultural and community capital to which the community has poured their heart and soul into developing their own sense of home in precarious places. A common thread found across the Vietnamese diaspora is their strong sense of cultural identity. For refugee and immigrant communities, cultural identity is considered an important indicator of resilience (Pickren, 2014; Ungar, 2008). Disruptions can threaten the community’s ability to maintain their cultural identity, which refugee and immigrant communities try to preserve through language, religious practices, food, and homemaking (Pickren, 2014). Despite their arduous journeys, it is imperative to acknowledge the community’s strength and pride in their adaptability to preserve their social and cultural fabric, as it gives a more comprehensive understanding of resilience. The Vietnamese community strongly demonstrates this through religious institutions of churches and temples,

cultural holiday celebrations such as Lunar New Year festivals, cultivating food through restaurants and farming, and creating this sense of home within their physical homes. Although these are similar practices to other Asian American immigrant communities, these are unique to the Vietnamese community when practiced after having gone through war, multiple displacements, hurricanes and flooding, and racism in the South. These practices show the community's strength and adaptability in retaining their cultural identity in the midst of navigating all these disruptions.

In unpacking the term *refugee resilience*, there is a unique duality in the multifaceted meaning of resilience. Both resilience and refugee have complex meanings individually, which refugee resilience aims to tackle the nuances of what they mean to the community. Resilience shows the optimistic strength of the community to recover from consequential disruptions, yet it simultaneously overlooks the factors that challenge their health and well-being (Kaika, 2017; Meerow & Newell, 2021; Fornalé et al., 2023; Garcia et al., 2022). Similarly, the meaning of refugee can put them into a box labeled as a perpetual foreigner, while on the other hand also embodying the essence of the community in being proud of their identity as refugees. These layered meanings show how the Vietnamese community is proud both individually and collectively of being refugees and resilient (Nguyen, 2013). Their identity as a process of constantly adapting to new circumstances can be interrelated with the process of how the community negotiates resilience. *Refugee resilience* captures the spirit of the Vietnamese community by encapsulating their pride in being resilient while underscoring the daily experiences and vulnerabilities that they continue to face.

For this community, although the physical spaces may always be fluid and impermanent, their sense of community, connectedness, and cultural identity are continually with them

wherever they are. As will be discussed across the following three themes: (1) social memory and community resilience, (2) local leadership and institutional capacity, and (3) intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care, instability not only in its physical form of migration and displacement but also mentally through psychological and emotional trauma have greatly disrupted the Vietnamese community. Nonetheless, what has been stable throughout is their sense of home, family, and community. Instability has been associated with creating a negative impact on communities, which is rightly justified as disruptions can weaken or change normal ways of life. Disruptions have displaced many Vietnamese refugees from their homeland and their families and friends, forcing them to start their lives over again.

Case Study

Vietnamese Migration to New Orleans

This case study takes place in the Greater New Orleans area of Southeast Louisiana in the Gulf Coast. This geographic locale and community were selected because New Orleans has one of the largest and most concentrated Vietnamese communities in the U.S. and one that faces significant climate change impacts. Additionally, it has a very similar subtropical climate to coastal Southern Vietnam where many members of the community have originally resettled from. This community has been lauded for their quick recovery and resilience after Hurricane Katrina. However, to explore how this resilience is maintained in this crisis and others in the decades since their resettlement we must first delve into the historical context of how this community came about.

The history of how Vietnamese refugees and immigrants came to New Orleans can be traced to the aftermath of the Vietnam War in 1975. Under the 1975 Indochina Migration and

Refugee Act, the U.S. established a domestic resettlement program to admit 135,000 refugees from Southeast Asia, primarily from Vietnam, as a response to the humanitarian crisis (Campi, 2005). During the relocation and resettlement process in the U.S., Vietnamese refugees were largely transferred to four refugee camps, one of which was in Fort Chaffee in Arkansas (Clarion Herald, 2014). From these refugee camps, many faith-based and non-government organizations helped resettle Vietnamese refugees to different cities across the U.S. (Leong, 2007). In May of 1975, Archbishop Philip M. Hannan of the Associated Catholic Charities of New Orleans visited Fort Chaffee and wanted to help resettle the Vietnamese families to New Orleans (Clarion Herald, 2014; Leong, 2007). Archbishop Hannan sponsored 1,000 families to New Orleans and asked Catholic Charities to help find subsidized, low-income Section 8 housing for the families (Clarion Herald, 2014; Leong, 2007).

Approximately 1,000 refugees were relocated to Section 8 housing called the Versailles Arms Apartments in the Village de L'Est neighborhood in New Orleans East, which many have referred to this community as Versailles. It was named Versailles after the first apartment complex where the Vietnamese first settled in New Orleans East called "Versailles Arms." Since the majority of the refugees were of Catholic faith who came from the same villages in Northern and coastal Southeast Vietnam, there was strong support from the Church, which created a sense of community and connectedness. This is particularly unique due to the majority of Vietnamese refugees in the U.S. being of Buddhist faith.³ The Vietnamese Catholic culture also creates a unique sense of community and connectedness through its parishioner network, which is further explored in Chapter 3. These initial refugees spurred a chain migration process of family and

³ Although the larger Vietnamese refugee diasporic community is of Buddhist faith, this New Orleans community is unique in that it is predominantly Catholic, which plays a role in the social cohesion of the community. Although this was not extensively studied, future studies exploring these two faiths in New Orleans would be important.

friends from the same villages in Vietnam to migrate to Versailles, which soon grew to 5,000 by 1990 (Leong, 2007). Many Vietnamese were also attracted to New Orleans because of its similar environment of a sub-tropical climate and delta landscape surrounded by water that created the same fishing opportunities as back home in Vietnam (Clarion Herald, 2014). This strong sense of community and religious identity as well as familiarity to adapt to the physical environment allows us to understand the role of resilience within this Vietnamese community.

Precarity of New Orleans' Environmental Landscape

The intersections of environmental justice and the layered structural inequities that the community faces are exacerbated by increasing risks and vulnerabilities resulting from climate change. What makes New Orleans a fluid and evolving place is its geographic location right at the heart of where the Mississippi River Delta meets the Gulf of Mexico. Being situated by the warm waters of the Gulf, it is right in the hot zone of hurricane paths that pose high risks of completely changing the landscape. Climate change has already been a reality for New Orleans for a long time, but the main risks that can raise uncertainty in the region are rising sea levels, increasing temperatures and heat stress, coastal land loss, land subsidence, poor air quality, changes in precipitation, and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as hurricanes and tornados (New Orleans Health Department, 2018; Landrieu and Hebert, 2017).

Low-income communities of color in New Orleans are disproportionately more exposed to pollution and face structural and racial inequities that can further destabilize their ability to adapt to climate change. In Village de L'Est of New Orleans East, the community is 45% African American, 45% Vietnamese, and 8% Latinx (Racial Wealth Divide Initiative, 2016). With a predominantly Black and Vietnamese community, Katrina further exposed those racial

inequities by showing the tragic impacts of chronic neglect and disinvestment. National media even showed the pronounced delay in response times to this community. There is a continuation of the government's failure to protect poor communities from environmental disasters, neglect of low-income neighborhoods, and a large disparity of recovery resources and aid provided to African American working-class families (Broom, 2019; Bullard & Wright, 2009). Additionally, for the Vietnamese community in New Orleans East, these risks can greatly disrupt the social cohesion as well as grassroots work that the community needs in dealing with climate and environmental challenges. It is important to identify and understand the impacts of these risks on this community in order to determine how to best support them in navigating the challenges and inequities present in a segregated New Orleans that has neglected its urban peripheries.

Methods

The methods employed in this research were semi-structured interviews and participant observations of community meetings, events, and informal conversations. During the months of March to June of 2022 and January to February 2023, my fieldwork research was based in the Greater New Orleans area, Louisiana. My study site was the concentrated Vietnamese communities in New Orleans such as Village de L'Est in New Orleans East and the Westbank neighborhoods across the Mississippi River including Marrero, Woodlawn, Avondale, and Gretna. Semi-structured interviews ranging from one to three hours were conducted with 16 community members to better understand the relationships between previous migration experiences, resilience, and climate change adaptation as well as needed areas of support in addressing community concerns. These were recorded with participants' permissions.

I used a purposive snowball sampling approach with support from community organizations Sông-CDC (formerly known as MQVN-CDC), VIET, and VAYLA who helped

connect me with members of the community (Noy, 2008). All the community members who participated in the semi-structured interviews were either refugees, immigrants, or children of refugees of Vietnamese descent (Kallio et al., 2016). Ten of the interviewees were first-generation born in Vietnam who migrated to the U.S. after the Vietnam War between 1975 and 1985. Of the remaining interviewees, two were 1.5-generation and three were second-generation Vietnamese Americans. The majority were predominantly of Catholic faith, and most were middle-aged and seniors with a couple of youths in their 20s and 30s. Additionally, there was a mix of participants who lived in different parts of New Orleans such as in the Westbank communities and the bordering town of Metairie. However, the majority were residents who lived or had previously lived in Village de L'Est in New Orleans East.

Participant observations were a second methods approach that included observing community meetings, tours, socials, events, morning markets, religious services at Catholic churches and Buddhist temples, and engaging in many informal conversations with community residents. Many of my interactions with the community were through short informal conversations and I had higher accessibility talking to residents this way because of the snowball impact of how I was introduced to residents at meetings and events.

Using thematic analysis, the recorded interview transcripts along with written field notes were imported into NVivo 14 qualitative coding software to look for emerging themes. Thematic analysis was chosen to explore the emerging themes of how the Vietnamese community shares their own interpretations of resilience in their community and how they relate to their experiences as refugees and migrants. Additionally, documents and transcripts of community organization talks such as from VAYLA's Earth Rising speaker series, newspaper and online articles about the Vietnamese New Orleans community, podcast interviews of community

organizations and leaders, and the Louisiana and New Orleans Climate Action Plans were included in the NVivo analysis. This inclusion of mixed media supplements direct interviews with community members by adding third-party observation and interpretation of the community's relationship with climate and environmental issues.

Limitations to this study's methodology include the lower number of interviews of youth compared to middle-aged and elderly groups, which is partly attributed to the snowball connections and cumulative five-month duration of fieldwork visits over the course of two years in New Orleans. Additionally, being physically separated from the community immediately after the fieldwork trip limited prolonged exposure and continued interactions with community members that could have potentially added more data collection of interviews and observations.

Findings

To deepen the understanding of what refugee resilience means and how it is applied to the Vietnamese community, three emerging themes are summarized below from the interviews, informal conversations, and observations. Using the refugee resilience framework, the following three themes will illustrate its applications and implications. These three emerging themes are (1) social memory and community resilience; (2) local leadership and institutional capacity; and (3) intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care. Then, this chapter will examine key cases where the three themes intersect with activism in the Vietnamese New Orleans community and ways of engaging with climate and environmental justice.

Theme 1 – Social Memory and Community Resilience

Considering all the disruptions, relocations, and injustices that the Vietnamese community has faced, what has been the most stable for community members is their collective

feeling of being resilient. This collective feeling pulls from the historical and social memory that many have derived from their lived experiences as refugees escaping war or as recent immigrants (Leong, 2007). As seen in the Vietnamese community, the ability to adapt and recover from a disaster or catastrophic event is dependent upon past experiences, communal leadership, and support through social networks and grassroots organizing. Many expressed pride verbally and through their vibrant holiday celebrations in identifying themselves as being resilient while referencing their challenging journeys from Vietnam to the U.S. and overcoming Hurricane Katrina to reestablish their community in New Orleans. One instance during a fundraising event at the Mary Queen of Vietnam Church Rosary, which was focused on supporting education via the church youth programs, I was introduced by one of the *Sơ* (Sisters)⁴ to one community member who has lived in Village de L'Est for over 30 years. When asked about the Vietnamese community, she was excited to express her pride in how resilient the community is; how even after Katrina there are people who are doing well after rebuilding their homes. Although climate change continues to occur resulting in increased storms, she further emphasizes the strength of the community, as measured in part by how many families have stayed together for a while throughout all the storms.

Particularly for the Vietnamese culture, family and community are deeply valued. The Vietnamese community in New Orleans East is one of the most concentrated Vietnamese communities in the U.S., with families living immediately next to each other or within a few miles radius. It is very tight-knit, as there were instances when I would mention a resident's name and other residents would generally know of which family or parents they are related to. It invokes a similar feeling to when they were living together in the same villages back in Vietnam

⁴ *Sơ* is another name for Sister/nun in Vietnamese and is used as an honorific when addressing the Sisters.

where residents could walk down the street and instantly ask for help or strike up a conversation with one another. I was privileged to visit a family where the parents stayed in one house and immediately in the house next door lived the grandparents with whom they shared a garage and backyard space. The familial and communal feeling created is indicative of establishing a second home in New Orleans that they strongly feel connected to. As a current co-director of a community organization who grew up in Village de L'Est for over 30 years describes:

It's not a very common thing, where you can begin a new place. A lot of these older community members have been here for almost 40 years and they're able to have a community. They're able to speak their original language and they're able to have friends, family and have all of that being familiar to them (Interview, February 7, 2023).

Their ability to maintain this deeply rich cultural community in a place so far from their old home is incredible. And although for many community members it was a difficult journey to be forcibly displaced from their home and having to build this new community, they want to preserve it and never let it go. This deep attachment to New Orleans is strong, but it also raises questions regarding the implications of future larger impacts from climate change.

The extent of connectedness can be seen going from the local New Orleans area to other cities and states across the U.S. The New Orleans Vietnamese community is also strengthened by the interconnectedness with families and friends who live farther away in Louisiana and out of state. Many residents had relatives or friends in Texas (Houston), Arkansas, Mississippi (Biloxi), Florida, California, and in other Louisiana cities such as Baton Rouge and Lafayette. These connections provided a safe refuge for many who evacuated Katrina and stayed until they felt comfortable returning (Pendley, 2021; Vu & VanLandingham, 2009; VanLandingham, 2017). An active community member who has lived in Village de L'Est for over 20 years expresses the degree to which residents have stayed connected with each other no matter the distance:

The Vietnamese community was established in 1975 in the housing complex [Versailles Arms] so a lot of Vietnamese would live in that area. Those people who live in [Village de L'Est], they are so close to each other and they are still connected to each other even though they have moved out now. They are still very close to each other (Interview, April 26, 2022).

In general, the Vietnamese diaspora is connected across the U.S., however, in my time spent in New Orleans, there was an instant feeling of a tight-knit community and a strong sense of solidarity and support for each other. An example case included when I was invited to attend a lunar new year celebration (Tết) at the St. Joseph Church in the Westbank community of Woodlawn and a fundraiser event for the MQVN church, respectively; I found that the same people came out in support of one another even if it was very far across town.

Across this interconnected community, a strong sense of pride in being resilient radiates among almost all community members that I interacted with. According to one community leader who has lived in the community for over 40 years and played an instrumental role in contacting residents, helping families rebuild, and navigating FEMA and flood insurance after Katrina:

In every bad position, there's always another door somewhere that would give, that would lead us to a better position. To me when there is a challenge, we face it and we'll overcome it and come out much stronger, much stronger...I look at nothing as a problem. I look at everything as a challenge. It's a challenge. Ask me to overcome it (Interview, April 25, 2022).

This statement exemplifies the spirit of a community in which they do not see natural disasters and storms as only problems, but as challenges to overcome and opportunities to grow, as stated in an interview with this community leader. He further iterated that each disruptive event gives the community more expertise and experience. It is a learning experience that helps the community grow and deal with future events more effectively. This evokes collective and social memory where past experiences in navigating natural disasters, oil spills, forced displacement

from Vietnam to the U.S., and having to face one challenge after another inform better community responses and capacities for each consecutive event (Wilson, 2015; Leong, 2007). Although Hurricane Katrina was a devastatingly tragic and traumatic event for the community, many residents caught in the aftermath of the storm knew immediately to stay connected and made defiant efforts to find family and friends who had to evacuate.

Much of community member's resilience stems from their experiences going through the Vietnam War and Katrina. Most importantly, they allude to how none of the hurricanes and storms in New Orleans compared to what they went through in Vietnam. One community organization member who was born and raised in Village de L'Est for most of their lives and has been actively doing community work and mutual aid since Katrina shares about her family's experience in coming to the U.S. and how Katrina and future hurricanes compare:

I never hear my parents complain about the storm. It's become natural like it's second nature. 'Oh it's storm season again. Are we going to run this year?' I think I've never really heard them say it's so hard. I guess it does stem from their experiences like what they had to deal with in Vietnam and coming to America, it's much harder. It's the resilience in them. This is nothing. This too shall pass, and we got this. So I don't think they ever really took it as struggles or it's just something they have to do. Just a storm. And we'll figure it out (Interview, January 24, 2023).

The social memory of comparing Hurricane Katrina as just a storm motivated the community to quickly take action and return (Leong, 2007). They viewed this as not being worse than fleeing war and having to leave one's own country, family, and home (Leong, 2007). Although they have left their original home, the collective and individual experiences of navigating displacement and resettlement after the war while keeping in close contact with family built social memory. Rebuilding their lives after displacement was a clear affirmation that they could overcome disaster. The strength that the community possessed was empowering and infectious, as there was collective perseverance to overcome and rebuild.

The determination of the Vietnamese community to overcome the instability of being displaced numerous times is continually fueled by support through communal and family ties. The social network and support formed between families, friends, and neighbors are a key contributor to their resiliency. Their migration journeys highlight the community's social cohesion and strong familial networks, which facilitated individuals in staying connected across countries and states to provide mutual support. (Leroy, 2016; Xu, 2017; Vu & VanLandingham, 2009). As noted by Vu and VanLandingham (2009), there was a 69% return rate for the Vietnamese community who returned to New Orleans by the Fall of 2006 (a year after Katrina) compared to 51% for African Americans and 69% for whites (Sastry, 2009; Fussell et al., 2010). This was one of the highest return rates for New Orleans, which can be attributed to the leadership of Father Vien and the tight-knit network created by the pastoral council of the Mary Queen of Vietnam (MQVN) Church which will be discussed in detail in Theme 2.

Resilience is strongly attributed to the elders and community leaders within the community. Their experiences and struggles in leaving their home country were often described as being more challenging than going through a hurricane. This was very much the case in an interview with a community member who came over to the U.S. as a refugee, moved around quite a bit throughout their lives before eventually settling in Village de L'Est in the 90s and became active within the community through local organizations. As this middle-aged interviewee shares, they are inspired by the resiliency of the elders in their journey to New Orleans:

How the elders grew up and things like that, they had a hard life. So to them, Katrina is nothing because you know what they could tell me they've been through worse. In Vietnam we went through battles all the time. We don't have any government assistance. We had to go build our house back again by ourselves. Why here in Katrina we have government assistance. The older generation, they are tough...The resiliency really lies with the elders (Interview, April 26, 2022).

Although Katrina was a horrific event that still has lasting impacts on this community, these anecdotes show that this community views hurricanes as not a large issue compared to what they have gone through before. The parallels of the Katrina experience brought up many memories and past knowledge on being resourceful, which channeled into looking for support within and outside of the community. If community members were not able to find help due to language barriers, they knew community leaders that they could go to for support. Though the community acknowledges that the climate is changing with warmer weather and higher frequencies of storms, they feel prepared as storms are just a part of the environment that they can live with; hurricanes are nothing new to them. However, this should be considered with caution, as there can be ramifications if appropriate preparations are not made for future stronger hurricanes. Integrating this community's mindset of overcoming any challenge with innovative adaptive measures developed between community organizations and planning processes could be key to addressing future climate change impacts.

Even though the community has shown the strength of their resilience in overcoming the aftermath of the Vietnam War, resettlement, Hurricane Katrina, and other disruptions, it is unjust that they have to continue to face the compounded impacts of both war and environmental injustices. Admittedly, all of these previous experiences and ways of navigating these disruptions show the fortitude of the community through challenging times, but they continue to face daily barriers, inequities, and vulnerabilities. It is important to acknowledge their collective strength, but it is also necessary to critically examine and transform the social and physical environment that heavily taxes their resilience. To delve deeper, we must subsequently look at organizational and institutional leaders that have shaped this community.

Theme 2 – Local Leadership and Institutional Capacity

Throughout their adaptation in the U.S. and New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina, advocacy against illegal landfill dumping, oil spills, and other hurricanes, what has been incredibly instrumental in support of the community is the role of local leadership and community institutions. Many community members have pointed to the leadership of Father Vien from the Mary Queen of Vietnam (MQVN) church. During and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Father Vien proactively searched for and contacted residents who had evacuated from New Orleans. Father Vien The Nguyen, Father Luke HungDung Nguyen, and the MQVN church played a key role in mobilizing the community to return and rebuild their homes, particularly in Village de L'Est. Other elder community leaders in the Westbank communities also flew back and forth between Houston, TX and New Orleans to make sure that families and friends were safe. These leaders further helped with disaster relief and translating information. Translation was critical to address language barriers limiting access to social and financial services, including FEMA funding and flood and property insurance claims (Huntwork, 2022).

Two community members below share the important role that Father Vien and the MQVN church led immediately after Katrina in reuniting the dispersed community and spurring the return of almost all residents. The co-director of a community organization and a 2nd-generation Vietnamese American who grew up in Village de L'Est all her life shared the lengths to which Father Vien went to reunite community members:

[Father Vien] activated his pastoral council to help spread the word. He even traveled to some of these areas where folks had evacuated to. St. Anthony Church in Baton Rouge had a lot of refugees and he came there and talked to them like hey we need to return to rebuild. I think he even went to Houston to talk to folks where they were sheltering. But I mean I would say that's what really was a catalyst to bring people back because it was true for my family (Interview, January 24, 2023).

Here, the Catholic faith supports resilience because of how the church is structured with its pastoral council. The pastoral council allows the priest, Father Vien, to directly contact the pastoral leads who were in charge of all family contacts for each of the sub-neighborhoods in the community (Interview, April, 26, 2022). When Father Vien contacted all the leads, he was able to track everyone down except for one person who unfortunately had passed away (Interview, April 26, 2022). Another community member who has lived in Village de L'Est since coming to the U.S. in the 1980s and has been very active in providing health services to the community, shared the significance of Father Vien and the MQVN Church in supporting residents to return:

Because we have a community here, because of our involvement with the church, and how the church was involved with the community that was the driving force that made us want to come back and rebuild. Back then was Father Vien. He was very active in getting us back as a community. I met him a few times over in Houston, and I heard him at a table discussion of how he wants us to come back and rebuild the community, which he did. And then we were still committed because it's pretty much because there's no other services around here. There's no police service, no water service, no, there was no utility service, anything like that... So the church was pretty much the lifeline (Interview, June 9, 2022).

Without the instrumental figure of Father Vien in actively leading the recovery and rebuild of the community along with the MQVN church in providing a haven, the Vietnamese community would not be where it is today. The leadership of Father Vien and the structure of the pastoral network of the MQVN church enriched the community's resilient capacities to stay connected in returning to their homes.

In addition to Father Vien and the MQVN Church, community organizations and religious institutions formed a strong complementary support network. There are several organizations established in New Orleans East that provide these support services: Vietnamese Americans Young Leaders Association of New Orleans (VAYLA), Sông Community Development Corporation (MQVN-CDC until 2022), Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic

Training (VIET), NOELA Community Health Center, and VEGGI Farmers' Co-op. VIET was established early on in 2001, however, many of the other organizations started after Katrina. These organizations were created to provide the services that were lacking following Katrina. Through these organizations, there was a strong cohesiveness through which they engaged with each other. Each of the organizations complemented one another in terms of providing specific services such as VAYLA with a focus on the youth, VIET with social services, and NOELA with health. Their strength in working together raises the community's resilience capacity. One community member who has lived in Village de L'Est since 2004 and who has been heavily involved in the community organizations expressed the complementary relationships they had with each other:

We see ourselves as a community. We all kind of shared the same vision so it was easy to work together. Anything that had to do with youth we referred to VAYLA and VAYLA did the same things that anything they have to do with elders or business or anything they refer to [MQVN-CDC]. Everybody was trying to rebuild their house and everybody was in the same playing field. They were all struggling and there wasn't anyone better than anyone. We're all just in it together (Interview, April 26, 2022).

Although these organizations were based in New Orleans East, they conducted significant work with other Vietnamese pockets across Greater New Orleans, such as collaborating with Westbank leaders to help find resources to rebuild.

These organizations have done incredible work in collaborating with each other and fostering intergenerational solidarity alongside the leadership of Father Vien. Their work was instrumental in garnering support to successfully combat environmental justice issues. VAYLA along with Father Vien helped bring national attention to the New Orleans Vietnamese community's fight against the illegal landfill dumping in New Orleans East. VAYLA in particular was vital in galvanizing youth to join the elderly community. VIET is focused on providing social services, access to translation and legal services, economic development, and

community-building events. Sông-CDC is focused on community development and ways to address issues of housing, employment, green and environmental projects, and access to food. Access to food and sustainable livelihoods was an important driver for the establishment of VEGGI in 2011 after the BP oil spill. VEGGI addresses food access, income, and employment for many fishermen and farmers who suffered from the oil contamination of soil and fish populations (Nguyen 2015). A longtime resident of Village de L'Est whose parents and grandparents have been active in the community such as with the organizing that took place in fighting against the landfill after Katrina said, "the reason why MQVN came up with VEGGI was to help those impacted by BP [oil spill] so the ones that couldn't go fishing anymore could do gardening, which they were doing anyways. We were able to help them expand their gardens." VEGGI emphasized the importance of establishing the community's own farm and aquaponics, which they have expanded in a lot across from the MQVN church (Nguyen, 2015). Most of the farmers are elders and they provide Vietnamese herbs and vegetables that have become sources of income in helping to supply farmer's markets and restaurants in New Orleans.

VEGGI not only created a sustainable adaptation practice after the severe impacts of the oil spill on the community, but also helped to preserve a way of life through food production in farming. Gardening and farming are staples in many Vietnamese homes, and almost everyone in the New Orleans community had their own backyard garden of herbs and vegetables. The VEGGI community farm was established to provide a space for elders to come and farm, which can be seen in Figure 4 where VEGGI staff are leading a tour. Gardening is a way for many members of the elderly population to reconnect and preserve their sense of home. Growing the same herbs and vegetables that they grew up with in Vietnam in their backyard gardens creates both a meditative and adaptative practice related to social memory. Conversely, the power of

farming and adapting was also a way of empowering themselves. Farming was a way of taking back agency and empowering community members. The city showed its disregard for New Orleans East by not including the Vietnamese community in rebuilding maps and plans. However, the advocacy work by Father Vien and organizations continued to inform initiatives such as VEGGI, which directly helps community members.



Figure 4. *Image of VEGGI farm tour led by VEGGI staff. (Photo taken by Peter Nguyen)*

Lastly, as demonstrated with the MQVN Church, religious institutions have played key roles in supporting community advocacy work and preserving social networks. There are five Vietnamese Catholic churches and four Buddhist temples across Greater New Orleans. One

community member who has lived in Village de L'Est for over 20 years and who has predominantly been involved with the MQVN church and community organizing explained the importance of these religious institutions:

Those centralized institutions whether it's Chùa [temple] or Nhà Thờ [church] because it really is a gathering place for the Vietnamese people. When we first came to the United States there was another Vietnamese family that we knew of at the time and later on we met other Vietnamese people and then they start saying, 'oh yeah you have to go there to see other Vietnamese people (Interview, April 26, 2022).

The Vietnamese community in New Orleans is predominantly Catholic. The church has been instrumental in keeping the larger community connected through events such as the annual lunar new year celebration (Tết) that is held at the MQVN Church and brings the Vietnamese community together from across the region. Tết is a national and nonsectarian holiday that is celebrated by both Catholics and Buddhists. Both churches and temples create safe spaces that community members can attend weekly to interact with other friends and family. These spaces also hold commemoration events, such as the annual commemoration of the end of the Vietnam War on April 30, which are important in preserving the history and culture of this community. Holding spaces for these types of events contributes to the community's resilience capacity as they maintain social cohesion within the community, preserve local cultural identity, and support the sharing of news and issues between residents.

Theme 3 – Intergenerational Perspectives, Trauma, and Care

We have seen the Vietnamese community's engagement with resilience being strongly supported by the social memory of navigating challenging experiences, social ties, community institutions, and local leadership. This community is capable and has shown its cohesion within its networks in tackling adversities. However, *refugee resilience* needs to also examine trauma

within the community, specifically intergenerational trauma. Xu (2017) critiques the literature gaps that do not examine the Vietnamese community in New Orleans through the lens of trauma and mental health. This lens of trauma could provide insights into the relationships between positive and negative experiences related to resiliency (Xu, 2017). The predominant framework that uses social memory as the main element of resilience in the Vietnamese community does not incorporate trauma, thus masking the underlying daily hardships that the community continues to face (Xu, 2017; Wilson, 2015). These hardships include daily discriminatory practices in employment, education, healthcare, housing, and access to other services, as well as continuing threats of climate change and hurricanes (Xu, 2017). Moreover, neighborhood issues such as crime continue and at times can retrigger past war trauma of shootings and robberies. This can especially be harmful to the elderly in the community.

The relationships between family and intergenerational care are important in the Vietnamese community. Particularly in this community, young children and teenagers had good relationships with their parents. A strong feeling of care and love arose from my talks with people who were always looking out for their elderly parents and grandparents. As previously mentioned, most of the elders feel a strong connection to New Orleans as a home that they don't want to leave, which makes them more inclined to stay. However, more of the youth have expressed concerns about staying long-term in New Orleans because of the lack of job opportunities in the City, the constant risks of hurricanes and storms, and issues of crime and safety. The youth want their parents and grandparents to be somewhere safer. When I talked to Catholic nuns in New Orleans East, they mentioned that, during Hurricane Ida in 2021, most of the elderly decided to stay at home instead of evacuating. This relates back to social memory, in

which these hurricanes, when compared to their refugee experience are not as bad. However, the strength of hurricanes is becoming an issue of concern as climate change intensifies.

The majority of the Vietnamese refugee community in New Orleans are middle-aged and elderly. With rising youth populations of ages 0-22, there are intergenerational differences that bring to light cultural traditions and stigmas that relate back to this historical trauma. There is a cultural stigma for Vietnamese people to not talk about their personal feelings, mental health, and feelings of shame and guilt (Xu, 2017). It raises this feeling, more commonly in elderly groups, that they must keep their heads down and keep going forward; this fuels the need to rebuild and return to the community, but it also masks underlying issues within the community. Additionally, the parallels of relocation, loss, and rebuilding between refugee migrations and the Hurricane Katrina experience are instilled within the elderly groups that feel strongly attached to their home in New Orleans (Xu, 2017). There is a push and pull between the younger children and the elderly parents, where elders do not feel the need to evacuate and leave their homes even though their children and grandchildren strongly advocate for them to do so during hurricanes. New Orleans is a second home that they do not want to lose and leave again. Looking at the historical trauma and intergenerational perspectives could shed more light on understanding the Vietnamese community's collective resilience. How does it allow the community and supporting institutions and organizations to better address the needs of the community and the inequities they continue to face? How can this bridge the intergenerational differences and connections to New Orleans?

The social memory along with their communal networks from enduring past hurricanes, oil spills, and migrations to and within the U.S. have prepared community members in their capacities but also mentally in their mindset that they can overcome any challenge. Additionally,

it is no accident that this community as racialized refugees are living in a more vulnerable and neglected area on the peripheries of the city. What struck me most, however, was that the positive energy I felt in the air when talking to residents coalesced around this sense of connectedness; that they always have each other. An example is talking to one resident, she mentioned how they knew the families in the neighborhood and how the parents all know of the other families' business, which they can tend to get nosy about in their free time. It raises the feeling that this community feels like home to them; although they had to leave their home in Vietnam, they can maintain their home in the form of community and kinship. It is a perfectly valid reason why they want to return to their homes in New Orleans. A long-standing community member expressed, "they still want to come back because it is home to them. They love it here. It's hard to when you've been in a place for so long and established a home in a community. It's hard to just leave that" (Interview, May 20, 2022). Even though the community has changed a lot in recent years and is not the same as it used to be with more residents moving out, people still feel a strong connection to this place. A community organization member born and raised in this community her entire life shares about this special connection and the hopes to revive that feeling:

It always brought us home no matter what happened. We always came back, like a special connection too. New Orleans East or Versailles used to be like the place like it was home. Like I still want that kind of environment or the same experience for my kids even though it's not anywhere near what it used to be. It's always been home. It's always been no matter where we go. You can't find the same people. You can't find the same community and it has a changed a lot, but something about it, the sense of it is still here and we hope to revive it back to what it was (Interview, January 24, 2023).

Home is a fluid state, and whether the community changes or residents move to different places, Village de L'Est will always be home for them. No matter how dispersed the community is, they remain connected to each other in one way or another. Nonetheless, this sense of home is currently being challenged by other social issues such as crime that necessitate a second look

into the meaning of resilience: the challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities associated with *refugee resilience*.

There is a unique relationship between resilience and trauma where trauma has been seen to generate resilient behaviors, but as it is importantly raised by a community member, resilience can also create trauma. Throughout their resilient experiences in overcoming challenges to establish a home in New Orleans along with being labeled a “resilient” community by outside entities, they still face trauma-inducing issues such as crime and the lack of investment from the government to assist low-income families. A co-director of a community organization who has also grown up in the Village de L’Est community for their entire life movingly shares their perspective on the relationship between resilience and trauma:

I think there’s so many layers of that resilience to overcome trauma but also resilience creates trauma. Thinking about an immigrant that came, fled Vietnam and then came here and resettled. I’m sure there’s a lot of trauma on top of that. I talked about trauma too. I think this creates this view we have to handle our own, no one’s going to help us. That even instills in the younger generations like this is why you need to be doctors. I think there’s a reason why a lot of their parents’ ideologies are from because of their experience with resilience and trauma (Interview, January 24, 2023).

There is an immense amount of trauma that many of the refugees, particularly elders, have faced since leaving Vietnam and resettling in New Orleans. With their ability to stay resilient and overcome challenges such as Hurricane Katrina to remain in their new homes, they are deemed capable of confronting these obstacles on their own. Although their spirit very much empowers them as they address their challenges, they are still not supported by city and state governments to not only address their vulnerability to climate change impacts but also the inequities in investments in schools, healthcare, and social services. Amidst the success stories, the notion of *refugee resilience* acknowledges the previous and ongoing issues this community continues to face as they adapt to successive displacements.

The resilient narrative shows the successful capabilities of the community but it can also mask the day-to-day vulnerabilities (Nguyen, 2021; Kaika, 2017; Kang, 2022; Kang, 2018). A co-director of a community organization who has lived in Village de L'Est all her life powerfully articulates this critique of resilience:

I want to say this about resilience, because we're always deemed as resilient folks feel that we can bounce back from anything and not have to invest in our community. This is a disinvestment in the New Orleans East community as a whole because they feel that 'oh the community members out there are resilient, they're going to bounce back.' So we're calling out the fact that resilience builds on top of intergenerational trauma and that there's a disinvestment in communities because if you're resilient you don't need help. That narrative that's being created, that definitely needs to be changed (Interview, January 24, 2023).

This narrative can demonstrate to others that the community is able to adapt and are successful in navigating issues, thus they do not need more support and that is the potential harm that this can do to the community in preventing additional investment and support. By incorporating a new framework that integrates trauma and refugee resiliency, inside and outside institutions can acknowledge the underlying issues that the community faces. This refocuses the need that climate justice is not just about resilience and adaptation but a paradigm shift that also advocates for social and racial justice and equity.

Vietnamese Activism & Environmental and Climate Justice

To understand refugee resilience within the Vietnamese community, the ways in which they organized around the impacts of environmental injustices and climate issues must also be examined. The legacy of activism in this community demonstrates the synthesis of social memory, local leadership and institutional capacity, intergenerational perspectives, care, and trauma in documenting not only their resiliency but also the inequities that disadvantage this community. For context, we must start with the acknowledgment of the history and legacy of

environmental racism and injustice in New Orleans, specifically pointing to Hurricane Katrina responses to flooding and evacuation support that were delayed and lacking to the New Orleans East communities of color (Botic and First-Arai, 2018; Mata, 2012; Nguyen, 2015). Two environmentally racist actions immediately took place after Hurricane Katrina: 1) the City of New Orleans authorized a landfill consisting of toxic hurricane debris to be opened approximately 1.5 miles from residents' homes in Village de L'Est and 2) the city's rebuilding plan "Bring New Orleans Back Commission" excluded Village de L'Est in its map deeming the area unlivable and designated it as green space (Nguyen, 2015; Tang, 2011; Interviews).

Hurricane Katrina became a defining moment as these discriminatory actions sparked advocacy and activism within the Vietnamese community. Regarding the community as just a dumping site and exclusion as part of rebuilding efforts deeply infuriated community members. Feeling as if their community was a sacrifice zone, community members mobilized around the leadership of community activists, the MQVN Church, and Father Vien in 2006 (Tang, 2011). Community members protested at City Hall and participated in rallies, town hall meetings, and community events in collaborative solidarity with African American coalitions (Tang, 2011). A proactive resident in community organizing who has lived in Village de L'Est for over 25 years recounts those protests in response to City Hall's and Mayor Ray Nagin's negligence:

They came out with the Green Back New Orleans campaign and there was this whole big map and Versailles was not on the map. They were planning to make Versailles a green space. So that's when [we] started rallying and said, 'we need to go and show up at City Hall and let them know we're back. The following week they organized and went back to City Hall and there were probably around 100 people who showed up there and said, 'How is it that you designate this as green space when we are already back and the rest of the city are not back?' And so [City Hall] said, oh, well, we didn't know anybody was back.' And I said, 'even if you know you don't realize that people are back, shouldn't you ask? Shouldn't you go and find out? You can't just designate a place a green space.' And the Vietnamese community was actually the first community that came back and after a while [City Hall] had to scrap that and redo the map (Interview, April 26, 2022).

VAYLA, which emerged from the landfill organizing, played a key role in galvanizing the youth to join and support the elders participating in direct action (Tang 2011). The strength and unity of the Vietnamese community activism alongside cross-racial solidarity with the African American community ultimately pressured the closure of the landfill, and this moment helped define the Vietnamese American community in Versailles as breaking the model minority mold in making their voices be heard.

It is important to highlight the solidarity between the African American and Vietnamese American communities in New Orleans East. Katrina was a key moment that brought these two communities who have lived next to each other for the longest time. However, many of the people I talked to mentioned that this collaborative effort between both communities did not arise strongly until post-Katrina and the fight to get New Orleans East recognized by the city. One community member describes how this solidarity formed between MQVN Church and the African American organizations in New Orleans East.

Father Vien at the time, like I said, he called these community members together. He actually formed a coalition with a lot of the community members, with a lot of the other African-American community members. And they actually got together. The youth who were very dormant at the time became voices for this community as well because they had to help their family members get back (Interview, May 20, 2022).

Father Vien became an instrumental figure along with the youth to establish a coalition between African American and Vietnamese American community members. Cumulatively, both communities were able to raise awareness to City Hall that the community has returned and will not see that their homes be turned into green space. This coalition would form the basis of the support the community would need to combat future injustices.

The grassroots activism and support not only from the African American community but also from environmental groups, lawyers, and other community organizations across the country

laid a foundation that would support future fights against environmental injustices. A similar issue arose in 2018 when Entergy proposed to build a gas power plant right near the Village de L'Est community which the City had authority to approve. As was the case with the landfill, the city did not include the community in consultation and allowed Entergy to control the process and sway the City Council through illegal means of hiring actors to testify in favor of the power plant (Botic, 2018; Botic and First-Arai, 2018). Although the power plant was approved, protests and rallying from the community ultimately resulted in a lawsuit by Earthjustice on the law violations, which the judge ruled to bring discussions to the City Council who approved the power plant (Botic, 2018; Botic and First-Arai, 2018). The City's continued passivity toward environmental racism revealed its flawed institutional priorities. As shown through these cases, the Vietnamese community has been resilient and strong-willed in advocating for themselves to fight against these injustices. However, these cases also show the systemic issues and inequities that still plague the community to this day. These issues are structural and there are many vulnerabilities such as safety, access to housing and education, crime, healthcare disparities, language access, and climate change and natural disasters that the community faces (Xu, 2017; Leroy, 2016). As emphasized by community members, much more investment and resources must be invested into this community.

Discussion

For many refugees and forced migrants, disruptions to everyday livelihood and displacement can be challenging and traumatic. Refugees are forcibly displaced because of political and social turmoil, violence and conflict such as war, persecution, or natural disasters. These unanticipated disruptions create an instability of life and livelihood where one is uprooted

from their own home to move to a completely new location. They can be seen as navigating a liminal in-between place of their old and new homes. The uncertainty of where they will be, for how long, and with whom can be very stressful as instances of displacement lower one's resilient capacities (Pinto, 2014). Cultural traditions and identity are carried through this fluid navigation within the liminal space that builds a sense of collective and social memory (Catalani, 2021). The Vietnamese community in New Orleans has shown through multiple displacements and navigating political, environmental, and social turmoil that they are still very resilient. Throughout my experiences within the Vietnamese community, I have felt their strong spirit in being a resilient group. However, the presence of this resilience raises several questions that I explored in this chapter: how does the Vietnamese community define and negotiate resilience? What are the implications of ascribing resilience to refugee and immigrant communities such as the Vietnamese community in New Orleans? What are some alternative frameworks that can better hold the complexity of the Vietnamese community's experiences of resilience, vulnerability, and inequity?

This research answers these questions by re-grounding the meaning of resilience through a deep dive into examining *refugee resilience* and the critical dichotomy of strengths and vulnerabilities it illustrates within the Vietnamese community. My use and application of *refugee resilience* build upon Kang's refugee resilience development which introduces a critical lens into how refugee and immigrant communities such as Vietnamese refugees engage in practices of cultural and physical adaptation to disruptions. Contextualized within the voices of the Vietnamese refugee community in New Orleans, *refugee resilience* necessitates the acknowledgment of the strength and capacity of the community to adapt to significant disruptions while critically recognizing the challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities that they

continue to face. It builds upon the framework by addressing the structural disinvestment by governmental institutions that creates a false hope of supporting the community at the surface level through small grants but neglecting to address the systemic issues that are at the root of the problem. *Refugee resilience* is broken down into three themes that highlight the ways in which this community has been resilient: social memory; local leadership and institutional capacity; and intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care. Social memory emphasizes the importance of navigating past disturbances of war and hurricanes that inform resilience today. Local leadership and institutional capacities are key in empowering and galvanizing community members to advocate for themselves while preserving a solid sense of collaboration. Lastly, intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care provide a critical analysis of the challenges that the community continues to face amidst their successful attempts to rebuild and preserve their community from disruptions.

Through interviews, observations, and talks with people in the community, instability can be looked at through a positive lens. What I mean by this is that through instances of instability and disruptions there are opportunities for cohesion, innovation, leadership development, and solidarity as community members unite over common experiences and goals. Community members have had to escape the aftermath of the Vietnam War, rebuild from Hurricane Katrina, adapt to oil spills, and fight against environmental injustices such as illegal landfill dumping. The spirit of the community is to identify themselves as very resilient people who see natural disasters and injustices as challenges to overcome and opportunities for growth. A strong sense of communal connectedness and unity activates and empowers the different pockets of Vietnamese families across Greater New Orleans.

This strong sense of connectedness adds to the nuanced dynamic of how the Vietnamese community negotiates pride both individually and collectively informs the understanding of the relationship between their identities and resilience (Nguyen, 2013). Grounded in interviews, informal conversations, and observations that took place during my time in the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, there was a strong sense of cultural identity from community members who know who they are and where they come from. Refugee resilience encapsulates this spirit of the Vietnamese community by expressing both the pride that the community feels in being resilient but also underscoring the daily experiences, vulnerabilities, and inequities that the community continues to face as refugees and immigrants. How this community navigates resilience alongside these daily vulnerabilities and inequities as well as the reservations they have for being ascribed a resilient community is key to unpacking *refugee resilience*.

Reservations on Resilience

In addition to the three themes, a critical examination of intergenerational trauma is important to discuss within *refugee resilience*. For the Vietnamese community, disruptions and instability are seen through a positive lens of overcoming challenges that strengthen the community and grow their cultural identity. Refugee resiliency recognizes the positive creativity of the Vietnamese community in being able to adapt during moments of instability. However, it also acknowledges the often overlooked systemic social, economic, and political challenges that the community continues to face. As seen through the historical trauma framework and refugee resiliency frameworks, even in the successful stories of being the fastest community to return and rebuild in the aftermath of Katrina, there is still disinvestment, social inequity, and other issues that can be exacerbated by increased climate change intensities (Xu, 2017; Kaika, 2017).

Through talks with community members and community organization staff, particularly for the Vietnamese community in New Orleans East, social issues have been higher priority concerns than climate change impacts. Increased intensities of hurricanes and tornadoes have tremendous impacts that disrupt ways of living, however, crime and safety, housing, and access to social services such as legal support have been increasingly worrisome for residents. More recently in the past couple of years crime has increased significantly in Village de L'Est, with many Vietnamese families victimized by burglaries, robberies, and in near proximity to shootings. Fear of crime is a significant, distressing, and ongoing concern that has been an issue for the community before and after the major hurricanes that have impacted the City.

The fact that there has been continued concern since Katrina of crime and because it is of higher concern in recent years illustrates the pervasiveness of systemic inequities in this community. There is a lack of immediate response from both the police department and the City Council in addressing many of these crimes, which has created much frustration and fear in the community. Additionally, there is public disinvestment in terms of supporting community businesses, schools, and organizations to provide safe spaces and social service programs for residents. Furthermore, there is a racialization of crime within this community where media, systemic structures, and intergenerational differences perpetuate the stereotypes of suspects towards immigrants and the Black and Latinx communities. It is harmful as it creates a wedge between these communities that live in the same place and under the same scrutiny of city and state governments. Located in New Orleans East, this area has been historically overlooked by city, regional, and federal governments. New Orleans East predominantly consists of communities of color of African American, Vietnamese, and Latinx communities. There is a racist stigma of New Orleans East as low-income, dangerous, and not attractive for development

projects. Its proximity to the eastern outskirts of the city and its demographic makeup has shown a history of marginalization, neglect, and discrimination by the city. Disinvestment from the city and lack of funding to provide access to necessary services such as social services, employment support, disaster insurance aid, legal services, and exclusion from previous city rebuilding plans show the structural issues that still marginalize this community. Vinita Srivastava posits an important critique of resilience in that “focusing on resilience undermines the need to find solutions” as well as covers up inequitable access services such as healthcare or lack of city resources directed towards safety (Srivastava, 2021).

Resilience can be seen through both positive and critical lenses, and it is not always a beneficial framework. Vinita Srivastava posits an important critique of resilience in that “focusing on resilience undermines the need to find solutions” as well as covers up inequitable access services such as healthcare or lack of city resources directed towards safety (Srivastava, 2021). Indeed, there must be a critical understanding in unpacking resilience and what it means for specific groups and communities. Resilience that is overly generalized to all communities can be harmful without thinking through its implications, instead a re-grounding of the term in how the community relates and interprets it is important to understanding the circumstances and priorities of the community. As Leroy et al. (2016) argue, it is imperative to consider who resilience is for, who does it benefit, how is resilience cultivated and used, and in what timeline? As sharply said by a long-standing resident and organization staff member, the most important thing needed is resource investment in this community:

“Once the resources come in then everything else will go. There’s going to be more attractions and that in turn will bring more support. We want to have more Vietnamese and Asian businesses, but we need help from the government to develop these projects and give these businesses a reason to want to be out here” (Interview, January 24, 2023).

There is a clear need for funding and investments from governments, but the community knows that this tends to fall short and there must be a stronger emphasis on coalitions and community-based strategies to push for this type of needed investment.

Refugee resilience is unique and helpful by understanding how the Vietnamese community negotiates resilience through their differentiated geographies, dislocation, strengths in social cohesion and organizing, experiences in navigating past and current disruptions, and identifying the daily vulnerabilities and inequities they face. It is a process that the community negotiates to balance a desire to empower each other to strengthen the collective resilient strength while continually dealing with the memory of loss, dislocation, and trauma. This raises another idea of differentiated geographies of resilience, as this community's resilience is not the same as another community's resilience. It also provides just one approach to understanding the Vietnamese community's engagement with resilience in the context of their past and current experiences in navigating challenges. It builds upon the specific relationships between resilience and refugee and immigrant communities while acknowledging their unique and ongoing inequities and vulnerabilities beyond resilience. Using this term must be coupled with both strengthening the resilient aspects within the community while addressing outside entities and structures to better support the community. It is not just a singular incorporation of this community's needs to be more resilient, but also the need to address other institutions outside of the community's agency that can provide the needed resources for climate change preparation and tackling main issues of concern such as crime.

Conclusion

This research contributes to the broader resilience theory, especially to the recent literature on resilience related to refugee and immigrant communities. *Refugee resilience* is a more recently coined term, which this study aims to inform and enhance. This research specifically contributes to Simi Kang's (2022) development of *refugee resilience* that provides a systemic critique to how resilience is used and its harmful implications for communities to potentially continue to be sacrifice communities because of their resilience. I add to this systemic critique by supplementing a different dimension in grounding the framework in this community's voices who have articulated themselves as proud of their resilience but elevating their calls to public authorities that they still face structural inequities and daily vulnerabilities. This chapter has explored the ways in which structural challenges and inequities can be addressed to lower the barriers to the community's resilient capacities. Suggestions include stronger and more targeted outreach investment programs from the City of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana to disadvantaged and overlooked communities of color such as Vietnamese refugees and immigrants. These programs must include social services workshops and increased county office locations, small business funding, workforce development, school and health investments, non-profit funding and training, and increased accessibility to natural disaster preparation resources.

This research has uncovered ongoing tension within the community between leaving and staying when assessing how to approach future impacts of hurricanes, the lack of economic opportunities, and crime and safety. Elders generally have the sentiment of not moving while the youth are more inclined to leave. However, community organizations such as VAYLA, VIET, and Sông-CDC are developing ways to bring these resources to the community to enable people to stay and return in place. These organizations, along with community leaders, play an

intermediary role in balancing these two dynamics of community mobility. It is therefore key that resources are sustainably funneled to these organizations. The leadership and advocacy of these organizations are critical foundations to this community that must protect the resilient spirit of the residents.

As seen through residents' anecdotes, there is a powerful sense of pride in the community's ability to be resilient to climate change-related disasters such as hurricanes and other pressing issues. As one community member describes the perception of climate change: "there are more bigger fish to fry," including concerns about crime, safety, housing, and access to social and legal services. Historical trauma is embedded within the community and particularly for elders there is a strong desire to remain in their new home of New Orleans. However, staying put has risks of discrimination, crime, and recurring annual hurricanes that can be harmful in retriggering past trauma. These risks are directly tied to the systemic inequities and governmental neglect that have limited the necessary resources and investments that this community seriously needs. Addressing these structural challenges and systemic inequities will also help build the community's capacity to adapt to climate change and environmental disruptions. Residents are already concerned about the uncertainty of their livelihoods 10-20 years from now, thus far-reaching long-term changes and commitments must be made to assist this community.

This analysis should not be used solely by itself, but it must be coupled with other analyses and advocacy work to inform policy recommendations and systems change. Potential areas for future research include the need to look at ongoing city and state climate adaptation strategies and how they align with this community. Research should be expanded on the implications of immobility for residents who refuse to leave. Insights from this research coupled

with how they intersect with resilience and adaptation provide an understanding of this community's outlook. Migration and relocations are generally proposed adaptation strategies in more climate and flood-prone areas such as New Orleans, but what happens in the case of communities not having the capacity to relocate or voluntarily choosing not to relocate due to place attachment? Potential research here can integrate with Julie Maldonado's work from *Rising Voices* comprised of Indigenous scholars looking at Indigenous knowledge systems and climate migration. Research in these areas can strengthen ways to support refugee and immigrant communities more effectively with regard to climate change and social inequities.

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Chapter 3

Refugee Resilience: The Roles of Community Organizations, Institutions, and Local Leadership in Climate Justice

“Whether it was MQVN-CDC, [VIET], or whether it’s VAYLA, we’re on the same goal. We didn’t see ourselves as CDC and VAYLA. We see ourselves as a community.”

- *New Orleans East Community Member*

Introduction

How does a community remain tight-knit amidst natural disasters and forced displacement? In the case of the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, what has kept the community together and fostered their ability to return to their homes after Hurricane Katrina is the pivotal role of community organizations, religious institutions, and unifying leaders. As signified in the opening quote, we see that organizations emerged out of a common vision of community. The present tense of “see” emphasizes that community members have seen, still see, and will always see themselves as a united community.

As one of the most concentrated Vietnamese American populations in the U.S. with one of the highest number of people per square mile, the Greater New Orleans Vietnamese community is currently home to about 17,000 people (New Orleans-Metairie, LA, 2023). A heartbreaking result of the Vietnam War was the resettlement of many refugees who ended up in the U.S. and eventually New Orleans. Many Vietnamese refugees have noted that New Orleans has a very similar climate and environment to Vietnam, particularly South Vietnam. Most of the Vietnamese community who came from fishing and shrimping backgrounds were able to adapt to the similar coastal environment.

The Vietnamese community in New Orleans has overcome significant challenges, including war, migration, and resettlement. However, living in New Orleans has exposed them to other hardships including Hurricane Katrina in 2005, illegal toxic landfill dumping post-Katrina in 2006, the BP oil spill in 2010, and other environmental injustices. Throughout numerous disruptions to their livelihoods through multiple displacements and governmental neglect, the Vietnamese community has shown strong resilience in overcoming challenges.

What has been a stable force in the community since their resettlement in New Orleans is the religious institutions of the Catholic churches and Buddhist temples. Specifically, the Mary Queen of Vietnam (MQVN) Church plays a pivotal role in preserving the cultural identity and social cohesion of the community. During and post-Katrina, the MQVN church played a critical role alongside the creation of community organizations that emerged out of the Katrina injustices. These organizations included Sông Community Development Corporation Sông-CDC (formerly known as MQVN-CDC at the time) and the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA). For context, two actions of injustice by the City of New Orleans completely disregarded the Village de L'Est Vietnamese community. First, the city hastily opened an illegal landfill next to the community in 2006 that bypassed community input and permitting processes (Lydersen, 2009). Secondly, the city designated this whole community as a green space in the City's Bring Back New Orleans rebuilding plans. Both ignited a fire within the community that galvanized activism and leadership to combat these injustices. Residents loudly voiced their concerns to City Hall, which sparked efforts to dismantle the model minority myth that the community was seen as an obedient and quiet immigrant community.

As evidenced by protests at city hall and by the landfill site, the Vietnamese community was not going to be overlooked and undermined. Their protests focused on advocating for this

community to be included at the decision-making table and for the closing of the landfill. The determination and tenacity of the community to organize ultimately resulted in a victory as the landfill was closed in response to the opposition in August of 2006 (Leong et al., 2007; Tang, 2011; Lydersen, 2009). This was one of the first cases of environmental justice advocacy within a Vietnamese American community. Even after 18 years, this community still faces similar disinvestment challenges and inequities that put them at risk of climate change impacts.

To understand the layered vulnerabilities and challenges this community still faces, I apply refugee resilience as a framework to analyze both the resilient strength of the community to bounce back from disruptions but also acknowledge the challenges and inequities that they face as a disadvantaged community. Community organizations, institutions, and leadership are formal and informal resources that maintain the community's resilient capacities and that have engaged with its challenges directly. Three main questions arise to understand these dynamics: how have vulnerabilities and inequities related to climate justice shaped the community? How do organizations and institutions address these factors? In particular, how do local community organizations, institutions, and leaders reveal both the strengths and challenges of the community that are integral to refugee resilience?

To critically understand refugee resilience and the key challenges that a refugee and immigrant community faces, one must look through the lens of community organizations, institutions, and local leadership. These organizations and institutions are a vital forum for understanding both the capacities of the community as well as the vulnerabilities and inequities that the community faces. Community organizations and institutions form a central focal point within the community's social networks. Community organizations and institutions allow us to

understand the ground-level experiences and local knowledge that form the pulse of the community.

Theoretical Framework

Climate Justice

Climate Justice (CJ) emerged out of the Environmental Justice (EJ) movement in the late 1990s when EJ was expanding to address the root causes of climate change and impacted frontline communities, as well as advocating for a transition away from fossil fuel industries (Jafry et al., 2019; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). EJ principles and definitions of justice helped to conceptualize the foundation for CJ, which includes addressing “distributive inequity, lack of recognition, disenfranchisement and exclusion, and, more broadly, an undermining of the basic needs, capabilities, and functioning of individuals and communities” within the context of climate change (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 361). Building upon the EJ movement, climate justice introduced a rights-based discourse that is contextualized in local geographies around resource-based struggles (Newell et al., 2021). This emphasizes looking at the resilience of local communities with a critical lens focusing on building adaptive capacities through the alleviation of poverty and reducing overlapping vulnerabilities (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). As explained throughout the paper compilation in Porter et al. (2020), the authors note the importance of understanding and centering community organizations that have intimate connections with the most vulnerable communities, thus they can uplift the critical overlapping vulnerabilities that need to be addressed.

Hurricane Katrina served as a defining moment that solidified the intersections of EJ and CJ by including climate change as another condition that revealed the broader social injustices of

low-income and disadvantaged communities of color (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Jafry et al., 2019). The impacts during Katrina and the response afterward in New Orleans brought to light and magnified the preexisting injustices and racial discrimination that included segregation, poverty, failing education systems, and substandard housing (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Haletky, 2006). This informed the climate justice framework to focus on the intersections of climate vulnerability and disaster relief with other forms of injustice consisting of lack of recognition and inclusion in political decision-making, which is integrated into this concept of intersectional climate justice (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). Consequently, the Vietnamese community was situated as an underserved and neglected community from governmental disaster response plans. Grassroots advocacy work from community organizations and leaders fought against these injustices to make a stand that they should be present and heard at the table.

Amorim-Maia et al. (2022) call for an intersectional climate justice that integrates these compounding and overlapping vulnerabilities. One of the key sub-components of intersectional climate justice is promoting activism that addresses vulnerability and fosters community resilience building (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). Resilience building focuses on long-term empowerment and adaptive capacity for marginalized populations to address intersectional identities with a critical inclusion to support minority-focused organizations via training and knowledge dissemination (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). Supporting and engaging local organizations is important because of their intimate connection with the community, which is why one must look at resilience through the lens of organizations. Gaps remain of how to effectively integrate different forms of justice into resilience. Interfacing with organizations can reveal a multitude of overlapping vulnerabilities and inequities a community faces, which is core

to refugee resilience as discussed in the following section. The organizational lens of seeing how this community negotiates resilience shows us that there are overlapping issues that intersect with climate change. This informs climate justice as not just solely addressing climate change issues but also the impacts of government and economic disinvestment, lack of access to food and education, and neighborhood safety. To further illustrate this intersection of climate justice with refugee resilience through an organizational lens, theories of organizations, community and social capital, and cultural capital and wealth are explored to understand the strengths, challenges, and complexities of how organizations are integral to communities.

Refugee Resilience

Resilience has been broadly applied to various communities as having the ability to bounce back and cope with disruptions. Although there is no one clearcut definition of resilience, the general definition described as the “capacity to adapt, self-organize, learn, renew, and develop” in the face of disturbances has been used freely without critical analyses of the community context (Adler et al., 2015, p. 492). My critique of resilience is its limited inclusion of inequities and vulnerabilities that refugee and immigrant communities face such as economic disinvestment and governmental neglect, which are crucial to climate justice. I use and define the term *refugee resilience* to exemplify the strength and capacity of the community to bounce back from significant disruptions (environmental, social, economic, etc.), while also acknowledging the challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities that they continue to face as a disadvantaged community (see Ch. 2). Contextualized within refugee experiences, the significance of Vietnamese refugees related to this term is the attachment to New Orleans as a sense of place,

displacement and the mobility of home, language barriers, family separation, mental health, facing racism in the South, and enduring traumatic events from war and hurricanes (see Ch. 2).

This framework specifically contributes to Simi Kang's (2022) development of refugee resilience that provides a systemic critique to how resilience is used and its harmful implications for communities to potentially continue to be sacrifice communities because of their resilience. I add to this systemic critique by enriching a different dimension in grounding the framework in this community's voices who have articulated themselves as proud of their resilience but elevating their calls to public authorities that they still face structural inequities and daily vulnerabilities. What is also key is how resilience and refugee are deconstructed in their own meanings within the community.

Both "resilience" and "refugee" have complex meanings individually, and "refugee resilience" aims to tackle these nuances of what they mean to the community. There is a unique duality in the multifaceted meaning of resilience. Resilience shows the optimistic outlook of the community in being able to bounce back from consequential disruptions, but it can overlook the continual neglect of the community by the state. There is a similar duality for the meaning of refugee, where it puts them into a box labeled as a perpetual foreigner, while on the other hand also embodying the essence of the community in being proud of their identity as refugees.

These layered meanings show how the Vietnamese community demonstrates pride both individually and collectively (Nguyen, 2013). Their identity as a process of constantly adapting to new circumstances can similarly be interrelated to the process of how the community negotiates resilience. Refugee resilience captures the spirit of the Vietnamese community by expressing their pride in being resilient, but it also underscores the daily experiences and vulnerabilities that they continue to face. To effectively understand refugee resilience of both

refugee and immigrant communities, one must look through the lens of community organizations, institutions, and local leadership who have a strong grasp on this duality. In this way, refugee resilience informs climate justice not only in terms of the overlapping vulnerabilities, but also by uplifting the resilient strength to combat these challenges.

Organizational Theory

Here I explore organizational theory to understand the processes and systems in which organizations, institutions, and leaders form stable grounding points in the community. Organizational theory is used to explain how organizations form, function, manage, and the cultures and behaviors within them (Toepler & Anheier, 2004). The emergence of community organizations and institutions within the Vietnamese community draws on the open systems sub-theory that explains how “organizations are not isolated by rather are closely interconnected and interdependent with their environments from which they exchange and draw resources” (Toepler & Anheier, 2004, p. 263). As the majority of organizations in this community are nonprofits that operate in a third space outside of businesses and governments, they can be conceptualized as intermediary units within the community that act interdependently with other institutions and residents (Freeman & Audia, 2006; Haveman & Wetts, 2019).

For refugee and immigrant communities, community-based organizations and institutions play vital roles in providing resources, access to services, cultural preservation, and serving as intermediary translators between government and public entities with the community (Hung, 2007; Salamon, 1999; Drennan & Morrissey, 2019). Organizations within this Vietnamese community play a pivotal role in civic engagement and community participation, helping drive disaster recovery and resilience (Weil, 2011). As Hung (2007) describes, there are four types of

nonprofit organizations: religious, cultural, service, and public interest organizations. The majority in the Vietnamese community are nonprofit and comprise a combination of these four types. Since strong social ties are so important in refugee and immigrant communities, examining the organizations that form the core of these social networks is key to understanding both their role and the community's priorities and challenges.

Gaps in the theory related to refugee and immigrant communities remain on issues such as community resilience, trauma-informed practices, service access, providing culturally competent services, and collaborative efforts between community-based organizations. Research is needed on how organizations can effectively operate and provide support, especially in contexts of resilience to climate change and disasters in disinvested settings (Drennan & Morrissey, 2019). This research aims to contribute to these gaps by addressing how organizational capacities, self-reliance, extensive networks within the community, and social cohesion affect a refugee and immigrant community's resilient capacities. Looking in more detail at community and social capital will allow for detailed insights into social relationships, trust building, and networks of information sharing in which organizations are core to the social fabric of the community. Marzana et al. (2020) describe community participation, a key element of organizational theory, as a negotiated process in fostering resilience within immigrant communities, highlighting the role of social capital in facilitating collaboration, trust, and collective action among community members. Social capital is also a strong catalyst for climate justice, as the collective action and knowledge sharing needed to combat injustices rely on the community's social cohesion and empowered agency.

Community and Social Capital

A community capital framework can show how and which types of resources are invested for the collective well-being. These types of capitals include human (individual skills), economic (financial), physical (infrastructure), natural (sustainable use of resources), political (community access to power and resources), cultural (values, norms, and traditions), and social (social networks) (Amirahmadi, 2012; Kais & Islam, 2016). Kais & Islam (2016) argue the importance of a community's resilience relies on how much of each capital is present, how the community works as a united team, how it identifies barriers, how well it is horizontally and vertically connected to other institutions, and how dynamic and strategic its community leaders are. Examining these questions can help understand the surpluses and deficiencies within the community and in which areas specific investments can be made to address those challenges.

Social capital is a critical element that reflects the relationships, cohesion, and networks individuals, families, and organizations have with each other (Milana & Maldaon, 2015; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Roman, 2004). Maulana & Wardah (2023) and other scholars argue that social capital is a key driver of disaster recovery and community resilience, as social cohesion serves as a backbone for restoring various capacities in the community (Carmen et al., 2022; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). As previously mentioned, refugee and immigrant communities rely on strong social ties between families and individuals due to instances of displacement, marginalization, language barriers, and trauma. One of the first lines of defense refugee and immigrant communities go to when addressing hardships is their social networks. This was shown in the Vietnamese community immediately following Katrina, where the social cohesion through the MQVN church was the main reason why there was a high success rate of return (Kadetz, 2018;

Rivera & Nickels, 2014; Airriess et al., 2008). Social capital is a vital component in examining the resilient capacities of these communities such as the Vietnamese community.

Community organizations and institutions are staple entities that form the center of these social networks and facilitate both communication and access to services through these networks. The community organizations literature has not fully embraced social capital as a critical component of resilience and disaster recovery research in refugee and immigrant communities (but see Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Maulana & Wardah, 2023). This research aims to address these gaps in examining social network cohesion through experiences of migration and displacement, as well as how social capital and resilience, as facilitated through organizations, are important in resource-disadvantaged communities. Integrating social capital into efforts to achieve climate justice can bridge the vulnerability and equity gap by understanding how organizations and leaders navigate the lack of access to resources and agency to participate at decision-making tables. Additionally, effective ways to support this grassroots effort can include active coalition building of community-based organizations, partnerships with academic institutions and funders of climate justice and resilience, and integrating governmental programs and city initiatives that address climate injustice and chronic disinvestment.

Cultural Capital & Wealth – Identity and Preservation

Cultural capital is particularly important to examine within refugee and immigrant communities, as they continually negotiate their identity through migration and displacement. These communities have their own unique cultural capital in the values, language, faith, customs and traditions, family, and memories that are often different from the host countries (Bhugra et al., 2021a; Bhugra et al., 2021b; Tran, 2021). Studies have shown that retaining cultural values

and traditions in new countries has contributed to the preservation of communities' social networks and cohesion (Ungar, 2015; Panter-Brick, 2015; Tran, 2021). The MQVN church and the Catholic faith are seen as core to this Vietnamese community. Cultural capital such as understanding the role of faith-based institutions can deepen our understanding of how religious and cultural preservation can maintain social cohesion.

Emerging from cultural capital and critical race theory is the concept of cultural wealth that builds upon how looking at cultural capital and communities as a resource instead of a deficit can reframe resilience thinking (Yosso, 2016; Yosso, 2005; Miller et al., 2021). For the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, resilience thinking can oftentimes portray the Vietnamese community as deficient in resources. Resilience often begins with a disruption that suggests a community's initial setback as a deficit to recover from. However, incorporating tenets from cultural wealth that challenge deficit thinking and center the lived experiences of communities strongly informs refugee resilience in its application to the Vietnamese community. Refugee resilience is a negotiated process that highlights the strengths and knowledge of the community while confronting the structural and daily inequities that the community faces which exacerbate their vulnerability to climate change impacts. Despite possessing abundant resources and capacities, the community faces marginalization driven by external structural systems.

As Yosso (2007) argues, the collective memory of a community is a precious thing. There is a deep history of refugee and immigrant experiences surrounding migration, displacement, marginalization, and trauma (Tran, 2021; VanLandingham & VanLandingham, 2017; Ungar, 2015). That holds significant value in the unity and collective resilient strength of the Vietnamese community. In addition to maintaining social cohesion and providing services, community organizations and institutions also create a space for community members to practice

their customs and traditions as well as be cultural brokers that build trust with outside institutions. This research's incorporation of cultural capital and wealth contributes to the gaps in understanding how refugee and immigrant communities engage with resilience and climate justice. Cultural wealth directly relates to social capital, as it empowers the community, which can enable mobilization capacities and collective action to address climate preparedness and inequities.

In synthesizing all of the theoretical frameworks discussed, this chapter illuminates the intersections between refugee resilience, organizational theory, community and social capital, and cultural capital and wealth, as well as how they contribute to climate justice in refugee and immigrant communities through the lens of organizations. Refugee resilience informs climate justice through its integration of both the strengths and vulnerabilities that the community faces in the context of climate change. Through the lens of organizations, organizational theory offers a broadened perspective in looking at grassroots initiatives and organizing that address inequities, which are centered in the community. Within the community's social web of residents, leaders, and organizations, one must understand the community and social capital that looks at the assets and strengths of community cohesion that ultimately informs resilience. Trust is a key component within community and social capital that forms the core of the community's social fabric. Moreover, framing refugee resilience's integration of the community's assets through cultural wealth that opposes a deficit thinking framework shows the collective resilient strength that both residents and organizations embody to combat overlapping climate vulnerabilities. These are critical to pursuing intersectional climate justice that weaves all of these frameworks, perspectives, and ways of examining the community's strengths and challenges together.

Methods

In engaging with this New Orleans Vietnamese community, it is important to first acknowledge my positionality as an outsider and insider. I am a second-generation Vietnamese American raised in Chicago. My interest in environmental and climate justice grew from learning about my parents' relationships with water in Vietnam and the U.S. Seeing parallels between how my parents did not grow up with access to clean water in Vietnam and seeing other communities facing disproportionate pollution burdens inspired me to pursue environmental justice research. Raised around community organizations, I am drawn to community-engaged scholarship as a practice that bridges community knowledge with advocacy research. I acknowledge the importance of centering marginalized perspectives in my work towards community-oriented problem-solving.

In this study, a mixed methods approach was employed that included semi-structured interviews, participant observations of community meetings, events, and informal conversations, multimedia analysis of podcast interviews and organization guest speaker talks, and thematic analysis of oral history transcripts from the Viet Chronicle project. Fieldwork research was based in the Greater New Orleans area, Louisiana during 2022 and 2023. Within the Greater New Orleans area, my study sites were concentrated in the Vietnamese communities of Village de L'Est in New Orleans East and Westbank neighborhoods including Marrero, Woodlawn, Avondale, and Gretna.

I initially connected with staff from Sông-CDC and the Tulane University Center for Studies of Displaced Populations (CDSPP). They generously facilitated connections with residents and leaders, directed me to relevant organizations such as the Vietnamese Initiative in Economic Training (VIET) and VAYLA, and guided my questions based on emerging themes from

community voices. As I got connected with residents, organization staff, and leaders, each person I talked to recommended other individuals to interview which fed into a purposive snowball approach. I conducted 16 interviews with community members, which were recorded with participants' permissions. Ten of the interviewees were first-generation born in Vietnam who migrated to the U.S. after the Vietnam War between 1975 and 1985. Of the remaining interviews, two were 1.5-generation and three were second-generation Vietnamese Americans. The majority were predominantly of Catholic faith, and most were middle-aged and seniors with a couple of youths in their 20s and 30s. Additionally, there was a mix of participants who lived in different parts of New Orleans such as in the Westbank communities and the bordering town of Metairie. The majority were residents who lived or had previously lived in Village de L'Est.

Many of my interactions with the community were through informal conversations where I had higher accessibility through introductions made at community meetings and events. These interactions were all included in participant observation field notes of various community meetings, tours, socials, morning markets, religious services at Catholic churches and Buddhist temples, and meeting new residents through daily interactions such as at grocery stores and restaurants.

The remaining approaches to the mixed methods included thematic analysis of a podcast interview of staff from Sôg-CDC and VAYLA's Sinews in the Cypress speaker talks with Khai Nguyen of VEGGI Co-cop as well as transcripts of oral histories of Vietnamese elders from the Viet Chronicle Project archived at The Historic New Orleans Collection. Through the NVivo 14 qualitative coding software, I conducted thematic analysis to look for emerging themes from all interview transcripts, field observation notes, podcast interview transcripts, speaker series transcripts, and oral history transcripts. I used thematic analysis to explore the emerging themes

of how the Vietnamese community shares their own interpretations of resilience in their community and how they relate to their experiences as refugees and migrants.

Limitations to this study's methodology include the lower number of interviews of youth compared to middle-aged and elderly groups, which is due to the snowball connections through middle-aged residents and the limited five-month duration of the fieldwork site visits. Moreover, the shortened fieldwork visits limited prolonged exposure and continued interactions with community members that could have yielded potentially more interviews and observations as well as updates on work conducted by community organizations.

Findings

To deepen the understanding of refugee resilience through an organizational lens, this chapter explores the history of community organizations, institutions, and local leadership. The history of how they emerged offers a grounded understanding of the vulnerabilities and inequities that the community faces, their resilient processes, ways of cultural preservation, and activism within environmental justice. This chapter first looks at organizations, as they form the core of the community and have been very active in galvanizing activism, raising issues to local governments, and addressing the lack of resources through grassroots efforts. Then, institutions are examined such as churches and temples that form a stable space for social gatherings and cultural preservation. Finally, the lens is narrowed to individual community leaders who founded and emerged out of those organizations while also widening out the scope to other leaders outside of the organizations who also became core to the social networks.

Background of Community Organizations

There are numerous community organizations within the Vietnamese community in New Orleans. Because of their centrality in the community and their coverage of diverse social sectors, I focus on these main organizations: Sông Community Development Corporation (Sông CDC) that includes the VEGGI Farmers Cooperative (Co-Op), Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA), Vietnamese Initiative in Economic Training (VIET), Coastal Communities Consulting (CCC), and NOELA Community Health Center. The background and brief history of each of these organizations are presented in Table 2.

Organization	Background & History
<p>Sông Community Development Corporation (Sông CDC)</p>	<p>Sông CDC (formerly known as MQVN-CDC) was recently established in 2022. MQVN-CDC was formed post-Katrina in 2006 and since 2022 has transitioned to Sông CDC.</p>
<p>VEGGI Farmers Cooperative (Co-Op)</p>	<p>VEGGI is a cooperative farming program part of Sông CDC that focuses on food justice and urban economic development.</p>
<p>Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA)</p>	<p>VAYLA emerged out of post-Katrina in 2006 through the efforts of Vietnamese youth leaders who organized against the illegal toxic landfill, Chef Menteur C&D Disposal Landfill, next to the Vietnamese community.</p>
<p>Vietnamese Initiative in Economic Training (VIET)</p>	<p>VIET was founded in 2001. Their mission is to assist individuals and families with English proficiency, language translation, senior support, and access to social services.</p>
<p>NOELA Community Health Center (CHC)</p>	<p>NOELA CHC initially started from the Tulane University of School Medicine in 2008. As a response to post-Katrina’s need in the community for access to healthcare, NOELA was established to provide both an adult and pediatric clinic.</p>
<p>Coastal Communities Consulting (CCC)</p>	<p>CCC was established in 2010 after the BP oil spill. Their mission is to provide economic development, social support services, technical assistance, and disaster recovery assistance for the rural and fishing communities across Southeast Louisiana.</p>

Table 2: This table shows the community organizations and programs within the Vietnamese community in New Orleans focused within this research study. All the organizations listed here are based in Village de L’Est in New Orleans East, except for CCC that is based in the Westbank. All these organizations are also non-profits except for the NOELA CHC, which is a community healthcare center.

Background on Faith-Based Institutions

The Vietnamese community in New Orleans is comprised of two main religious faiths: Catholicism and Buddhism. There are five churches within the Greater New Orleans area, with the main church called the Mary Queen of Vietnam (MQVN) Church centered in Village de L'Est. There are four Buddhist temples across Greater New Orleans. Two are located in the Westbank, and one, Trung Tâm Phật Giáo Vạn Hạnh, is located right in the Village de L'Est community. According to a 2008 study, the community is about 80% Catholic and 20% Buddhist (Airriess et al., 2008). Unique to this community is the predominance and cohesion of the Catholic faith, as most Vietnamese communities across the U.S. are predominantly Buddhist. From interviews and observations, the community is still predominantly Catholic with resident anecdotes that at least 75-90% are Catholic (Interview, May 20, 2022). Spirituality is of strong importance to the Vietnamese community and faith plays a focal point in their social fabric. As will be discussed further, the Catholic churches, along with their educational programs and social events facilitate gatherings where residents are actively engaging with each other. They have been critical in maintaining the social networks and connectedness that have kept the community together since post-Katrina.

To contextualize why this community is predominantly Catholic, we must first revisit the resettlement process of the original families that came to New Orleans. During the relocation and resettlement process in the U.S., Vietnamese refugees were largely transferred to four refugee camps, one of which was in Fort Chaffee in Arkansas (Clarion Herald, 2014). From these refugee camps, many faith-based and non-government organizations helped resettle Vietnamese refugees to different cities across the U.S. (Leong, 2007). In May of 1975, Archbishop Philip M. Hannan of the Associated Catholic Charities of New Orleans visited Fort Chaffee and wanted to

help resettle the Vietnamese families to New Orleans (Clarion Herald, 2014; Leong, 2007). Archbishop Hannan sponsored 1,000 families to New Orleans and asked Catholic Charities to help find subsidized, low-income Section 8 housing for the families that became the Versailles Arms (Clarion Herald, 2014; Leong, 2007). This was already a tight-knit community migrating to New Orleans, as each of the families were all from the same villages in Vietnam. Many of the families came from the villages of Phát Diệm and Bùi Chu located in Northern Vietnam, which were already centered around the Catholic diocese (Nguyen, 2021). Moreover, immediately after resettling, in 1976, the community built the long-time staple institution of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, which continues to be the glue of the community (Archdiocese of New Orleans, 2024).

Background on Local Leadership

Numerous community leaders have galvanized and empowered residents' voices. Before delving into the specific community leaders, I want to preface that community leaders can be defined differently from community to community. As there are many leaders and there are different individuals named by each of the residents that I have talked to, here I identify the main leaders as identified by the residents I engaged with.

One of the most instrumental figures is Father Vien Nguyen⁵ who was the priest of the MQVN Church in Village de L'Est from 2003 to 2012 and who has been in this community since 1977 (Interview, April 26, 2022; Interview, June 1, 2022; Viet Chronicle Oral History Project). Father Vien is a strong vocal and passionate leader in the community who has steered activism in collaboration with youth leaders throughout the community during and post-Katrina.

⁵ Also referred to as Cha Vien in Vietnamese. This name may be used interchangeably with Father Vien.

He is regarded as a very important figure in the community because of his passion for social justice and his role as a Catholic leader who formed the staple of the community's social fabric.

Other identified leaders include Viet Quynh Pham (current President of the Vietnamese New Orleans community), John-Hoa Nguyen (leader based in the Westbank who organizes community and cultural events), Toan Nguyen (Vietnamese Seniors Association), leaders within the Sisters Catholic church community, and the executive directors of the community organizations as listed in Table 2. The leaders of the community organizations include Tap Bui and Khai Nguyen (Sông CDC and VEGGI Farm Co-Op), Lang Le (VIET), Jacqueline Thanh (VAYLA), Diem Nguyen (NOELA CHC), and Sandy Ha Nguyen (CCC). As this is a tight-knit network, many of these leaders have collaborated and supported each other at large community events such as the Lunar New Year festival (Tết) and various community projects. The Tết festivals are celebrated at each of the religious institutions, however, the largest event is held at MQVN Church and can be seen in Figure 5. The intersections of these leaders and their associated organizations provide a diverse, yet connected network that focuses on community development, cultural programming, spiritual events, and providing social services.



Figure 5. *Image of Tết Lunar New Year festival celebration held at MQVN Church in January 2023. (Photo taken by Peter Nguyen)*

Vulnerabilities & Inequities

Through specific interviews and informal discussions with organization staff, religious institutional leaders, and other community leaders, specific vulnerabilities and inequities were identified that the community continues to face. First, there is a distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic vulnerabilities that are present. Intrinsic vulnerabilities are related to individuals' identities and demographics, which include age, gender, education level, socioeconomic class, language barriers, level of social cohesion, and cultural practices. Extrinsic vulnerabilities are external factors and systems that raise the community's risks. Specific to this community, these

include crime and safety, lack of investments in affordable and senior housing, historical disinvestment both economically and politically, concerns of the outmigration of youth and residents, and climate change impacts. Many of the residents experience these extrinsic vulnerabilities day-to-day. Compounded on these vulnerabilities are the extrinsic inequities that consist of a lack of investments in social services and economic opportunities, historical neglect and governmental disinvestment, and racial marginalization of the Black, Vietnamese, and Latinx communities that live in New Orleans East.

When coupled with the intrinsic vulnerabilities, the extrinsic inequities can exacerbate the risks to climate change. Many of the residents I spoke to focused their comments on extrinsic vulnerabilities; however, organization staff tended to identify the intersections of both intrinsic and extrinsic vulnerabilities. Addressing these extrinsic factors can alleviate the severity of the intrinsic vulnerabilities, such as increasing education access, economic opportunities, providing social services for the elderly, and language justice. The lens of organizations further identifies an intermediary variable between intrinsic and extrinsic vulnerabilities, which is the level of trust of organizations and governments. Organizations help to facilitate these levels of trust when interfacing with governments, which is critical to connecting the resources to both empower and bring agency to the community.

Vulnerabilities

Based on interviews and observations, I will prioritize these three issues: crime and safety, climate change impacts, and concerns of resident outmigration and loss of community for critical attention. Community organization leaders have shared that crime and safety are seen as the highest priority even compared to climate change, as crime directly impacts them and their

neighbors. Residents see crime occur daily, with long response times or sometimes no response at all from police. As one community organization co-director puts it,

I feel like they [residents] don't see it [climate change] as a top concern until it actually happens. Living in an area that always has hurricanes, floods. Until it happens, I think top priority for folks from day to day is going to be crime and safety. It's going to be top of mind even when we hold our community conversations (Interview, January 24, 2023).

Another community organization co-director also shared the same overwhelming concern across the entire Village de L'Est community,

If you ask a random Vietnamese person in the community, especially an older person they probably have concerns about public safety and crime...[Crime] has always been there, but I think in the last two years it's definitely been an uptick in crime. New Orleans in general has seen that as well and the police force is very low compared to the population now so there are issues everywhere (Interview, February 7, 2023).

Having the expectation that the government and police will not respond and do anything to address these unmitigated crimes contributes to high concerns for safety and the potential loss of community from recent outmigration to other neighboring cities and states. A community organization Co-Director shares that,

a lot of times we do feel that Vietnamese communities are targeted, so there's a point in time last year I thought there was a string of violent attacks on seniors that are not reported because they don't trust the system to be reported and they know that nothing will be done anyway (Lewis 2023).

The lack of trust can exacerbate the vulnerabilities and put the community at risk of sustaining itself. However, how the organizations have identified these concerns and taken the initiative to act as an intermediary to bridge this gap will be critical to reducing these vulnerabilities. But this cannot solely be put on the organizations as their responsibility.

In May 2022, a community meeting was hosted by the New Orleans Police Department and City Councilmember Oliver Thomas (who represents District E that encompasses New Orleans East) at the MQVN church school to garner feedback around main community concerns.

VIET staff and leaders helped facilitate the Q&A discussions. Many of the residents expressed frustration and impatience regarding police responses to crime (burglaries, shootings, break-ins), which have ranged from hours to a day for police to respond on the scene. Many of the residents who voiced their frustration were elderly and there was one man who was upset because he had not been able to voice his concerns as well as the lack of City response to address safety. Lang Le, Executive Director of VIET, continued to talk with police staff to strongly advocate for the community's voice to be heard and for the City to listen because the lack of safety and response has been very alarming.

Although crime has been present within the Village de L'Est community for decades, climate change impacts and risks have also increased over the past two decades. Climate change is not seen as directly compared to crime daily, but residents have noticed changes over the years such as increased frequency and intensity of hurricanes and tornadoes, coastal erosion, land subsidence, hotter temperatures, water quality issues, changes in the availability of land for growing crops, and increased flooding during storms. A community organization co-director shares their thoughts on these issues,

Louisiana has got a lot of erosion going on and a lot of the older people they see it themselves because they're going fishing, they're going shrimping and so they understand the issues around here like land loss, sea level rise and things like that. The folks that live in New Orleans East, we feel like we're far away from the coastline but we really aren't that far. There's water all around us.

Especially in New Orleans East, I think the community out there is one of the worst in terms of subsidence in the whole city. New Orleans itself is always sinking because New Orleans is built by the Mississippi River but over the past hundreds of years, it's been sinking because the river doesn't flood and deposit new land (Interview, February 7, 2023).

Increases in storms such as tornadoes have been very noticeable, and some have pointed to them being of higher risk than hurricanes. As one staff member of NOELA CHC shares,

Never have I seen a tornado. So I'm talking about in 2019 there was one that happened right down the street and my staff because they were so in awe of it they actually went outside, looked, and they saw it came down this way and you could see it hop across the highway...And that's why I believe in climate [change]. We just had hurricanes and now we're dealing with hurricanes and tornadoes (Interview, May 20, 2022).

The added concerns over the risks of tornadoes in recent years coupled with the annual threat of hurricanes create more stress that some residents have contemplated possibly moving outside of the area for ease of mind.

Many of the people I talked with expressed concerns over the potential slow loss of the community as residents have been moving out of Village de L'Est to other parts of Greater New Orleans, Louisiana, or other states. Village de L'Est has a strong unique sense of community but that is at risk because of crime, climate change, and a lack of economic opportunities that stems from systemic inequities that disadvantage this community. A community organization co-director shares this concern of the outmigration,

I travel a lot to other Vietnamese communities and you never feel any other sense of community like we do here. But we definitely feel it being diminished slowly over time just because folks are getting older. Folks are moving out. And it's your whole built environment like we've never truly recovered in the East as a whole after Katrina, not a lot of investments, not a lot of developments. We don't have the same amount of opportunities as we did in the past like grocery stores or spaces to hang out (Interview, January 24, 2023).

These concerns over losing a sense of community and home are worrisome because it directly ties to the systemic inequities that continuously disadvantage the community. There is a compounding effect where these vulnerabilities (crime/safety, climate change impacts, outmigration) and inequities overlap, which contributes to the overall stress and marginalization of the community.

Inequities

In addressing the overlapping vulnerabilities, it is important to note the extrinsic systemic inequities identified by community organizations and leaders. They point out the lack of investments in social services and economic opportunities, historical neglect and governmental disinvestment, and racial marginalization of the Black, Vietnamese, and Latinx New Orleans East communities. However, it is important to link the overlapping vulnerabilities and inequities together through addressing the historical and current relationships of distrust of government agencies.

There is a larger systemic issue of historical disinvestment and racial marginalization of the New Orleans East communities of color. As seen from the police response times to crime along with the struggles and neglect faced by the community post-Katrina, which will be discussed in more detail below, these are not unfamiliar issues. Leaders from VIET, VAYLA, and Song CDC staff shared that there is collective concern about the lack of investment and attention paid to the Village De L'Est community from the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana. This is illustrated through comments from three different community organization staff members:

Our community is being overlooked. They're not bringing resources into the community. We're being left behind (Interview, January 24, 2023).

[On what resources are needed] I think right now it's mainly just community services and amenities because the community here has always been low on resources and things like that... I also think the services and resources need to be there for them. That's on the city, that's on the government (Interview, February 7, 2023).

We got to work the system, as the system doesn't help us (Interview, January 24, 2023).

Tap Bui reiterates the historical and systemic neglect of New Orleans East by the City in an Oxford podcast interview below. She describes the lack of recognition justice to acknowledge the history of the community who have lived in this space for close to 50 years.

New Orleans East is largely ignored by the proper city of New Orleans. We are 60% of the land mass and 40% of the taxpayer space. But we don't see that support in resources go back here, especially post-Katrina. You can see there's still a lot of blighted properties at scale in New Orleans East. There was a report after Hurricane Katrina that slated New Orleans East should just be green space, so not recognizing that there have been communities who have been here for generations. But there was a report that recommended the city just designate this entire space as green space, which was a big no-no (Lewis 2023).

This systemic neglect hinders the community's aspiration to grow, provide opportunities, and protect residents from social, environmental, and physical risks. There has been collective apprehension about the outlook of the community if these inequities are to continue that provide fewer resources and opportunities to maintain the sense of community and home that are so key to this community.

The historical and systemic neglect of the Vietnamese community in New Orleans East has additionally contributed to the lack of trust in governments. Trust is extremely important within the Vietnamese community and there has been a pattern of distrusting governments, which dates back to Vietnam before their resettlement in the U.S. The systemic neglect in New Orleans East indicates that governments have broken trust with the community, which can exacerbate the community's vulnerabilities. Ever since coming to the U.S. and New Orleans specifically, the elders have had a strong sense of self-reliance as they have been accustomed to not having any government assistance coupled with the challenges of applying for bank loans or insurance policies (Chang, 2014). Although residents have pointed to the comparisons of having government assistance in the U.S. compared to Vietnam, there has still been neglect and mistreatment of the community by city and state governments. This is particularly seen post-

Katrina through application processes for disaster relief and neglect of the Village de L'Est community in the "Bring Back New Orleans" rebuilding program; responses to crime and safety; and lack of investments in social services, education, and economic opportunities.

The "Bring Back New Orleans" program created a new map that completely disregarded the Village de L'Est community, which frustrated many residents. As one former community organization staff member says,

There's one time that [the community] went to City Hall because Cha Vien didn't realize but they came out with the Bring Back New Orleans. And so this whole big map of what the Bring Back New Orleans things will be. And Versailles was not on the map. They were planning to make all of Versailles a green space. That's when they started rallying to go and show present City Hall and let them know that we're back. The following week they organized and they went up to City Hall and there were probably around 100 people who showed up and said, "how is it that you designate this as green space when we are already back and the rest of the city are not back?" And so [City Hall] said, "oh well, we didn't know anybody was back." And I said even if you don't realize that people are back, shouldn't you ask? Shouldn't you go and find out? You can't just designate a place a green space when you don't know whether people are back or not. And the Vietnamese were the first community that actually came back and then after a while [City Hall] had to scrap that and redo the map. And it was a struggle for everything, struggle to turn on the water, struggle to turn on the electricity, struggle to fight for a FEMA trailer because from the very beginning no one got FEMA trailers (Interview, April 26, 2022).

The omission of the community from the New Orleans rebuilding program map angered the whole Vietnamese community and ultimately ignited residents to organize to be heard and included on the map.

Building upon this feeling of neglect, there was a struggle to obtain FEMA aid and access to basic necessities that contributed to the distrust of governments providing essential resources to survive. This sense of distrust has continued, coupled with the recent increase in crime over the past few years. A Co-Director of a community organization shares that,

A lot of stuff happens that people just don't report because why would they trust the system if it doesn't, they never feel like that it helped them. From being refugees to being evacuees of Katrina they've never felt like the government helped them" (Interview, January 24, 2023).

This constant feeling that the government has never helped them not only shows the structural issues of government negligence for the community even after 18 years since Katrina. It feels that the government is completely out of the equation and to address this issue the community feels that there needs more grassroots efforts of care and building on the trust of organizations to channel their concerns to other governing institutions.

Addressing Resilience Through Organizations, Institutions, & Leaders

Despite the numerous overlapping vulnerabilities and inequities that the community faces, organizational and institutional leaders have discussed ways to address these through collaboration with each other and entities outside of New Orleans. Their roles in fostering community resilience can be categorized into four themes: social cohesion, collaborative leadership, addressing distrust of governments, and organizational goals.

Sông CDC, VEGGI Co-Op, VAYLA, VIET, NOELA CHC, and CCC all play a role in facilitating social cohesion through social service and cultural programming as well as technical assistance. Religious institutions such as the Catholic churches have also played an instrumental role in the cohesiveness of the community in holding social and cultural gatherings. This Vietnamese community is very faith-based and there is a strong relationship between the churches with the Archdiocese of New Orleans that originally helped them settle in Village de L'Est (Interview, April 25, 2022). Specifically, the MQVN Church and Father Vien host the annual Tết Lunar New Year festival, Sunday mass, Vietnamese language classes, and youth programs that have had high attendance. But what is instrumental in maintaining the social network is the hierarchy structure of the Catholic church through the pastoral council. This was exceptionally helpful in the aftermath of Katrina in relocating everyone that had dispersed to

other cities and nearby states such as in Houston, Texas. One heavily involved community member and staff of the NOELA CHC explains the importance of the pastoral council,

The Catholic structure you have a priest and then they have this pastoral council who is in charge of the whole community. And each of those neighborhoods they have presidents or councils. That's how they keep track of everybody who's in the neighborhood. That was a good thing because they had records of everybody that was in the church. So right after Katrina, Father Vien who stayed when the levee broke he was still here, some community members were still here. And the water started rising. He then noticed because they got flooding too. He went out and got boats, whoever's boat was available. They started knocking on doors, making sure that everybody was out. I think he told me that there was only one death in this community, it was an older woman. They couldn't get to her in time. He decided since we have this list of community members with the pastoral council and have each president of those communities start calling people to come back. As you can imagine Katrina happened in August. By October a lot of community members were back already (Interview, May 20, 2022).

It is incredible how through all this chaos and people being displaced and having to move to nearby cities and states that Father Vien and the pastoral council were able to locate everyone from Village de L'Est except for one person.

This is a great illustration of collaborative leadership between the MQVN Church, Father Vien, and the community pastoral council that maintained social cohesion throughout a moment of turmoil. Similarly, this collaboration expanded to include the creation of two other community organizations: VAYLA and Sông CDC, which was initially called MQVN-CDC. These organizations united the community to protest against the illegal toxic landfill dumpsite near the community. For context, 8 months after Hurricane Katrina that touched down in August 2005, the Chef Menteur C&D Disposal landfill was proposed to be opened in April 2006 approximately 1.5 miles from Village de L'Est (Tang, 2011). As this is explored in the latter section on Vietnamese Activism, this collaboration was key across all organizations, and leaders fostered the inclusion of both young and older generations. The collaborative effort ultimately led to the shutdown of the landfill, which was a strong showcase of community empowerment.

In terms of addressing distrust of governments, organizations play a vital role as an intermediary in interfacing with governments as well as providing access to services with language assistance. Residents have more trust in community organizations and are more willing to listen to and use the services provided by these organizations. This is particularly important for the fishing and rural communities that span from Greater New Orleans to the coastal areas of Southeast Louisiana. Sandy Ha Nguyen, Executive Director of CCC, works specifically with these communities. These communities trust her and rely on the CCC to provide technical assistance, language translation, and support in disaster relief funding applications. She states that,

I only have one advantage over everyone in the state when it comes to fisher families. That advantage is trust. If there is a government meeting, they won't even come out unless I'm there or I send one of my staff there. They still don't trust the government (Interview, January 25, 2023).

Trust is very important to the Vietnamese community. Community members' relationships with these community-based organizations form a united grassroots network that does not solely rely on the governments. Community members' trust is grounded in the relationships with the organizations, which form the root of how organizations can extend this trust to larger agencies that can support the community.

A common sentiment heard among community organizations was the need to build upon this trust with the community, especially with all of the vulnerabilities and inequities the community continues to face. Staff from Sông CDC, VAYLA, and VIET have stated the need to strengthen collaboration with each other as well as to build upon programming that will bring more resources into the community. This can build community capacity, while expanding this grassroots approach where these organizations can serve larger roles in providing services such as green infrastructure or senior housing development to address the community's main

concerns. Father Vien speaks to how Sông CDC's and VEGGI's empowered outlook to tackle these issues and be more proactive to preserve and make this community safer:

[VEGGI] is part of the self-reliance in terms of food. That's the work. So there's a movement now. There's a group from [Sông CDC]. They want to continue to create more shields to armor the community even more. And so we are looking at different aspects of it. So we don't stop. We continue to see how we can armor the community. And just like different issues too, right? Like housing and crime as a usual. If the safety is not there, the people will not remain. And so we need to deal with that side of things. How can we fix that? In the past we sat there and said, the city is not doing anything and we don't know what to do. But we are proactive now. If the city is not doing it, we want to see is there any way that we can help the city make it better. So we're not just the recipient. We are the doer, the actor. And you see that. You see, [Sông CDC staff], they're from the local community. All of them, the local people standing up doing the work (Interview, June 1, 2022).

Speaking with one of the co-directors from Sông CDC, there is a strong recognition of the systemic inequities that impact this community and they are driven to elevate these issues to the City and state level. Here they state the need to develop various programs in the community,

But that's a part of the bigger system like the built environment to get to address crime. There's a bunch of things that you can do like a workforce program, youth development programs for kids so they can stay out of trouble. How do you keep kids in school because a lot of them don't go to school so how do you keep them in school? How do you provide them with mental health support, even a criminal justice system. How do you reform the criminal justice system and not just criminalize men of color? You see that often. How do you put more resources into the police department? Build morale because we have really low morale here (Interview, January 24, 2023).

These are the key questions Sông CDC and other organizations are thinking through to change the landscape and uplift the community to feel more comfortable in their own home.

Cultural Wealth - Identity & Preservation

A strengths-based framework focuses on the positive assets that make this resilient community what it is today. Drawing from cultural wealth concepts, I have shown the instrumental role that organizations, the MQVN church, the pastoral council network, and

leaders have played in galvanizing the community and bridging residents with government entities. These grassroots approaches form the core of a climate justice and refugee resilience approach to addressing those overlapping vulnerabilities. I highlight two community leaders' voices who speak to the strengths of this community and the spirit that preserves their strong connections with each other. A co-director of a community organization shares the unique cultural strength of being in a place where all their families and friends from the same villages are within walking distance and where they are able to communicate in their native language as if they were in Vietnam:

The strengths are the people, it's not a very common thing where you get a place where many of these older community members have been here for almost 50 years and they're able to have a community, they're able to speak their original language and they're able to have friends, family and have all of that being familiar to them. That's not very common. We just want to be able to continue that and provide that for them. And this is from Katrina, they've gone through a lot, you know, coming to the U.S. and realize being boat people, the dangers of that and going through Katrina. So I feel like they've gone through a lot but they feel like they've got this community (Interview, February 7, 2023).

Another co-director of a community organization shares about this tight-knit community and the strong sense of belonging they have built in a place completely far from the home that they were forced to leave from:

The sense of belonging for sure. I think that's why hurricane after hurricane people always come back because they know that they don't get this community feel anywhere else in this level of support, in the atmosphere. Even for some of us we feel that people my age a lot of them have moved out but they still come back to the community, the kids are still attending church or going to the school here, still being educated really in New Orleans East. I don't think that's going to change anytime soon (Interview, January 24, 2023).

As we can see from both these quotes, there is a strong sense of pride in being part of this unique community, and an enduring sense of belonging. There is cultural wealth in the social connectedness and shared memory in their refugee and post-Katrina history. As Chang (2014) reaffirms, what keeps this community together is the social stability from the church, family, and

shared refugee history. This solid foundation is built upon the intergenerational care for each other and the strength to preserve their culture and community.

Activism & Environmental Justice

Refugee resilience is exemplified by the multifaceted collaboration between community organizations, Catholic churches (specifically MQVN Church), and leaders to resist the illegal placement of the Chef Menteur C&D Disposal landfill in 2006. The City of New Orleans authorized this landfill consisting of toxic Hurricane Katrina debris to be opened approximately 1.5 miles from residents' homes in Village de L'Est (Nguyen, 2015, Tang, 2011, Interviews). The landfill was illegally approved in the sense that it bypassed community input and a standard permitting process (Lydersen, 2009). Led by Father Vien, youth, and elders, the community protested at City Hall and at a proposed landfill to demand it be shut down. After a long-fought battle over eight months at the city and state level, Mayor Ray Nagin did not renew the zoning waiver and the landfill closed in August of 2006. With a well-deserved victory (in a struggle that should not have been necessary in the first place because of the illegal placement of the landfill), the community also used this moment to continue to mobilize and address the lack of equitable access to disaster relief resources. Collaboration not only occurred between organizations and leaders, but they galvanized elders and empowered the youth to lead the organizing. MQVN-CDC and VAYLA emerged out of this landfill protest with VAYLA being youth-oriented and MQVN-CDC focused on social services, organizing, and elderly groups (Interview, April 26, 2022).

During the protests, a long-standing community member shared how these organizations as well as the collaboration between the younger and older generations created a synergistic fight against the landfill, ultimately leading to its shutdown:

So the elders were sharing their knowledge of what they know and the youth were the ones who knew the language. So they're the ones who were doing the advocating and the elders were supporting them. Afterwards we had the fight with the landfill. I can understand the whole concept of why they want a landfill, but why here? Why in this place, especially next to a natural reserve? It doesn't make any sense why you would put it right next to Bayou Sauvage, where it's one of the largest natural reserves in the U.S. So from that it was the energy that came out of the community was amazing. And people were not frightened. They were not scared. And they wanted their voice to be heard. So it was all this organizing that we did during that time (Interview, April 26, 2022).

This collaborative spirit illustrated the social memory of activism and refugee resilience wisdom brought in by the elders that was revived and facilitated through the youth leaders. The collective mobilization of everyone in the community led by Father Vien and the youth as well as the persistence to protest both at City Hall and at the landfill led to a rare moment of justice fighting back against systemic neglect. This shows the cultural wealth that came together from all aspects of the community to not only strengthen community empowerment, but also to develop the collaborative and leadership capacities that challenged the model minority myth that always described them as a quiet group.

Discussion

To understand climate justice and refugee resilience more effectively, one must look through the lens of community organizations, institutions, and leaders. The main research questions that helped examine this lens were: how have vulnerabilities and inequities related to climate justice shaped the community? How do organizations and institutions address these factors? In particular, how do local community organizations, institutions, and leaders reveal both the strengths and challenges of the community that are integral to refugee resilience?

Looking through an organizational lens shows the true ground-level strengths, capacities, needs, challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities that the community faces. This chapter demonstrated the linkage between intrinsic and extrinsic vulnerabilities and how extrinsic inequities can exacerbate those vulnerabilities. These extrinsic vulnerabilities included crime and safety, lack of investment in affordable and senior housing, concerns of outmigration of youth from the community, and climate change impacts (frequency and intensity of hurricanes and tornadoes, sea level rise, flooding, hotter weather, land subsidence, water quality, and availability of land for growing crops). The systemic inequities that they also highlighted include the lack of investments in social services and economic opportunities, historical neglect and governmental disinvestment, and racial marginalization of the Black, Vietnamese, and Latinx New Orleans East communities.

Community organizations and institutions are staples within the community's social networks. They know the current and historical conditions, people's outlook, community-level knowledge of responses to disasters, and areas of need. What is key about organizations and institutions is the trust that is built between them and community members. In this specific community, there is a general lack of trust in government entities. However, there is strong trust in the organizations and institutions that have become the main modes of communication with outsiders. As part of intersectional climate justice that looks at overlapping vulnerabilities and inequities, organizations understand and play a key intermediary role in facilitating trust between governments and community members. Organizations carefully navigate this trust as these compounded vulnerabilities such as crime can break down trust and provide direct risks that detract attention to other risks like climate change impacts.

This delicate dynamic of organizational trust is present within the broader EJ landscape in Southeast Louisiana. This goes back to Katrina where the responses to the impacts and the direction of aid for disaster relief show the racism and discrimination against the underserved, marginalized communities of color in New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana. Historically, there has been a lack of trust in government agencies to adequately support these communities, especially with the history of polluting industries in Cancer Alley causing generational harm (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Haletky, 2006; Yoder & Moore, 2022). However, what is a common thread throughout these environmental justice moments in Southeast Louisiana is the strong grassroots efforts collectively combatting these issues despite the lack of governmental support. Community organizations have played a vital role in addressing these environmental injustices and advocating for legal support and holding industries accountable. It is critical to look at climate justice and resilience through the lens of organizations.

Looking through this lens offers us ways to understand areas of need in addressing the lack of resources, policy support, and community empowerment. It shows the needed trust and ways of collective mobilization around these challenging dynamics of trust. Examples of organizational support show that disaster preparedness, recovery and relief funding, or any emergency news is passed on through organizations. Access to resources such as ways to contact FEMA for disaster relief support or filing paperwork for social services are funneled through organizations and local leaders. Organizations are mediators between governments/agencies and residents, conducting bridging activities like facilitating community meetings and workshops with city government departments and City Council. Community empowerment is another factor that organizations play a vital role in, especially in civic participation and increasing voter turnout and community agency during elections.

Refugee Resilience

By exploring both the vulnerabilities/inequities that the community faces juxtaposed with their strengths and capacities, we can provide a critical analysis of resilience through the refugee resilience framework. Refugee resilience shows the strength and resilient capacities of the community while also emphasizing the vulnerabilities and inequities that the community faces. Looking through the lens of community organizations and institutions illustrates the critique of applying resilience to a community, and the importance of showing the continued disinvestment and marginalization that they face. These inequities can include access to grant funding, economic opportunities, police safety resources, climate change preparedness inclusion in city plans, and the lack of listening to community concerns about access to social services.

Through the lens of community organizations, institutions, and local leadership, the notion of a resilient community is redefined within the case of this community. We see the resilient capacities and ability to galvanize the community quickly in disaster recovery and advocating against environmental injustices through collaborative leadership and channeling the community's social cohesion. However, we also see the institutional barriers and disinvestment that these institutions highlight, such as lack of funding, representation in City and state government, lack of agency in local and regional policy, and the dynamics of othering within the urban periphery (Chang, 2014).

Beyond Resilience

In addressing both the needs and strengths of the community, these organizations and institutions are also thinking beyond resilience in looking towards social and climate justice to guide how to preserve this community and make it a place that they dream of. Community

organizations and Church leaders have shown the ineptitude of the city and state to listen, support, and invest in this community. They show how resilient and grounded this community can be in terms of its self-reliance and grassroots organizing to work around governmental neglect. Building upon this grassroots mobilizing, these organizations and leaders have aspirational goals that pull from Father Vien's previous remarks that "we are the doer, the actor. All of the local people are standing up doing the work" (Interview, June 1, 2022).

"If the City is not doing the work, then we must do the work," is the mentality that leaders from Sông CDC, VIET, and VAYLA are articulating. These aspirational goals include addressing risks to social cohesion and outmigration, remedying the distrust of governments in tandem with grassroots empowerment, and fostering more collaborative relationships. The threat to social cohesion is due to the outmigration of residents and the difficulty in balancing tighter elder networks with more widely dispersed youth networks. Organizational leaders are thinking through how to provide more programming such as through VEGGI's farm and collaborative pop-up dinners that connect residents with food. Sông CDC additionally has ambitions to develop a housing project that targets affordability and seniors.

Distrust of government is a critical issue because this systemic inequity is placed upon refugee and immigrant communities of color. There have been historical patterns of how governments have mistreated, disinvested, and marginalized BIPOC communities. Louisiana has one of the lowest levels of trust in state government, which is another marker of why there is distrust of governments in the Vietnamese community (Gallup, 2014). However, for this Vietnamese community they have been living in a state of distrust of governments throughout their lives that has led to self-reliant and grassroots organizing to maintain their community (Hamm et al., 2023; Interviews). This grassroots cultivation of organizing and service providing

has been funneled through these community organizations and leaders. What are ways to remedy this condition of distrust? Organization leaders have shared their determination to be proactive in engaging with City Council, foundations, and other agencies to bring more resources to develop programs on housing, workforce, youth development, green infrastructure, climate justice, and food justice.

On the flip side of this distrust issue, state and city governments must also play an active part in recognizing the harm it has done to these communities and engage in reparative justice. They can alleviate these issues by integrating equity, transparency, and accountability to build trust with the community. They can start providing resources and funding, prioritizing disaster relief aid, improving disaster preparedness infrastructure, investments in community health, and inclusion of residents within decision-making. Otherwise, there will be a continued “lack of diverse economic opportunities, reliable public services that risk the community becoming an underserved and disconnected from the rest of the city” (Chang, 2014).

Lastly, organization leaders hope for more collaboration and mutual aid exchanges between organizations as well as the potential to revitalize coalitions with nearby Black and Latinx communities. All of the organizations have one common goal—to support this community. Organization staff argue that focusing each of the organizations on specific aspects of the community can more efficiently address collective concerns. There is a desire to foster the same relationships between Sông CDC, VIET, and VAYLA that were similar in the immediate post-Katrina era. However, this has been hard because of the continued lack of public investment and funding opportunities for the organizations. It is challenging, but they believe it is worth it to be part of a table of diverse perspectives where everyone is all in together. If that is not

achievable, there is potentially a more grassroots approach to creating their own coalition of organizations and community leaders to lead the efforts in addressing these issues.

Being at the table is the key message that organizations are advocating. This highlights an important gap that these organizations want to bridge between policy and practice. Hopefully, this research can contribute to filling this gap with practice by raising awareness of what community members' priority concerns are and ways to best support community organizations already doing the groundwork. As often seen with coastal fishing communities, many people are concerned about the loss of their livelihoods to state climate adaptation plans (Interview, January 25, 2023). There is a disconnect between the state government and what these communities are encountering. This research aims to elevate conversations on how to bridge the gaps between governments and communities through the integration of community organizations that have a seat at the table and can advocate for their fellow families and friends.

Conclusion

Although this case study refers to a particular refugee and immigrant community based in the Gulf South of the U.S., the historical and contemporary analysis through community organizations and institutions can be transferred to other refugee and immigrant communities. This study emphasized the importance of looking through the lens of community organizations, institutions, and leaders to understand refugee resilience and climate justice more effectively. Through this lens, vulnerabilities and inequities were identified that shaped the community's negotiation with resilience. These vulnerabilities included crime and safety, lack of investment in affordable and senior housing, concerns of outmigration of youth from the community, and climate change impacts. The systemic inequities identified include a relationship of distrust of

governments, a lack of economic development and opportunities, historical neglect and disinvestment, and racial marginalization of the Black, Vietnamese, and Latinx New Orleans East communities. As any community is unique in its own contexts, issues, and capacities, talks with organization staff and leaders revealed the true ground-level strengths, capabilities, needs, challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities that the community faces.

This study contributes to the larger climate justice and resilience literature, more specifically the refugee resilience framework, as well as organizational, community and social capital, and cultural wealth literature. It informs climate justice and resilience by highlighting the compounding overlapping vulnerabilities outside of climate change that ultimately impact the community's vulnerability to climate change. It encapsulates and uplifts the resilient strength to combat these challenges. In informing organizational theory, it looks at organizational capacities, ways of self-reliance, and how organizations facilitate social cohesion that contributes to resilient capacities. Social capital is a vital component discussed here that illustrates how collective action and knowledge sharing are done through grassroots social networks to combat injustices. Lastly, pulling from refugee resilience to also center the community's strengths through cultural wealth shows the collective resilient strength that both residents and organizations exemplify in combatting these overlapping vulnerabilities.

This research can also inform the practical applications on community investment, social and climate justice policy, community health, and grassroots advocacy. This adds to ways of thinking through community capacity building, inter-organizational dynamics and collaboration, community empowerment strategies, extrapolation to other non-profit organizations, and to other refugee and immigrant communities. The community organizations offered various ways of community capacity building, some of which include specific skills training, and workforce

development to address economic opportunity disparities. An example of this is Sông CDC working collaboratively with VIET on grant applications to carry out environmental and climate-oriented projects in the community. These highlight the factors of community capacity building that contribute to climate justice, which are sustaining social cohesion, facilitating collaborative leadership, and addressing distrust of governments through grassroots work.

Limitations of this study were the short timeline of the fieldwork visit which therefore only includes a snapshot and oral account of the histories of the organizations and institutions. It would be good to have a more longitudinal analysis to understand the changing landscape of the community in the face of climate change and other threats to health and well-being. Moreover, I did not get as many interviews from VAYLA, VIET, CCC, and NOELA CHC staff to get more diverse insights on the community concerns, inequities, and outlook on how to address those inequities.

Future research to build upon this study should include more cross-sectional analysis that provides both snapshots and long-term views on how these community organizations and institutions evolve in their roles related to resilience and climate justice. More research is needed on the institutional barriers such as lack of funding and the system of nonprofit funding and how that impacts organizational capacities. Lastly, more research is needed on the distrust of government and the linkage with resilience with regard to refugee and immigrant communities. This additional inquiry would greatly enrich the understanding of how the Vietnamese community in New Orleans negotiates resilience. One other lens that must be explored in-depth is intergenerational perspectives, dynamics of care, and trauma. How do those inform a refugee resilience framework?

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Chapter 4

Uncovering Intergenerational Perspectives, Trauma, and Care in the Face of Climate Change within the Vietnamese Community in New Orleans

“The older generation they lost South Vietnam. They lost everything but they still keep their mentality. They still think about their past and they carry it all to the present and the future.”

- Community Leader

“It’s home, in many ways. We are committed to each other, and I am bound to New Orleans for the rest of my life. My family grew up here. Part of the Vietnamese culture is that the land is very important because that is where we bury our loved ones. I remember a story with respect to New Orleans East: someone was talking about moving away and the response was you can’t – this is where we buried our dead.”

- Father Vien Nguyen

Introduction

As illustrated through these quotes, the Vietnamese American community has a deep strong ecological and cultural connection to New Orleans as their home. There is a foundational belief that this community will always stick together no matter the disruptions or challenges that they come across. Having to leave the land that was once their home in Vietnam and resettling in New Orleans, has produced a sense of place in their new home. These quotes show the complexity that arises within the generations in the community that make it difficult to move away from this home in New Orleans but something that they always carry with them. The intergenerationality of this community is a critical element that must be explored when examining their resilience.

To situate the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, the Greater Metropolitan area is currently home to 17,000 Vietnamese Americans (New Orleans-Metairie, LA 2023). The Vietnamese community located in New Orleans East in the Village de L’Est community is one of the densest Vietnamese communities in the U.S. (Kaji et al., 2020; VanLandingham & VanLandingham, 2017; Nguyen, 2015). It is also geographically and politically isolated from the

rest of the city as it lies on the eastern urban periphery of New Orleans, which makes access to social services, healthcare, and disaster relief aid more challenging (Chang, 2014). Because of this isolation and its internal social ties stretching back to Vietnam, this community demonstrates strong social cohesion (Leong, 2007; Nguyen, 2021).

The history of how the Vietnamese community resettled in New Orleans was due to the Archdiocese of New Orleans. During the relocation and resettlement process in the U.S. immediately after the Vietnam War in 1975, Vietnamese refugees were transferred to four refugee camps, one of which was in Fort Chaffee in Arkansas (Clarion Herald, 2014). In May 1975, Archbishop Philip M. Hannan of the Associated Catholic Charities of New Orleans visited Fort Chaffee and offered to resettle 1,000 Vietnamese families to New Orleans East, which is predominantly African American (Clarion Herald, 2014; Leong, 2007). Many of these families were already of Catholic faith, which made it easier for them to follow Catholic Charities. They originally settled in subsidized, low-income Section 8 housing called Versailles Arms, which the community is oftentimes and currently referred to as “Versailles” (Clarion Herald, 2014; Leong, 2007). Because many of the refugees came together as families, much of the community is multi-generational.

Despite the robust presence of the Catholic faith, strong community social cohesion, and multi-generational families, this community has endured many challenges. Overcoming war, forced migration, resettlement, and natural disasters are many of the challenges they have faced. Living in New Orleans has further exposed them to other hardships such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the BP oil spill in 2010, illegal toxic landfill dumping next to Village de L’Est, and other environmental injustices. However, throughout these numerous disruptions, multiple

displacements, and governmental neglect, the Vietnamese community has demonstrated resilience in overcoming these challenges.

Post-Katrina, community organizations, religious institutions, and local leaders have been instrumental in facilitating social cohesion and galvanizing residents to combat injustices. Specifically, the Mary Queen of Vietnam (MQVN) Church has played a pivotal role in preserving cultural identity and social cohesion. Community organizations that play staple roles in the community emerged out of the MQVN church. These organizations include Sông Community Development Corporation Sông-CDC (formerly known as MQVN-CDC) and the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA). These organizations, along with Father Vien Nguyen of the MQVN Church, were instrumental in galvanizing the community to protest an illegal landfill that was intended to hold Katrina debris right next to the neighborhood and the neglectful “Bring Back New Orleans” plan to convert Village de L’Est into a green space. The “Bring Back New Orleans” plan did not consider the community’s presence at all and proposed all properties east of Highway 510 (which is where Village de L’Est is located) green space (Interviews; Tang, 2011; Nguyen, 2015).

The successful organizing to shut down the landfill was enabled by the intergenerational solidarity led by VAYLA, where the elders were driving the action and the youth led the language facilitation to bridge the environmental activism organizing. The youth were fluent in English, as many of the elders were not, which led them to translate protest planning and communications between the city and the community. This moment was instrumental in highlighting the intergenerational relationships that are so important to the Vietnamese community. This community has already endured so much trauma and demonstrating this

resilience through intergenerational solidarity shows the power of organizing and healing. There is a shared history and social memory that unites this community.

Throughout these successful stories, however, there are still various challenges that the community faces. To understand the layered overlapping vulnerabilities and challenges this community experiences, I apply a refugee resilience framework to examine both the resilient strengths of the community to bounce back from disruptions while also acknowledging the challenges and inequities that they continue to face as a marginalized community. A key aspect I want to examine within this framework is the intergenerational lens. Intergenerational relationships are key in refugee and immigrant communities' social fabric. As demonstrated in this community, intergenerational relationships offer historical, temporal, and spatial lenses to understand how resilience is negotiated. Not only are trauma and resilience passed down through generations, but this relationship fosters ways of healing and care that continue to address current issues, one of which is climate change impacts.

To critically understand refugee resilience and the key challenges facing refugee and immigrant communities such as the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, one must look through the lens of intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care. This raises three questions to unpack this lens: how does examining intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and approaches to care contribute to refugee resilience within the context of climate justice in the Vietnamese community in New Orleans? How does this lens reveal the strengths and challenges within this community to address climate change impacts? How does this lens reveal ways to address the vulnerabilities and inequities faced by the community to climate change impacts? Delving into these questions will allow an enriching look into the temporal aspects of how this community

has, currently, and will negotiate resilience in the future. Looking through the intergenerational aspects can shed more light on the Vietnamese community's collective resilience.

Theoretical Framework

Climate Justice

Climate Justice's core foundations are rooted in addressing distributive inequity, lack of recognition, disenfranchisement and exclusion, and capabilities of individuals and communities within the context of climate change (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Jafry et al., 2019). Climate justice introduced a rights-based discourse that focuses on the resilience of local communities with a critical lens on building adaptive capacities through the alleviation of poverty and reducing overlapping vulnerabilities (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). In unpacking the linkage between climate justice and resilience, one key component that was not previously discussed in detail is the intergenerational relationships and perspectives. Climate justice has emphasized protecting future generations as they are to be more severely impacted by climate change impacts (Luzzatto, 2022). However, there is still a gap on what incorporating an intergenerational lens in climate justice looks like for localized communities (Luzzatto, 2022; Roy & Ayalon, 2022).

It is critical to incorporate examinations of intergenerational perspectives and trauma when examining the resilience of communities and ways to reduce their vulnerabilities. Skillington (2019) offers an important lens of integrating an intergenerational justice approach to climate justice. Intergenerational justice focuses on the impact of climate change on future and younger generations while incorporating the context of deepening inequalities between generations, the unequal distribution of burdens of climate adversities, and the lack of

representation in decision-making processes (Skillington 2019). This lens adds a stronger emphasis to the justice component of climate justice where inequities within and between generations are more pronounced in refugee and immigrant communities. Drawing from the youth climate justice movement, youth activists elevate these inequities in terms of representation and participation of generations (Grewal et al., 2022). They highlight that anyone can participate and that there should be intergenerational solidarity of involvement in climate justice (Grewal et al., 2022). Representation strengthens the power of raising awareness, which is crucial to raising the concerns that communities face with regard to climate change.

The gaps of integrating an in-depth look at refugee and immigrant communities into climate justice and intergenerational justice raise a crucial element of the justice component where they face overlapping vulnerabilities around climate change and social injustices (Luzzatto, 2022). Amorim-Maia et al. (2022) call for an intersectional climate justice that integrates these compounding and overlapping vulnerabilities into climate action planning. Key elements of intersectional climate justice are promoting vulnerability activism for frontline communities, improving recognition and procedural justice of historically excluded groups such as Southeast Asian refugee and immigrant communities, and emphasizing care-centered approaches that link both climate justice and health (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). Integrating a care-centered approach emphasizes strengthening intergenerational relationships and solidarity (Ayalon et al., 2023; Roy & Ayalon, 2022). Ayalon et al. (2023) examined intergenerational differences and conflicts and concluded that fostering intergenerational solidarity and the transmission of knowledge is key to intergenerational climate justice. This transmission and how it is facilitated through different mediums such as through community organizational leadership are important because in addition to knowledge, there are experiences, social memory, and

trauma that are passed down (Greenfield, 2019). These are crucial to understanding resilience and the ways in which the Vietnamese community negotiates it. Literature on refugee resilience, migration studies, and historical and intergenerational trauma are explored to understand the importance of looking through an intergenerational lens to understand the linkages between climate justice and the resilience of the Vietnamese community.

Refugee Resilience

Refugee resilience addresses the gap in linking climate justice with resilience by employing a critique of resilience in its limited inclusion of inequities and overlapping vulnerabilities that refugee and immigrant communities face in the context of climate change. This term is unique to refugee and immigrant communities because they have a unique social memory of dislocation, erasure, violence, and similar forms of trauma. It is distinctly significant to the Vietnamese refugee and immigrant community because of their attachment to New Orleans as home, displacement and the mobility of home, language barriers, family separation, facing racism in the South, and enduring traumatic events from war and hurricanes (see Chapters 2 and 3). I define the term *refugee resilience* to exemplify the strength and capacity of the community to bounce back from significant disruptions (environmental, social, economic, etc.) while also acknowledging the challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities that they continue to face (see Chapter 2). Other resilience theories have briefly touched upon this, but have not necessarily centered this approach or fully integrated resilience with climate justice, particularly applying them to refugee and immigrant communities.

My use and application of *refugee resilience* builds upon Simi Kang's (2022) development of refugee resilience that provides a systemic critique to how resilience is used and

its harmful implications for communities to potentially continue to be sacrifice communities because of their resilience. I contribute to this systemic critique by adding a different dimension in grounding the framework in this community's voices who have articulated themselves as being proud of their resilience, while elevating their calls to public authorities that they still face structural inequities and daily vulnerabilities. Within these community voices, it is additionally vital to unpack all the demographic groups and their perspectives within the community.

At the heart of *refugee resilience* is the importance of examining intergenerational perspectives and relationships. Resilience literature has its blind spots in not examining intergenerational dynamics (Petz, 2003). The adversities and displacements that refugees often face can result in distinct experiences of what 1st and older-generation immigrants have navigated through as compared to 1.5 and later generations born in different countries. It is important to examine through an intergenerational lens to understand both the strengths and challenges faced by all generations. Drawing from intergenerational resilience, a newer less researched field, this concept builds upon the collective memory within families and communities by highlighting insights of positive adaptive capacities that can be transferred to the next generations to support navigating adversities (Shevell & Denov, 2021; Petz, 2023).

Intergenerational resilience has deep roots from Indigenous literature and communities, which I draw from as there are similarities in challenges faced and how resilience is fostered. These include cultural practices as sources of resilient strength, historical trauma, emphasis on intergenerational knowledge transmission, social cohesion, and facing similar marginalizing structures of colonialism dispossession and forced displacement (Williams, 2021). Indigenous intergenerational resilience prioritizes and reframes Indigenous communities through an asset-based model that points to emphasizing cultural wealth when looking at the resilience of

marginalized communities (Williams, 2021; Yosso, 2005). Williams (2021) stresses the importance of using this framing to look at how intergenerational resilience focuses on sustained empowerment amidst oppressive systems.

To effectively understand refugee resilience, one must look through an intergenerational lens to recognize how both trauma and resilient capacities are passed down through generations. This temporal dimension can highlight the wide range of strengths and challenges that the whole community endures. In this way, insights can be learned of the long-term impacts of historical injustices and systemic inequities, and how this can guide ways to address equitable access to resources and opportunities for current and future generations. Through this effort, there is a critical emphasis that resilience needs to focus on healing from past and current trauma, and furthering ways to build care and support systems that sustain community social cohesion (Shevell & Denov, 2021). These are explored in the next sections on migration and historical and intergenerational trauma that provide a grounding of both terms of “refugee” and “resilience.”

Migration Studies

In understanding the mobilities of immigrants and refugees, Migration studies offer a large body of knowledge to examine why people migrate, how migration takes place, and what navigating different cultures looks like for immigrating communities (Scholten et al., 2022). Migration studies is an interdisciplinary field of research that is intertwined with geography, which defines it as the “description, analysis, and theorization of the movement of people from one place or country to another” (King, 2012, p. 136; Scholten et al., 2022). Migration studies is a geographic analysis of understanding both the spatial and temporal dynamism of who and where people migrate as well as unpacking the reasons for those movements. The field has a

debatable timeline of when it emerged as the literature was mostly written by Anglo-European countries near the end of the 20th century (Scholten et al., 2022; Pisarevskaya et al., 2020). It was not until the past 20 years that there has been more literature published by non-Anglo-European countries (Scholten et al., 2022; Pisarevskaya et al., 2020). This increase in writing from other countries brought about a shift from focusing on issues of demographics and governance to mobilities, diversity, gender, and health (Scholten et al., 2022; Pisarevskaya et al., 2020). This shift towards complexities around diversity, race, discrimination, and social issues raises questions of “how” and “why” beyond the scope of just “who” and “what.”

As King (2012) notes, cultural geography offers a useful perspective into these complexities within diasporic and migrant communities. Cultural geography considers the migrant community’s cultures, sense of identity, homeland orientation, and border navigation between the host country and their own cultural identity (King, 2012). Cultural geography also highlights how migrant communities form grounded attachments and geographies of belonging in new places (King, 2012). However, there is not as much breadth in exploring these dynamics for immigrants and refugees (specifically Southeast Asian communities) in the context of navigating multiple displacements, especially in climate-vulnerable areas. Southeast Asian refugees have faced forced migration and displacement, particularly as a result of war, political persecution, and environmental issues.

Forced migration studies examine the processes by which people are involuntarily displaced from their home community to a new destination (either both domestically or internationally), which are usually due to political persecution, war, natural disasters, or other conflicts (Bond, 2022; Priorelli, 2021; Elie, 2014; Fiddian-Qasmiveh et al., 2014). Forcibly displaced migrants constitute four types of groups: refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced

persons, and environmental and climate refugees (Bond, 2022). Applying this to Southeast Asian communities, particularly the Vietnamese community which is primarily a refugee community who were forcibly displaced from the Vietnam War after 1975, is important to understand their migration journeys and resettlement in other countries such as the U.S. These refugees as part of a larger diasporic community, as defined by Bond (2022), are unable or unwilling to return due to fear of the Communist takeover of Southern Vietnam. As previously mentioned, one of the gaps is the inclusion of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian voices within Migration and Forced Migration studies.

Elie (2014) argues that refugees and forcibly displaced migrants have often been forgotten and excluded from scholarly research. The field has been criticized as being ahistorical only studying the history and processes of states and international organizations, but less of a focus on refugees and centering their stories instead who have experienced the trauma and resilience firsthand (Elie, 2014). This paper aims to counter this gap by grounding the Vietnamese refugee community in individual and migrants' voices and the perspectives from refugee organizations. In centering their voices, it is important to further align them through an intergenerational lens to examine how trauma and resilience are passed through generations. Priorelli (2021) describes the impacts of involuntary migration as consisting of trauma, family separation, leaving behind one's home country, political violence, and incarceration. However, Priorelli (2021) also argues a positive thinking lens of how refugees' experiences bring out their strengths that activate resourceful and resilient behaviors. Integrating history through an intergenerational lens is important to refugees because highlighting the social memory of past migrations is key to understanding how they inform their choices today (Priorelli, 2021).

Voluntary immobility is an important dynamic, particularly within the elder generation of Vietnamese refugees in New Orleans. Many elders choose to stay rather than leave New Orleans even amidst the climate and safety risks due to place attachment and previous experiences of forced migration. This raises an important question of what that means for how the Vietnamese community negotiates resilience, especially through this intergenerational lens. To better understand this dynamic, this research aims to examine staying aspirations and family-related motivations that are particularly high in Vietnamese communities (Schewel & Fransen, 2022; Blondin, 2021; Yee et al., 2022). Place attachment and familial ties form a strong element that is key to intergenerational resilience (Denov et al., 2020). Refugee resilience pulls from the bonds formed in intergenerational experiences and cohesion, and this research aims to delve into this gap to understand both how resilience and trauma are linked between generations as well as ways to navigate those links toward a resilient future.

Historical and Intergenerational Trauma

To understand refugee resilience and the relationship between trauma and resilience, one must explore historical and intergenerational trauma. To ground this section, I draw from Indigenous and Pacific studies to frame historical and intergenerational trauma in relation to the Southeast Asian and Vietnamese refugee community (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 2014; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Daw, 2020; Sharif & Murtaza, 2022; Neef, 2022). There has been a wealth of knowledge on the origins of trauma analysis and understanding of the various processes of how communities and individuals process trauma in Indigenous studies. Although they are in different contexts, both have similarities such as colonialism, war, forced migration, dispossession, and systemic oppression that have led to psychological and social trauma

impacting how cultural identity is passed through generations. These affect mental health, cultural continuity and preservation, and community resilience. Indigenous and Pacific ways of navigating trauma and creating resilient pathways through generations, as a result, are key to informing ways of understanding how trauma and resilience are negotiated in multi-generational Vietnamese refugee and immigrant communities. Understanding and acknowledging these legacies of trauma is important to understanding ways of healing through a resilient framework.

The concept of historical trauma in Indigenous studies was first developed by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart in the 1980s, which she defines as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan across generations, emanating from massive group trauma” (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 2014; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Daw, 2020; Sharif & Murtaza, 2022). Much of this trauma stems from the historical destructive legacy of colonization and the many impacted Native and Pacific Islander populations who were subjected to violent genocide and dispossession of their land and livelihoods (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Kirmayer et al., 2014; Gone, 2023). Brave Heart & DeBruyn (1998) point to an understanding of collective trauma shared with Jewish Holocaust survivors, and Japanese American internment camp survivors. I will extrapolate this to Southeast Asian refugees from the Vietnam War and Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Through this shared collective trauma within each of these groups, there is a legacy of trauma that is transmitted through generations. From historical trauma, intergenerational trauma brings forth a temporal lens of integrating historical trauma with closer examinations of current and future generations. Intergenerational trauma is defined as trauma that is “not resolved, subsequently internalized” and impacts the health and well-being of latter generations (Daw, 2020; Walker & Devereaux, 2021; Gone, 2023; Sangalang & Vang, 2017, p.

745). It raises questions of how experiences and ways of navigating those past experiences are passed down to later generations.

Families affected by trauma from forced displacement and resettlement can display unresolved trauma that is passed from the parents to their children (Maffini & Pham, 2016). Although there is a wide breadth of intergenerational trauma in Indigenous literature, there is limited research that has not been explored as much within Southeast Asian communities, specifically the Vietnamese refugee community (Xu, 2017; Sangalang & Vang, 2017). Intergenerational trauma among Vietnamese refugees has shown various manifestations through psychological distress, post-traumatic stress disorders, parent-child detachment, family conflicts, avoidance of dialogue, and strains on social cohesion (Jeyasundaram et al., 2020; Sangalang & Vang, 2017; Maffini & Pham, 2016; Isobel et al., 2019). These can be triggered or exacerbated by other daily vulnerabilities such as natural disaster impacts, crime/safety, violence, or evacuations (Daw, 2020; Walker & Devereaux, 2021). Integrating an intersectional and intergenerational climate justice lens is important to understanding overlapping vulnerabilities with historical trauma. Climate disaster outcomes can play out differently in communities that have experienced historical and intergenerational trauma related to displacement and systemic oppression. Resilience and climate justice efforts that do not consider historical trauma can risk adding new forms of trauma to the community that build on top of systemic inequities.

Many families have shared experiences of this collective trauma, but they also have shared understandings of channeling those traumas into ways of healing and resilience. Much of the literature on intergenerational trauma raises important characteristics, which are about healing responses and how families and generations heal from past traumas and transmission of trauma. An added reason for grounding this section within Indigenous and Pacific Studies is that

these Indigenous-centric models integrate healing modalities to address trauma (Daw, 2020; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 2014). What are ways of transcending beyond trauma and reforming them into resilient practices? Indigenous and Pacific ways of healing draw from communal grief and are grounded in extended kin networks that “support identity formation, sense of belonging, recognition of a shared history, and survival of the group” (Walker & Devereaux, 2021, p. 12; Neef, 2022; Daw, 2020). Pacific Studies show a more intimate impact through climate grief, as many Indigenous communities in the Pacific Island nations have already faced relocation and loss of land due to drastic changes in sea level (Neef, 2022). The shared impacts across these island communities have greatly pushed for climate justice advocacy that acknowledges past and current traumas from climate change. This feeds into what Williams (2021) posits through an Indigenous intergenerational resilience framework that requires an integrated collective sense of identity grounded in the people and place. The Vietnamese community has a strong sense of identity and place attachment to New Orleans, which is why I want to understand the ways of healing and what forms they take in the Vietnamese community in New Orleans.

Intergenerational resilience through the process of healing and care manifests in various ways both individually and communally in the Vietnamese community. Huynh et al. (2023) raise an important point of how systemic marginalization can often overlay generational trauma and daily vulnerabilities, which can be seen through dispersal resettlement policies in the U.S. However, the establishment of refugee ethnic enclaves and community self-empowerment can help resist and heal these systemic harms (Huynh et al., 2023). Southeast Asian refugee and immigrant communities conceptualize care through grassroots organizing, intergenerational caretaking, affective labor, religious programming, and cultural commemoration that aim to unite the communities over shared histories (Huynh et al., 2023). As Ihara (2021) shares, Southeast

Asian refugees “identify how trauma has shaped their lives and find belonging in a longer genealogy of resilience” that begins the process of healing (p. 1). Reconnecting to their own shared histories, past trauma and grief, and ways of caring for each other intergenerationally as a community are strong ways of fostering resilience. Integrating an understanding of the intersections of intergenerational trauma, overlapping vulnerabilities, systemic inequities, and ways of community healing is key to unpacking refugee resilience.

In synthesizing the four fields that encompass the theoretical framework, this paper foregrounds the intersections between refugee resilience, migration and forced migration studies, and historical and intergenerational trauma and how they contribute to climate justice in refugee and immigrant communities through an intergenerational lens. Applying an intergenerational lens to refugee resilience contributes to climate justice by recognizing how trauma and resilience are passed down through generations, which illuminates the strengths and challenges within the community. Through migration and forced migration studies, examining the reasons behind forced displacement and how those traumatic experiences generate resilient refugee livelihoods show ways of overcoming challenges. They additionally show how those traumatic and resilient experiences are shared between generations. Lastly, as seen in each of these fields, historical and intergenerational trauma are focal points that elevate the shared histories within refugee and immigrant communities, but also highlight the intergenerational ways of healing and care that foster resilience. Integrating the intersections of these fields strengthens the critical look into the community’s strengths and challenges shown through refugee resilience, as well as furthering ways to bridge systemic inequities and empower grassroots organizing.

Methods

In engaging with this New Orleans' Vietnamese community, it is important to first acknowledge my positionality as an outsider as well as an insider having a shared diasporic identity. I am a second-generation Vietnamese American raised in Chicago. My interests in environmental/climate justice and resilience stems from learning about my parents' relationships with water both in Vietnam and the U.S. Seeing parallels between how my parents did not grow up with access to clean water in Vietnam and learning about how other communities face disproportionate pollution burdens inspired me to pursue community-engaged environmental justice research. Raised around community organizations, I am drawn to community-engaged scholarship as a practice that bridges community knowledge with advocacy research. I acknowledge the importance of centering marginalized perspectives in my work towards community-oriented problem-solving.

For this study, a mixed methods approach was employed that included 16 semi-structured interviews, participant observations of community meetings, events, and informal conversations, multimedia analysis of podcast interviews and organization guest speaker talks, and thematic analysis of oral history transcripts from the Viet Chronicle project. Fieldwork research was conducted in the Greater Metropolitan New Orleans area, Louisiana during 2022 and 2023. Within this area, my study sites were solely focused on the Vietnamese communities of Village de L'Est in New Orleans East and the Westbank neighborhoods of Marrero, Woodlawn, Avondale, and Gretna.

I initially connected with staff from Sông-CDC and the Tulane University Center for Studies of Displaced Populations (CSDP). They generously facilitated connections with residents and leaders, directed me to relevant organizations such as the Vietnamese Initiative in Economic

Training (VIET) and VAYLA, and guided my questions based on emerging themes from community voices. As I connected with residents and organization staff, each person I talked to recommended other individuals, which ultimately emerged as a purposive snowball approach (Noy, 2008). Through these connections, I conducted 16 interviews with community members, ten of which were first-generation born in Vietnam who migrated to the U.S. after the Vietnam War between 1975 and 1985. Of the remaining interviews, two were 1.5-generation and three were second-generation Vietnamese Americans. The majority were predominantly of Catholic faith, and most were middle-aged and seniors with a couple of youths in their 20s and 30s. Additionally, there was a blend of participants who lived in different parts of New Orleans such as in the Westbank communities and the neighboring city of Metairie. The majority were residents who currently live or had previously lived in Village de L'Est.

Most of my interactions with the community were through informal conversations where I had higher accessibility through introductions made at community meetings and events. These interactions were all included in participant observation field notes of various community meetings, tours, socials, morning markets, religious services at Catholic churches and Buddhist temples, and meeting new residents through daily interactions such as at grocery stores, coffee shops, and restaurants.

The remaining approaches to the mixed methods included thematic analysis of a podcast interview of staff from Sôg-CDC and VAYLA's Sinews in the Cypress speaker talks with Khai Nguyen of VEGGI Co-cop as well as transcripts of oral histories of Vietnamese elders from the Viet Chronicle Project archived at The Historic New Orleans Collection. Through the NVivo 14 qualitative coding software, thematic analysis was conducted to look for emerging themes from all interview transcripts, field observation notes, podcast interview transcripts, speaker series

transcripts, and oral history transcripts. The codebook was initially informed by Sông-CDC staff who had shared with me current concerns in the community. Thematic analysis was selected to delve into the emerging themes of how the Vietnamese community articulates their negotiations of resilience in the community and the connections to their experiences as refugees and migrants.

Limitations to this study's methodology include the lower number of interviews of youth compared to middle-aged and elderly groups, which is due to the snowball connections facilitated through middle-aged residents and the limited five-month duration of the fieldwork site visits. The shortened fieldwork visits limited prolonged exposure and continued interactions with community members that could have potentially yielded more interviews and observations as well as updates on initiatives conducted by community organizations. One aspiring future addition to this study would be to visit the community annually to interface and be involved with the community organizations' efforts.

Findings

To deepen the understanding of refugee resilience, it is crucial to explore through the lens of intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care. Firstly, this chapter delves into the similarities and differences across the youth and elders' perspectives as well as discusses the different generations' priorities (1st, 1.5, and 2nd generations). Secondly, the chapter examines the intergenerational relationships within the community through the exploration of trauma, social memory, and the connections between war, forced migration, multiple displacements, natural disasters, resettlement, and current vulnerabilities. Thirdly, this chapter explores how intergenerational trauma informs a culture of care that facilitates resilience within the community by addressing their most pressing concerns. Fourthly, this chapter explores how differing

intergenerational perspectives around addressing community issues and vulnerabilities are intertwined with the notions of mobility vs. immobility. Lastly, this chapter examines how addressing these intergenerational vulnerabilities challenges the resilient narrative placed on the community and how that can be transformed into alleviating those vulnerabilities and inequities.

Intergenerational Perspectives & Priorities

Vietnamese families in the New Orleans community are multigenerational and consist of 1st, 1.5, 2nd, and more recently 3rd generations. The majority of the community is 1st, 1.5, and 2nd generation. 1st generations include primarily older generations who first came to the U.S. after 1975. 1.5-generations include people who came as an adolescent or teenager. 2nd generations are born in the U.S. And there are more recent 3rd generations that consist of children and teenagers born in U.S. to 2nd generation parents. Throughout my interviews, informal conversations with residents, and observations of community events. I have encountered mostly 1st generation individuals who are generally in the senior and elder age range and 2nd generation individuals. There is a sizable demographic of 2nd generation people with age ranges from 20s to 40s. Between these generations, there are differences as well as similarities in how they view resilience, their outlook on the community, and their current priorities.

1st generation residents (I will also refer to them as elders or older generation) view resilience through a social memory lens of what they have experienced in the past through war, multiple displacements, and resettlement in New Orleans and how they overcame them. When comparing experiences of climate change impacts of hurricanes and tornadoes, they pale in comparison to what they have endured through war and violence. One senior resident shares this comparison in relation to how his other friends also view hurricanes as just:

Another challenge. But each time it is a little different. From what we have learned just like your mom and dad escaped Vietnam. It was a matter of life and death, so they had no choice. Either stay in Vietnam and be persecuted or living in brutal Communism or escape and judge for yourself it's 50-50. Most of the Vietnamese risk their life in order to seek freedom. And from your research over a half million Vietnamese died in the ocean. But then over 1.5 million people survived. So to us Katrina, I mean escaping Vietnam is one of the biggest one, so Katrina is not too bad (Interview, April 25, 2022).

Katrina does not come close to comparing to war and having to forcibly leave their home country. Another long-time resident who is 1.5-generation shares about how her parents and other elders consider hurricanes, "to them it is really nothing. It's nothing compared to that, that's why you see the older generation they are tough" (Interview, April 26, 2022). The older generation is greatly revered by everyone in the community.

All 2nd generation residents that I talked to attribute the community's resiliency originating from their parents and elders as the source of their resilience. A 2nd generation resident and community organization leader shares, "I think for the older generation, like my parents it's just a storm" (Interview, May 20, 2022). Another long-time resident and community organization staff member sums it up perfectly why elders are not as worried about increasing hurricane risks,

I never hear my parents complain about the storm. It's become natural. It's second nature like oh, it's storm season again. Are we going to run this year? We're not and it's more of coming up with a plan. I think I've never really heard them say, it's so hard. I guess it does stem from their experience. Like, what they had to deal with in Vietnam and just coming to America, it's much harder. And that's like we talked about a while ago, it's the resilience in them. This is nothing. This too shall pass and we got this. So I don't think they ever really took it as struggles or it's just another thing they have to do. Just another storm. And we'll figure it out (Interview, January 24, 2023).

It seems almost a given that their parents and the older generation have endured quite a lot in their journeys to the U.S. and have had to work extremely hard to provide a better life for their families that the potential challenge of hurricanes is seen as something they can overcome.

This approach to resiliency is more noticeable within the older generation as compared to the younger generations, which informs the issues and values they prioritize. For the older generation, they prioritize family, sense of community and home, attachment to New Orleans, church and Catholic community, cultural preservation through the younger generations in language and cultural practices, and crime and safety. The younger generations share similar priorities around family, a sense of community, and crime and safety. However, they also prioritize economic opportunities, access to social services and community investments, and climate change impacts. Middle-aged individuals that straddle between 1st, 1.5, and 2nd generations share these overlaps between the older and younger generations.

I want to highlight several of these issues as they have had major impacts on the community's well-being as well as residents' outlook for the future. All generations strongly value family and the sense of tight-knit community that they have in New Orleans. This has always been the cohesive glue that holds the community together to stay resilient such as overcoming Katrina and fighting against the illegal landfill. However, this sense of community and home has been challenged with increasing issues of crime and safety, outmigration, increasing hurricanes and tornadoes, and the continual governmental neglect to invest in this community. A community organization co-director delicately shares her perspective on the community,

I travel a lot to other Vietnamese communities, and you never feel any other sense of community like we do here. But we definitely feel it being diminished slowly over time just because folks are getting older. Folks are moving out. And it's a whole built environment like we've never truly recovered in the East as a whole after Katrina, not a lot of investments, not a lot of developments. We don't have the same amount of opportunities as we did in the past like grocery stores, places to hang out like the mall (Interview, January 24, 2023).

As seen by this co-director and everyone else that I have talked to, there is a noticeable trend that people are moving out of this community. This is in part due to a lack of reinforced infrastructure, lack of investments, and lack of developments after Katrina.

Even though New Orleans East is regarded as a climate-vulnerable area due to the lack of infrastructure, access to resources, and proximity to water sources, many of the residents currently still view crime and safety, and economic opportunities as more important priorities than climate change. Another community organization director points to the lack of economic opportunities that are one of the main reasons that many of the youth are moving away from New Orleans East,

Economic opportunities. Because I think in New Orleans itself, I mean here we can't compete. We can't pay enough for them to stay. So it's really economically driven for them to leave. Crime is something that I think they know and they can see everyday. That's driving them to leave. Environmentally, I don't think that impacts them as much. Because I think they've gone through so many that they're used to it, mentally they're used to it. They know how to prep for it. But I think if another Katrina were to happen, I think that would be the last straw for a lot of people. Because you don't want to go through that again (Interview, May 20, 2022).

As seen here, many of the youth are concerned about economic opportunities, but they are also aware of the crime that is present every day as well as the threat of hurricanes annually. This quote shows that there is resilience in both the older and younger generations, but the younger generations are more inclined to leave.

For certain younger generation individuals, climate is of higher concern, and coupled with the lack of job opportunities this can lead to their outmigration. In contrast, the older generation is more inclined to stay because of how rooted they are in this community. It's like a second home to them that they do not want to leave. A long-time resident shares the differences between staying and leaving between the generations,

For the younger generation, it's [climate and hurricanes] a dealbreaker. There's really nothing holding them back here. There's no job opportunities and things like that that holds them back. And a lot of the youth now once they graduate they go somewhere else to find a job anyways because there's nothing here. But for the elders it's a little bit different. Because they are so rooted in here because the philosophy of Vietnamese is that wherever they are born that's their root. But since they already lost their homeland, this is their new root. Wherever they grew up they are not gonna leave it, not as they are forced to. Now even my in-laws they talk about the possibility of leaving but they are not going to leave because their roots are here. But to them it is still better than any other place. (Interview, April 26, 2022).

Here we see how the older generations are most likely to stay put given the many concerns and issues in the community. Adding onto these interviews, many of the informal conversations I have had confirm these observations that the elders will stay, even to the extent of staying during previous hurricane evacuations.

Although the elders embody a strong attachment to New Orleans East, they still face worrisome daily vulnerabilities such as crime and safety. This has largely been the number one priority concern for the community in all generations, but primarily for the older generation.

When asked about how climate change compares to other issues in the community, this community organization staff member and younger generation resident shared these differences,

I don't think that's at the forefront in the community's mind. I think maybe with the younger generation we're a little more mindful of it but I think with the older generation I want to say it's not at the forefront concern in this community. It's sad because it does affect their life but it's not tangible like they don't see it like the crime that is happening. They see the crime, like their neighbor being beat up or whatever, like that's on their mind, that's their priority. The climate part is not really going to change their minds or make them want to move or even do anything about it. They feel like they have bigger fish to fry (Interview, January 24, 2023).

It is difficult as climate change does not have as much of a direct impact on the community's daily lives as crime does, however, the impacts when hurricanes strike are immense. The various stories I have heard from families describing the types of burglaries and shootings that take place

with very long response times from police are shocking and unsettling. This is a major reason why residents share a not so optimistic outlook on the community's future.

Both older and younger generations share similar outlooks on where they think the community is headed. They are worried about a slow decline due to the outmigration of the youth as well as a small portion of the older generations who do not want to deal with hurricanes and crime. Crime and safety are significant issues that the whole community is worried about, particularly parents. However, there is a challenging rift where older generations want to stay in the community compared to younger generations who are more inclined to move away due to climate change and lack of economic opportunities. This is also seen in the community organizations. There are three main organizations in New Orleans East. The Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic Training (VIET) are led by and serve more of the older generations around social services. VAYLA focuses more on youth programming. Sông CDC has a more balanced approach that collaborates on initiatives with both elders and youth, particularly through their VEGGI Farm Cooperative which maintains a community farm managed by five elders in the community. As one youth resident puts it, "the VEGGI org, they're great people. They help the older generation through gardening because gardening is right in front of the [MQVN] church. And they have a lot of good things happening, but they don't have enough traction" (Interview, June 6, 2022). Initiatives and programming are happening to service more of a bridging approach of the generations, however, there are still challenges of the lack of resources to directly engage these cross-collaborations more.

Resilience is very much a negotiated process as I came into the community with a climate lens, but it is much more than that, as priorities of community members go beyond climate change. Their priorities consist of community preservation, crime/safety, and fear of losing

community. There are overlapping vulnerabilities and systemic inequities that have led to this outlook. Including these intersecting vulnerabilities expands the scope of climate justice to refugee and immigrant communities, as revealed through refugee resilience. Intergenerational perspectives highlighting crime and safety as a daily vulnerability are further intertwined with past trauma and memories from their experiences in navigating disruptions. These vulnerabilities can trigger and exacerbate those past traumas.

Intergenerational Trauma

Trauma has a heavy presence within this Vietnamese community, particularly for 1st generation individuals who have experienced war, violence, forced displacement, resettlement, evacuations, hurricanes, and crime. The 1st generation, specifically the older generation, carries this social memory of those experiences with them that inform how they have adapted to life in America and the various disruptions that followed their resettlement. A long-time resident mentions that “they’ve gone through the migration in 1954 to the war in 1975, so to them it’s nothing” (Interview, April, 26, 2022). Another long-time resident of 1.5 generation shares that,

A lot of them went through the war and separation leaving their country, which is very hard to reestablish, but going back to resiliency, when Katrina hit it was only 30 years ago that we came to America. So when you think about it, 30 years, it’s not very long time when you reflect back, it’s kind of like you just got settled in. You’re just getting adjusted (Interview, May 10, 2022).

This social memory has been ingrained in them a resilient mindset that they can overcome these other disruptions because they have already been through war.

However, with social memory also comes with it embedded traumas. The trauma can manifest in many ways, but in the case of this community there is linkage of the trauma between generations. These include the fear of losing family and friends, fear for family’s own safety,

distrust of the government, difficult communication about past experiences in parent-child relationships, fear of losing continued cultural heritage and language, and societal pressures to maintain a hard-working spirit.

Communication of past experiences can often be difficult, especially for people who have experienced war. In one conversation I had with an older resident who was in his 90s, he shared many details of the deaths he saw during the war, the difficulty in having to leave his home country, and how those memories are still with him. It was a very vulnerable moment for him to share those stories, but through them, he expressed why he wants to stay in the Village de L'Est community and not leave. This is their home that they had to reestablish and it became a strong cohesive community, so they do not want to let go so easily. These stories can be difficult to share, and I have seen this trend with some of the youth and 2nd generation individuals that I talked to who also mentioned how their parents have struggled or would decline to share stories from Vietnam or their journeys as boat people coming to the U.S. As a community organization director puts it,

It's their mentality. Nothing else compares to war. And I think that's exactly what my grandpa would say. Nothing could be worse than that. And so being here in America where they're so comfortable now, why change? Why make that change when you don't have to? (Interview, May 20, 2022).

The older generation do not want to change and resettle somewhere when they have endured so much already to reestablish.

Although nothing compares to what they have been through, there are moments of disruption since moving to New Orleans that potentially triggered those past traumas. Katrina had the largest impact on this community that challenged both their trauma and perseverance. One community organization co-director and long-time resident shares how Katrina impacted both her and her parents,

Moving a lot kind of did feel like Katrina triggered that trauma or like they were like oh this is not as bad as war. We can kind of get through this and you know it's not as bad. I don't know if it triggered that for my parents. Maybe because this is around the time that my dad started getting sick. But it might have triggered some underlying health issues that he may not have recognized in the past. I think for me though personally I had to jump into action in terms of being the quote unquote golden child and oldest girl in the family and to take care of everything. So it was a rough time for me personally because I did deal with all the insurance, deal with the road home programs (Interview, January 24, 2023).

This traumatic event activated their resilient mindset to overcome and rebuild, but it also triggered underlying health issues for the parents and put more strain on the child to handle all of the post-Katrina family care-taking and insurance. This shows the impact of intergenerational trauma and how the younger generation must bear their parents' trauma.

More recent disruptions and issues in the community can trigger these past traumas as well. Increases in crime and concerns over safety over the past couple of years have been vulnerabilities that they experience daily. A formerly active resident who left the area but still visits this community often shared his rising concerns about the crime,

So now crime takes place not at night anymore. It could be anytime. And that's problematic. New Orleans East has always been geographically a place that is very large. But it's not as concentrated. The police force was always inefficient, in terms of number. Now we have new people moving out to New Orleans East. Yet, I bet you that if you check it out, the police personnel have not been changed to respond to the demographic change. And that's an issue. But still, I think the problem is seeing a police force to prevent crime is a negative approach. How can we reach the positive approach where even the police are not that much needed? (Interview, June 1, 2022).

Crime seems to be happening during any hour during the day, which makes residents feel unsafe and traumatized by the gun violence. This has led to fears of losing family members and friends and distrust in the government and police. This can be harrowing for certain people who have already experienced violence and war in Vietnam, but also the children that live in the community.

Furthermore, this shows the systemic inequities that facilitate these daily vulnerabilities to continue as this community is still neglected and is not listened to. A community organization co-director comments on this issue,

You know with the elimination of a lot of the affordable housing they were displacing a lot of these communities to be spread out and dispersed. But for them it made things worse because there were gangs that were in conflict with each other that were now living next to each other. So people attributed that rise in crime to not having enough affordable housing for general population (Interview, January 24, 2023).

One of the reasons why crime has increased is due to a lack of investments in affordable housing in the community. Affordable housing has been a priority that community organizations have been vocal about the city to address, however, that has gone to deaf ears as housing has not been developed alongside the rise in crime.

Lastly, a daily vulnerability the community faces ties back to their outlook of how they view this community as slowly diminishing. Residents are concerned with the potential of losing the older generations and threats to the continuity of the community. A formerly active resident shares his apprehension,

I am lamenting now because we are losing the older generation. Especially that some of them who are still alive have to move away because of the crime? Actually, it's a more serious concern of mine. If Katrina hits again, can they handle it? Yeah (Interview, June 1, 2022).

This despairing feeling accompanied by these daily vulnerabilities feel like compounding traumas that keep piling on top of each other and it raises a challenge of how to preserve this community and combat these issues. What is key in this last quote is the nod to the community's resilience in being able to handle future disruptions amidst their current circumstances. It can correspond to a community's coping capacity to manage these various disruptions. However, when looking through another layer of intergenerational care, we see the long-term resilient and adaptive capacities that are built in to be able to navigate future disruptions.

Intergenerational Care

Throughout all of the historical and intergenerational trauma as well as enduring present daily vulnerabilities, what are ways of addressing and overcoming these traumas? In acknowledging these past traumas, it is also key to examine the resilient ways that this community has engaged in healing and practices of care. To ground how this community has engaged in resilient practices it is important to recognize the social cohesion that fuels their resilience. A community organization co-director shares,

Like I mentioned a lot of these folks they've gone through war. They've gone through having to figure out ways to come to America, being refugees and all that stuff, hurricanes. So they've had to deal with a lot and so I think having that community, having people that they know and living together and living on the same kind of area that helps. It helps them to see their neighbors and wanting to carry on, wanting to come back and rebuild that place. So that plays a big part of that. That's inspiring (Interview, February 7, 2023).

Having this strong sense of community and knowing each other's neighbors can provide a sense of security that they can rely on. This cohesion was particularly helpful in the recovery and rebuild that took place after Katrina. Katrina was an example of a moment that activated their resilient mindset to overcome the displacement. The MQVN Church's pastoral council was greatly used to locate everyone, bring them back to Village de L'Est, and facilitate mutual aid and communal rebuilding gatherings.

Other instances of care include taking care of one's own family, holding and participating in community cultural events such as the annual Têt (Lunar New Year) celebration, and programming by community organizations that engage shared storytelling of refugee stories as well as sharing practices between generations such as through farming and food. An important flip side to social memory is the healing and caring elements that are also passed down through

generations. Acknowledging where they came from and their cultural identity informs a strong resilient identity.

In talking with one youth member, he shared that even though he would like to leave New Orleans East he is sticking by his parents no matter what, and ever since Katrina he has taken a more active role in taking care of his parents. This intergenerational feedback dynamic of the younger generation reciprocating the love and care their parents had for them takes shape within community organizations. Sông CDC and VEGGI Co-Op have developed programming to turn trauma into positive forms of healing and intergenerational exchange. One of the co-directors share about this connection between generations,

The Vietnamese community loves growing food and do a really good job about doing it. So I feel there's a lot of pride in that as well, a lot of when they hear about VEGGI they know that our farmers are super diligent, super passionate and they're committed to it. I feel like a lot of it has to do with getting future generations or others involved is just education. I think a lot of people don't realize and it doesn't have to be a young person, like a lot of people in general don't realize where their food comes from. So one is to actually get people educated about the growing process. We'd love to continue to work with young folks, get young folks out there to learn from our older farmers (VAYLA Speaker Series Talk, April 7, 2021).

As seen here, care is also about bridging the intergenerational gap to think about ways in sharing knowledge with the younger generation while preserving their cultural identities. These are some of the hopes and aspirations that care can take shape in this community.

Sense of Home and Challenges to a "Second Home"

The intergenerational relationships and solidarity exhibited by this community shows how strong of a sense of home and community exists in Village de L'Est. They have a strong attachment to New Orleans East as their home. However, there have been various challenges to this second home. One of these being the grief over the current outmigration of residents (mainly

younger generations) and the potential loss of this home. A critical challenge is how to bridge the intergenerational divide to maintain cohesion in the community as well as ways to preserve cultural continuity.

The Catholic churches and community do a good job bridging the generations through their cultural events, fundraisers, student rosary center, and Vietnamese language classes. However, a concern within the smaller Buddhist community is that these initiatives are not as active at the temples. Through an informal conversation with a Buddhist temple manager, he shared concerns that there are no youth that attend temple and he is worried about when after his generation is gone what will happen with the temples and continuation of the Buddhist community. In attending four of the temples, I noticed the lack of youth presence with the majority being the elders. Several of the Buddhist temple goers mentioned that because it is not required within the Buddhist faith to attend service and because all service is only in Vietnamese there are fewer reasons for the youth to attend. This is a grave concern but is something that community leaders and organizations are aware of and are taking steps such as potentially collaborating with both churches and temples during cultural events.

Even with the proactivity of the Catholic churches to involve the youth, there is still a pressing need to provide more cross-generational programming to facilitate more communication between generations. One long-time resident shares her concern about involving the youth, “What about the youth? What are you doing for the youth? I see that they don’t see the future. They don’t see the future at all.” However, one community leader proposes a worried, yet hopeful outlook to address this issue,

Well for the younger generation, it’s another concern. To maintain the Vietnamese community for as long as we can we have to somehow involve more with the young generation. We need to have more programs in Vietnamese, more outreach to the younger people to let them know who we are as Vietnamese. We need to let them know

more about our culture, our traditions, especially our language because if we don't speak Vietnamese we won't be able to communicate to the Vietnamese community and people, then we're going to lose them. Because as long as they can speak Vietnamese they can communicate to one another and we still have community (Interview, May 8, 2022).

Language is key in preserving cultural continuity between generations and it is important to address how youth can be targeted more in cultural programming. More avenues and initiatives are needed for how older generations can share their knowledge and heritage with the younger generations.

Challenging the Resilient Narrative

Throughout the further examination of the intergenerational perspectives and ways that raise awareness of the many challenges this community is facing, one key aspect that residents and community organizations want to be changed is the resilient narrative placed on this community and the implications that come with it. In addressing the meaning of resilience, one community organization co-director shares this vivid critique of resilience:

I want to say this about resilience, because we're always deemed as resilient folks feel that we can bounce back from anything and not have to invest in our community. So this is a disinvestment in the New Orleans East community as a whole because they feel that "oh the community members out there are resilient, they're going to bounce back." So we're calling out the fact that resilience builds on top of intergenerational trauma and that there's a disinvestment in communities because if you're resilient you don't need help. That narrative that's being created, that definitely needs to be changed (Interview, January 24, 2023).

Resilient narratives disregard the challenges and vulnerabilities that the community continues to face, but it is a contradictory narrative that leaves the community uninvested in because of how New Orleans East is portrayed as an unattractive place to move to.

Another quote by the co-director sums up succinctly how this resilient narrative can further create trauma:

Resilience to me is the ability to bounce back. That's the top one, classic one. But there's so many layers to that. Resilience to overcome trauma but also resilience creates trauma... Trauma is not talked about often. I think that creates this view of we have to handle our own, no one's going to help us. We got to work the system, as the system doesn't help us (Interview, January 24, 2023).

What does it mean that resilience also creates trauma? It can cause additional disinvestment in this community by assuming that this community can take care of itself. It leaves an already vulnerable community to stay vulnerable. Although residents express a strong pride in their resilience, many of them alongside community organizations maintain this critical analysis of the implications of resilience through the unpacking of trauma. Outside entities such as the city, FEMA, media, and previous academic studies have ascribed this community as being resilient. By not accounting for the community's past histories and trauma navigating war, resettlement, and marginalization in the U.S., governmental entities often think that since they are resilient they can handle anything so they can bear the brunt of climate change impacts and other social issues thrown their way. This can exacerbate trauma that is already present in the community.

Discussion

To critically understand climate justice and refugee resilience, a closer examination through the lens of intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care can identify the key challenges that the Vietnamese community in New Orleans faces. The main research questions that guided this lens were: how does examining intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and approaches to care contribute to refugee resilience within the context of climate justice in the Vietnamese community in New Orleans? How does this lens reveal the strengths and challenges within this community to address climate change impacts? How does this lens reveal ways to address the vulnerabilities and inequities faced by the community to climate change impacts?

Looking through this intergenerational lens illustrates the strengths as well as the various challenges and inequities the community faces that informs refugee resilience.

To answer these questions, *refugee resilience* is unique because refugees and displaced immigrant communities have a unique social memory of dislocation, erasure, violence, and similar forms of trauma. This shares similarities with coping capacities in managing disruptions such as through organizational mutual support that aid in adaptation, rebuilding kinship and religious social networks, reestablishing family ties, seeking cultural and political recognition, and advocating for economic stability and sustainability. However, they display long-term sustainable resilient capacities through their long tradition of navigating war and resettlement as well as building community infrastructure and modes of organizing to injustices. They have a foundation that allows them to cope with immediate disruptions, but they also have a longstanding cohesive grassroots network that allows them to address future long-term resilient strategies. Their coping capacities are built in tandem with their resilient capacities. Drawing from the spirit of community voices I talked to, they express not only the ability to address current disruptions but also the ability to address any future challenges. Consequently, they cannot do this without the recognition of outside entities and structures to acknowledge past trauma. Climate disasters can play out differently in these communities that have experienced intergenerational trauma and displacement. Resilience efforts and planning that do not take into account this history risk adding new forms of trauma on the community.

Trauma grounds the basis of refugee resilience as even throughout the successful stories of their resilience, it highlights the disinvestment and daily vulnerabilities that can be exacerbated from increasing climate change impacts. Intergenerational perspectives and priorities between the elders and youth show the disinvestments in the community such as

through responses to crime/safety, lack of resource investments to community organizations and local business, and the lack of diverse economic opportunities. In light of these challenges, a community economy of intergenerational care highlights the strengths of social cohesion and intergenerational networks of care facilitated by both community organizations and the Catholic churches, which have built resilient capacities to address inequities. This emphasizes areas in the community where grassroots efforts can be more effectively supported to strengthen their resilient capacities but also build in channels to raise awareness to political institutions in addressing these inequities.

This generational lens contributes to multiple fields of research including climate justice, resilience, migration and forced migration studies, and historical and intergenerational trauma. Within climate justice, exploring resilience and its implications addresses the gap of refugee and immigrant communities specifically through a breakdown of intergenerational perspectives. This adds to the intergenerational justice dimension of how inequities as causes and results from resilience take shape between various generations. This research adds to the gap in resilience and climate justice that has been explored as much of incorporating intergenerational dynamics. In terms of migration and forced migration studies, although there have been numerous studies focused specifically on immigrants and refugees, this study aims to contribute to the gap of including and centering Southeast Asian and Vietnamese refugee voices from within the communities rather than as writing about them from afar. Lastly, this contributes to the limited research within Southeast Asian and Vietnamese refugee and immigrant communities in intergenerational trauma, especially going beyond the psychological fields and integrating climate and resilience (Xu, 2017). As demonstrated by Xu (2017), a trauma framework serves to provide a better understanding of the Vietnamese community of how it negotiates resilience. Xu

raises an important question of how can a community's history of trauma serve as the basis for collective resilience across at-risk communities? Throughout all these fields, there shows an incorporation of an intersectional climate justice that needs to examine overlapping vulnerabilities with intergenerational trauma.

Intergenerational Strengths

Through the five themes of the intergenerational lens of perspectives and priorities, trauma, care, challenges to the sense of home, and challenging resilient narratives both strengths and challenges in the community are illuminated. The strengths exhibited by this community are prioritizing family, a collective sense of a home and tight-knit community, social memory, strong social cohesion, and cultural preservation and commemoration through community organizations and religious institutions (particularly Catholic churches). These foster the collective resilient spirit that I observed in everyone I talked to, but they explain the importance of how a tight-knit community where generally strong intergenerational relationships and solidarity can build resilient capacities to recover from disruptions such as Katrina and other hurricanes.

Within social memory where past experiences of navigating disruptions and forced displacement inform resilient practices today, there is a transfer of knowledge and resilience between generations. Knowledge transfer between generations is important because you can see resilient spirit that the younger generations draw from in their parents. This transfer of knowledge and narratives fosters social cohesion and a network of information exchange that may come in handy during climate change events. It builds upon the trust that is so present between community members. Intergenerational resilience pulls from the 1st generation and older generation's resilient spirit of how they have navigated the war, violence, and forced

resettlement which are transferred to the younger generation particularly through the activism and solidarity that was carried out post-Katrina in fighting against the landfill and City's neglect to turn Village de L'Est into a green space. What has been instrumental to foster this intergenerational resilience and social cohesion between generations is the role that community organizations and religious institutions play. As Koning (2018) posits, social support and cohesion is a powerful factor for refugee and immigrant communities in navigating stress and disruptions. Community organizations and social groups that cultivate social relationships in the community should be a priority and central staple in grounding resilient practices (Koning, 2018). The interplay of how Sông CDC, VEGGI Farm Co-Op, VIET, and VAYLA collaborate as well as with religious institutions and outside organizations will be key to a grassroots approach to resilience.

Intergenerational Challenges

As previously highlighted, with social memory that passes on resilience, it also comes with it the transmission of trauma. Collective and intergenerational trauma manifests itself in this community in various ways. These include previous navigation of war, forced displacement, separation from their home country, fear of losing family and friends, fear for family's own safety, distrust of the government, difficult communication about past experiences in parent-child relationships, fear of losing continued cultural heritage and language, and societal pressures to maintain a hard-working spirit. These can be triggered or exacerbated with overlapping vulnerabilities that are experienced daily. These include hurricane evacuation and resettlement, storm impacts of flooding and wind damage, crime and safety, governmental neglect such as on

lack of affordable housing and access to social services, and the fear of gradually losing this Village de L'Est community.

Within this collective will, there still exists intergenerational differences and tensions. Older generations prioritize family, sense of the community and home, attachment to New Orleans, the church and Catholic community, cultural preservation through the younger generations in language and cultural practices, and crime safety. On the other hand, although younger generations share similar priorities around family, sense of community, and crime and safety, they prioritize economic opportunity, access to social services and community investments, and climate change impacts. The older generation is more concerned with crime because they see the direct impacts of burglaries and shootings every day and they are more fearful of walking outside around the neighborhood. The younger generations prioritize economic opportunities which are lacking, but it is coupled with the disinvestments and crime that they are more inclined to move out of the community. This has led to a concerned outlook on the trajectory of the community that it will gradually diminish with more of the younger generations moving away. Moreover, as stated by some of the older generations and community leaders, there needs to be more youth engagement to preserve their cultural identity and heritage as the potential loss of language can lead to a loss of the community.

The tension between moving away versus staying in the community defined a stark line between the older and younger generations. It was a clear observation that I noticed from almost all of the conversations I have had, even meeting more of the younger generations who have moved out to the Westbank and nearby cities. This trend relates to acculturation differences that Ho (2010) identifies between older and younger generations, as older generations are more likely to stay put due to place attachment and preserve their culture. We see this clearly within the

Buddhist community where in the four temples that I visited, it was mostly attended by elders and only a handful of youth. Conversations with Buddhist residents raised concerns regarding youth engagement –what will happen once the elders are gone? What programs and activities will draw them to the temples? This is a grave issue that potentially collaborative events hosted by community organizations and cross-faith collaborations could attempt to address this dilemma.

The fear of losing their community and sense of home can be processed through grief in relation to past trauma. Drawing from Pacific Studies, there are intersections between forced displacement, climate mobility, intangible loss, and climate grief (Neef, 2022). Climate grief identifies how forced displacement creates intangible losses of their sense of home, connectedness, and cultural heritage and identity (Neef, 2022). For the Vietnamese refugee community, there is a sense of grief of losing their homeland, and having established a second home in New Orleans there is an urgency to remain in this community. However, there are feelings of grief of a potential inevitability if this diminishing trend continues that they may lose their community. This can result in disengagement from participating in actions and organizing together to challenge the inequities faced in this community. A framework aimed at respecting and emphasizing this dynamic is needed to empower and support grassroots efforts that are combatting these injustices.

Looking through the lens of intergenerational perspectives, it is important to acknowledge trauma and the ways in which daily vulnerabilities activate yet stress notions of resilience (Nguyen, 2024; Cai & Lee, 2022). This is instrumental to refugee resilience, where this intergenerational lens has identified the inequities of disinvestment, governmental neglect, lack of inclusion in decision-making processes, lack of infrastructure development, and neglect

of safety. However, in identifying the ways that trauma is woven throughout this community's generations, is the importance of intergenerational communication and solidarity to bridge these gaps of potential losses in cultural preservation and continuity (Cai & Lee, 2022; Jeyasundaram et al., 2020). Even throughout these challenges, there exists a strong resilient spirit to contest these inequities.

Challenging Resilience through Intergenerational Perspectives and Trauma

One quote from a community organization co-director stuck with me when discussing resilience, was how “trauma creates resilience, but that resilience also creates trauma.” Throughout all the past trauma, we see the Vietnamese community being resilient in overcoming those obstacles. As one of the first communities to return and rebuild after Katrina, they are considered a very resilient community. However, the implications of using this term by governments, media, and other outside entities can cause more trauma, which community members have identified as continued disinvestment and neglect by governmental decision-making processes. Funding around resilience and government planning processes must incorporate this critical lens of understanding the trauma, history, and vulnerabilities that these communities face. By assuming communities can take care of themselves, it leaves vulnerable communities that are already marginalized and systemically disadvantaged to continue enduring these daily vulnerabilities. This contributes to the critique within the refugee resilience framework that cautions mainstream usage of resilience but that requires a critical analysis of how it is used and implicated for specific communities.

Relating this back to how healing and approaches to care have been responses to intergenerational trauma, how can these grassroots and community ways of healing address these

challenges? We have seen the work of Sông CDC and VEGGI bridging the intergenerational gap through their farming programming. The other two organizations such as VIET focus on the elders while VAYLA focuses on the youth. These are great at targeting these different generations. However, there is also a hope to reinvigorate the collaboration that was once had post-Katrina to reactivate this intergenerational solidarity. There have already been collaborations done between Sông CDC, VIET, and VAYLA around vegetable distributions with the elders and potential grant project applications. I attended several of the vegetable distribution events that take place after senior exercise classes held at VIET. I was able to talk with several of the seniors there, whom many speak only Vietnamese, and they were open to talking with me because I reminded them of their children who for some have moved away, which speaks to the concerns of losing youth to outmigration. Nonetheless, I was able to attend one of the events where youth from the VAYLA staff distributed vegetables to the seniors (seen in Figure 6). This was beautiful to see the cross-generational collaboration and in talking with some of the staff afterwards, there is enthusiasm for the organizations to host more of these collaborative events. Additionally, what are alternative ways of investments that can support these grassroots initiatives, collaborations, and mutual aid projects to funnel more funding into these programs?



Figure 6. Image of vegetable distribution collaboration event between VIET, VAYLA, and VEGGI. (Photo taken by Peter Nguyen)

Supporting these community organizations and institutions can foster intergenerational communication that can bring the generations closer to discuss innovative ways of challenging inequities. This informs an intergenerational resilience where there is potential for parents and elders to share about their ethnic and racial heritage through church or temple, Vietnamese language schools, and cultural events (Cai & Lee, 2022). Furthermore, there is a need to center latter generations and create programming that engages the youth more (Nguyen, 2024).

In talking with different generations, I can relate with both the elders who resemble my parents but also the youth who closely share my identity as a second-generation Vietnamese American. I felt the impact of that trauma and its relationship with resilience. As a child of

Vietnamese refugees myself, I could relate to seeing how important intergenerational communication is. Growing up I have seen the difficulty of my friends' parents sharing their stories in Vietnam and during the resettlement journey. Several of my friends' parents have lived through the Vietnam War, the Secret War in Laos, and Khmer Rouge and trauma is very real in how it impacts survivors' abilities to share those stories. However, I found that many people I talked to were generally open about sharing those stories in New Orleans. Some were a bit emotional and had difficulty processing those traumatic moments. But for the most part, people were generally comfortable talking about those past traumas and regarding them as challenges to overcome. Their resilient spirit raises an important notion that there is a strong acknowledgement of their past traumas that inform ways to reconcile with that in New Orleans, using social memory to address dealing with hurricanes and storms. This acknowledgement must also be integrated into government and planning processes as public authorities do have responsibility in creating the systemic conditions that these communities must draw from in their social memory and resilient capacities.

Conclusion

What gets passed down through generations is trauma but also the strength and courage of the previous generations who went through war and forced displacement. This chapter contributes to a deep understanding of climate justice and refugee resilience through a closer examination of intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care. Through this intergenerational lens within the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, key challenges and inequities were recognized along with ways of healing and care to address intergenerational trauma. It shows that climate justice is not just limited to climate change impacts, but that there is a need to

address overlapping vulnerabilities stemming from systemic inequities of disinvestment and governmental neglect that continue to marginalize this community. Climate change becomes a multiplier that exacerbates these vulnerabilities. It also reveals the resilient strength to collectively organize at the grassroots level through community organizations as well as local leadership and religious institutions to facilitate cultural events throughout the year. It is important to acknowledge the trauma present in all generations as well as how they intersect with each other to highlight the intergenerational perspectives and priorities. Cultivating this sense of intergenerational care is key to preserving social cohesion and solidarity to address those inequities.

The hope is that this research can contribute to fill policy and practice gaps, however, there were several limitations that could have provided more insight to this intergenerational lens. One was that I had wished I interviewed more youth and children to get their perspectives. As a disclaimer, most of this analysis came from talks with elders, middle-aged groups, and younger generations in their 20s-40s. Another limitation is that it was not a full ethnographic study, which would have provided a deep understanding into the oral histories of residents' journeys. A full ethnographic study would have been living in the New Orleans community for at least a year, achieving at least 30 interviews, and participating in more of the community events and organizational programming. Questions did not explicitly ask for traumatic events to caution against triggering any of the participants' previous experiences, but rather questions asked about any events where they had to migrate and journeys coming to New Orleans.

Future research opportunities include a closer examination of voluntary immobility and place attachment for refugee and immigrant communities, specifically in the context of climate vulnerable and disaster-risk areas. Additionally, there needs to be a closer look into the

intergenerational trauma framework of how discourses on anti-communism, war, and acculturation inform intergenerational dynamics and understandings of resilience (Nguyen, 2024). To ensure that this research uplifts community voices, they must be heard and integrated by practitioners and City government staff to take immediate actions in addressing their concerns. There is a general feeling of concern about the gradual loss of this community. How can these organizations be best supported, and a sense of reinvestments be made to this community? City resilience planning must integrate this community and for them to have a seat at the table. Investments from governments and foundations need to further integrate racial equity to invest in these immigrant and refugee-centered community organizations. There is a gap of integrating this research into policy and practice. Integrating a healing and trauma-informed framework will create a more integrative resilience framework for policymakers as well as on the ground practitioners (Camponeschi, 2022). In addition to these future research opportunities, policy and practice recommendations can be found in the Conclusion Chapter.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

“I’m always going to be from the East. If my parents are from the East, I’m not leaving the East.”

- Youth Community Resident



Figure 7. Image of VEGGI Farm. (Photo taken by Peter Nguyen)

As strongly expressed by this community member, there is a strong sense of pride from residents of New Orleans East. There is deep attachment to Village de L’Est. It is a second home for them, which I can similarly relate to of how my family is also deeply attached to Chicago where my parents originally resettled since the 1980s. To synthesize this sense of pride as well as

the resilient strength expressed by the community, I will synthesize the key themes that form the basis of *refugee resilience* that is one approach to encapsulating their spirit and circumstances. In answering the main question of how understanding this Vietnamese community in New Orleans way of negotiating resilience inform a deep examination into how refugee and immigrant communities navigate injustices and inequities within and beyond the context of climate change, I re-ground the use of resilience through a *refugee resilience* framework to guide us through three key elements. I define *refugee resilience* as acknowledging the community's strength and capacity to adapt to significant disruptions while critically recognizing the challenges, vulnerabilities, and inequities they continue to face. This is revealed through three lenses: (1) social memory, (2) role of community organizations, institutions, and local leadership, and (3) intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care.

Synthesis of Findings & Themes

Chapter 2 first establishes the foundation of the *refugee resilience* framework building upon past critical scholarship on resilience as well as Simi Kang's (2022) development of refugee resilience. My utilization of the framework is grounded in the emerging themes from the New Orleans Vietnamese community's voices. It offers a groundwork to understand the nuances and challenges this Vietnamese community has previously and currently faces while showing the underlying strengths and vulnerabilities that should not be overlooked. From this framework, three main themes emerged: (1) social memory, (2) the role of community organizations, institutions, and local leadership, and (3) intergenerational perspectives, trauma, and care. Each of the three lenses enriches the understanding of each other's themes, which together illustrate intersecting vulnerabilities and inequities faced in the community. Social memory informs the analysis of how organizations, institutions, and leaders engage with previous navigation of

disruptions that allow a deep understanding of intergenerational perspectives and trauma. Social memory emphasizes the importance of navigating past disturbances of war and hurricanes within the Vietnamese refugee diasporic community. The role that community organizations, institutions, and local leaders play is key in highlighting these vulnerabilities through their activism and mobilization against injustices. Lastly, listening to the community's perspectives and relationships with trauma provides a critical analysis of the previous challenges and potential triggering trauma that the community faces.

Social memory emphasizes the importance of how navigating past disturbances such as war and hurricanes informs their resilience in navigating disruptions today. Many residents draw upon the social memories of war and how everything that they experience today is compared to their journeys from the war. Social memory grounds their resilient spirit as they see hurricanes and other disruptions as just challenges to overcome because nothing compares to what they have gone through in the war. Local leadership and institutional capacity point to the significance of community organizations and religious institutions which form the crux of the community's social networks and cohesive organizing power. Local leaders in tandem with these organizations and institutions drive social cohesion in maintaining connections between the Vietnamese communities across Greater New Orleans while also possessing the ability to galvanize residents during trying times. Lastly, intergenerationality provides a key component to resilience for refugee and immigrant communities because of the vast differences in perspectives and experiences faced by various generations. Intergenerationality illuminates how trauma from the elder generations faced in war and migration transfers to younger generations and how that informs resilient approaches and caretaking in the community.

A case example of environmental justice activism that occurred in 2006 immediately after Katrina was the fight and advocacy against the building of an illegal toxic landfill next the community. This showed the nexus of all three themes of using social memory to stand up to injustices, the power of organizations and leaders to galvanize residents to protest, and the strength of intergenerational solidarity with the youth leading the organizing alongside the elders. This ultimately informed the critical aspects of *refugee resilience* that, even with the successful return to Village de L'Est after the Katrina floods, the community was still neglected and not listened to. Katrina brought to the surface the historical underlying inequities that have been in New Orleans East, yet the community continues to face them which is what *refugee resilience* aims to highlight. This integrates critical and intersectional climate justice with resilience in focusing on refugee and immigrant communities.

Chapter 3 focused on the role that community organizations, institutions, and leaders play in resilience building as well as the on-the-ground markers of the major strengths, capacities, needs, and challenges the community faces. Organizations, institutions, and leaders are the most trusted entities within the community as they are staples within the social networks. This lens revealed both extrinsic and intrinsic vulnerabilities as well as inequities that residents faced. These extrinsic vulnerabilities included crime and safety, lack of investment in affordable and senior housing, concerns of outmigration of youth from the community, and climate change impacts (frequency and intensity of hurricanes and tornadoes, sea level rise and flooding, hotter weather, land subsidence, water quality, and availability of land for growing crops). Intrinsic vulnerabilities consist of individuals' identities and demographics, which include age, gender, education level, socioeconomic class, language barriers, level of social cohesion, and cultural practices. The systemic inequities that they also highlighted include the lack of investments in

social services and economic opportunities, historical neglect and governmental disinvestment, and racial marginalization of the Black, Vietnamese, and Latinx New Orleans East communities. Addressing these extrinsic factors can alleviate the severity of the intrinsic vulnerabilities such as increasing education access, economic opportunities, providing social services for the elderly, and language justice.

Through these vulnerabilities and inequities, organizations and institutions have shown the community's resilient capacities in galvanizing residents quickly in disaster recovery post-Katrina and advocating against environmental injustices (i.e. landfill issue) through collaborative leadership. Even though there is a general deficit mindset when looking at resilience, cultural wealth concepts raise the positive instrumental role that organizations, the MQVN church, pastoral council network, and leaders have played in bridging solidarity within the community as well as being the facilitator with government entities. However, this is still a challenge as a key component of building beyond resilience is bridging the disconnect between policymakers in integrating community voices at the decision-making table.

Chapter 4 sheds light into the intergenerationality of trauma in *refugee resilience*. This chapter examined five themes: intergenerational perspectives and priorities, intergenerational trauma, intergenerational care, sense of home and challenges to a second home, and challenging the resilience narrative. These themes revealed intergenerational strengths exhibited within the community, which are prioritizing family, a collective sense of home and tight-knit community, social memory, strong social cohesion, and cultural preservation and commemoration through community organizations and religious institutions (particularly through the Catholic churches). These foster a collective resilient spirit and intergenerational solidarity akin to the positive assets' framework of *refugee resilience*.

On the negative side of *refugee resilience* are the intergenerational challenges faced that stem from trauma. Collective and intergenerational trauma manifests itself through previous navigation of war, forced displacement, separation from their home country, fear of losing family and friends, fear for family's own safety, distrust of the government, difficult communication about past experiences in parent-child relationships, fear of losing continued cultural heritage and language, and societal pressures to maintain a hard-working spirit. These can be triggered or exacerbated with overlapping vulnerabilities that are experienced daily such as storms, crime and safety, and governmental neglect to social services.

Intergenerational differences and tensions are present as older generations have their own set of priorities. These include family, sense of the community and home, attachment to New Orleans, the church and Catholic community, cultural preservation through the younger generations in language and cultural practices, and crime safety. Younger generations share similar priorities around family, sense of community, and crime and safety, but they prioritize economic opportunity, access to social services and community investments, and climate change impacts. These differences have also led to fears of slowly losing this community due to outmigration and continual governmental neglect.

This shows the trauma-resilience cycle where throughout all these challenges resilience emerges. However, as a community resident puts it "resilience can create trauma." There are implications of the use of resilience where it assumes communities can take care of themselves, which leaves vulnerable communities that are already marginalized and systemically disadvantaged to continue enduring these daily vulnerabilities. This contributes to the critique within the *refugee resilience* framework that cautions mainstream utilization of resilience but that further requires a critical analysis of how it is used and implicated for specific communities.

Synthesis of Theoretical Gap Contributions

One major gap that this dissertation research contributes to is coupling climate justice with resilience through a *refugee resilience* framework. There is a general gap in applying a critical and intersectional lens to climate justice, which Amorim-Maia (2022) pushes for through an intersectional climate justice framework. This integrates compounding and overlapping vulnerabilities that local communities face beyond just climate change impacts. One key element to intersectional climate justice is promoting vulnerability activism and community resilience building (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022). The *refugee resilience* framework attempts to bridge this gap by integrating intersectional climate justice with resilience. Moreover, it builds upon the gaps individually within each of the climate justice and resilience fields respectively.

Chapter 2 primarily focused on the critique of resilience while building out its definition beyond its implications within the context of the Vietnamese refugee community. It contributes to the larger resilience field by integrating more of the refugee and immigrant community perspectives. *Refugee resilience* is a more recently used term developed by Kang (2022) who critiques resilience by showcasing how putting the expectation that the Vietnamese community is “perpetually resilient” is harmful that denies them the needed support while being made expendable under environmental racism. There is an added masking of the inequities and disinvestment from governmental institutions in the community. I contribute to this definition but develop my own framework to build upon this foundation that is centered on the community voices I talked to. In this sense, I define it as a way to understand the layered nuances and challenges this community continues to face by revealing the underlying vulnerabilities and inequities while acknowledging their strong resilient capacities. My main contribution builds

upon Kang's (2022) development of refugee resilience that provides a systemic critique to how resilience is used and its harmful implications for communities to potentially continue to be sacrifice communities because of their resilience. I enrich this systemic critique by adding another dimension in grounding the framework in this community's voices who have articulated themselves as proud of their resilience but elevating their calls to public authorities that they still face structural inequities and daily vulnerabilities. It contributes both empirically and theoretically by uplifting this community as one audience, while elevating the community's concerns of facing structural inequities and daily vulnerabilities to a second audience of public and governmental authorities who all have responsibilities in this.

Chapter 3 centers the organizational lens by looking at how community organizations, institutions, and leadership inform the *refugee resilience* framework while contributing to climate justice. It informs both climate justice and resilience by emphasizing the compounding overlapping vulnerabilities outside of climate change that additionally impact the community's vulnerability to climate change impacts. Within related sub-theories, it informs organizational theory by examining the organizational capacities, ways of self-reliance, and how organizations facilitate social cohesion. Social capital is a vital component within this community and through examples of organizational initiatives and collaborations we can see how collective action and knowledge sharing are conducted through grassroots social networks to combat injustices.

Chapter 4 examines intergenerationality and resilience in the face of climate change and intersecting vulnerabilities. Exploring resilience and its implications addresses the gap of refugee and immigrant communities in the context of climate justice, which requires an analysis of intergenerational perspectives. This research contributes to the literature on resilience by exploring intergenerational dynamics that have not been explored in depth, especially in refugee

and immigrant communities. This also contributes to other related fields of migration and forced migration studies that center Southeast Asian and Vietnamese refugee voices from within the communities. Lastly, there is limited research on Southeast Asian and Vietnamese refugee and immigrant communities and their relationships with intergenerational trauma. This research goes beyond the psychological fields where most of the trauma research has been conducted and integrates climate justice and resilience (Xu, 2017). Xu (2017) posits that a trauma framework can provide a more effective understanding of the Vietnamese community in how it negotiates resilience. Acknowledging and taking into account the community's past histories and trauma are important to understand how structural processes and inequities do not exacerbate or add on top of this trauma. They raise an important question: how can a community's history of trauma serve as the basis for collective resilience across at-risk communities? By integrating intersectional climate justice with resilience through a *refugee resilience* framework, it raises a vital point of the need to examine overlapping vulnerabilities with intergenerational trauma. Although all of this research contributes to the literature gaps, there is an importance to link this with policy and practice. Those gaps and recommendations are provided in the recommendations section below.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study was the condensed timeline of the fieldwork visit, which totaled a little over five months due to the extension of the COVID pandemic as well as limited funding to stay up to a year. This resulted in a lower number of interviews than I initially intended to conduct, especially a lower number of youth interviewees compared to middle-aged and elderly groups. A longer fieldwork visit could have potentially yielded prolonged exposure

to the community, and I could have developed stronger relationships with people by attending more community events and supporting the organizations I connected with. This also restricted my ability to connect and interview more staff members from VAYLA, VIET, NOELA CHC, the CCC, and other community leaders to gain more diverse insights on community concerns, vulnerabilities, and outlooks on addressing those vulnerabilities. Moreover, there was a limitation in including more interviews from Vietnamese-speakers, especially from the elders to hear more of their stories from Vietnam to New Orleans. Vietnamese-speakers seemed more comfortable with informal conversations rather than interviews speaking with an outsider, and due to scheduling it was a bit difficult to arrange those interviews. However, I did have more informal conversations with the elders in Vietnamese. Additionally, there was a timeline limitation and organizational capacity limit where I was aiming to conduct a survey in collaboration with Sông CDC, however, there was not enough time to implement the survey to obtain a wider and more diverse inclusion of community perspectives.

As this was not a full ethnographic study, a longer fieldwork site would have yielded an in-depth longitudinal analysis to understand the current landscape coupled with the outlook of how community organizations and institutions shape resilience building. Therefore, this is only a snapshot of the oral accounts of the residents I was able to talk to. In talking with a few community members, documenting more oral histories from residents, especially from the elders who they are worried about losing in the next decade, is important to archive. Another limitation in relation to the oral histories was the interview questions did not explicitly ask for traumatic events to caution against triggering any past difficult experiences, but questions related to where they had to migrate and their journeys coming to New Orleans were asked.

Future Research

The Vietnamese community in New Orleans reveals a deep history interwoven with a strong persevering spirit indicative of the larger diasporic Vietnamese refugee community worldwide. Although it is one case study, it serves as a greater foundation to inform nuanced ways of understanding resilience within other refugee and immigrant communities facing climate risks and overlapping vulnerabilities. To this end, there are numerous opportunities for future research to enrich the *refugee resilience* framework.

Potential future research can include more cross-sectional studies that provide both snapshots and long-term views on how these community organizations and institutions evolve in their roles over time. More research is needed to analyze institutional barriers such as the lack of funding and the system of nonprofit funding that impacts organizational capacities. This can include research on exploring the linkage between the distrust of governments with resilience in refugee and immigrant communities. Moreover, there needs to be a look at ongoing adaptation strategies in this community and analyze whether they align with the Louisiana Climate Action Plan.

A closer examination of voluntary immobility and place attachment for refugee and immigrant communities, particularly in the context of climate vulnerable and disaster risk areas. Migration and relocations are generally proposed adaptation strategies in more climate and flood-prone areas such as coastal Southeast Louisiana. However, what happens in the case of communities not having the capacity to relocate or voluntarily choosing not to relocate due to place and cultural attachment. Much of this can be cross-researched with Indigenous and Pacific studies and communities already facing this challenge.

Lastly, there needs to be an expansive study into the intergenerational trauma framework of how discourses on anti-communism, war, and acculturation inform intergenerational dynamics and understandings of resilience (Nguyen, 2024). These would contribute to elevating community voices and more accurately representing them where need to be heard such as by policymakers at the local and state levels.

Policy-Practice Recommendations

My goal for this research is for it to ultimately benefit the Vietnamese community in New Orleans as well as other refugee and immigrant communities by highlighting the potential counter-productive implications of framing this community as resilient unless also including their calls for resource investments to address the overlapping vulnerabilities and structural inequities. I want to uplift community voices so that they are heard and integrated by practitioners, City and State government staff, and powerful foundations to take immediate action to address their concerns. There is a general concern about the gradual loss of this community due to outmigration, governmental neglect, and economic disinvestment. Table 3 provides seven recommendations for policymakers and planners to integrate this community to have a seat at the table, how organizations can be best supported and efforts they can do, and how foundations can be more active in investing in local communities.

I want to include one last quote from a community member and activist who provides a compelling response below regarding what he thinks the outlook of the community is in terms of addressing all these challenges and vulnerabilities that residents still face. He paints a vivid picture of how to protect all the generations in this community, as there are many fears related to crime and safety as well as the potential loss of residents moving away.

Good people are still here. A lot of good people. And they see that as the community. You know to bring their talents back. But how do we do that? And maybe we need to get the different communities, even different communities, get them to dream again. To dream dreams and have vision. My fears right now are that they may be having more nightmares than dreams. That's my fear. When they do that, they just pull back and care for their family alone (Interview, June 1, 2022).

What are ways to dream again to prevent the nightmares from continuing in this community?

How can these recommendations and planning sessions with community members and organizations think of ways to address their vulnerabilities and inequities?

Policymakers	Community Organizations	Foundation Funders
<p>Including community resident and organization representatives within City climate resilience planning. Seats should be provided within committees. Community voices must have power in influencing decision-making and planning.</p>	<p>Incorporate health with a trauma-informed community development.</p> <p>Increase collaborations between Sôg CDC, VIET, VAYLA, and NOELA CHC. This can help bridge social services, health services with senior and youth programming.</p>	<p>Use the foundations’ platform to invest in community organizations and coalitions to support frontline communities.</p>
<p>Provide equity and environmental justice training to City and State government staff. One such workshop can be focused on cultural competency of educating staff on immigrant communities and their intergenerational needs. These could inform providing mental health services, senior housing, and language access for disaster preparedness and relief.</p>	<p>Intergenerational Justice</p> <p>Develop more youth programming by increasing collaborations with VAYLA and both the Catholic and Buddhist communities. There is a desire to collaborate to link the generations together such as addressing crime/safety.</p>	<p>Partner with academic, research, and thinktank institutions to conduct climate policy analysis of how to integrate frontline refugee and immigrant communities.</p>
<p>To address crime and safety, there must be an invested City public safety program to create a Safety Task Force that incorporates community organization leaders and residents every step of the way in envisioning how community safety can be best addressed. Equitable engagement can plan a community-led safety plan. Lastly, a mechanism to ensure accountability by law enforcement is needed.</p>	<p>Incorporate intergenerational leadership structure within organizations. This can include having both youth, middle-aged groups, and elder representatives as part of staff and Boards.</p>	<p>Partner with community organizations, integrate them into foundation planning committees, and have dedicated funds to these organizations.</p>

<p>Provide economic investments and small business/entrepreneur grants that can support the local businesses in New Orleans East while providing opportunities that youth can invest in.</p>	<p>Integrate workshop trainings or programming events such as what VAYLA is currently developing in addressing intergenerational trauma and how community organizations can integrate that into their work.</p>	<p>Thoroughly plan equitable funding distribution networks to connect with other foundations to support the same organizations and communities.</p>
<p>Create more investments and grant funding that supports cultural programming. The New Orleans Recreation & Culture Fund can invest in organizations aimed at cultural events and commemorations that can connect both youth and elders.</p>	<p>Integrate more collaborations with foundations and academic/research institutions such as how Sông CDC is partnering with the Water Leaders Institute to address water quality issues.</p>	<p>Provide more grant and investment opportunities that community organizations and institutions can apply to that support community development, social services, and climate justice.</p>
<p>The City of New Orleans and Louisiana should incorporate more targeted outreach to disadvantaged communities of color such as in New Orleans East. Programs can include social services workshops, workforce development, nonprofit funding and training, and increased accessibility to natural disaster resources.</p>	<p>Collaborate with other community organizations throughout New Orleans and brainstorm potential avenues to apply to larger grant projects together.</p>	<p>Partner with governmental or academic entities to provide technical assistance to the communities around climate change preparedness and natural disaster recovery resources.</p>
<p>City and State governments must integrate language accessibility and more direct communication lines to funnel natural disaster preparedness and recovery information to the community. Information must be provided in Vietnamese, Spanish, and other languages.</p>	<p>Increase collaborative cultural events between the organizations and Catholic and Buddhist communities such as the upcoming 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.</p>	<p>Lead public media campaigns to elevate community issues and raise the need for governmental entities and other foundations to support grassroots efforts.</p>

Table 3. *This table presents recommendations for community organizations, policymakers, and foundation funders to address the overlapping inequities of climate justice.*

Dissemination Plan

The next steps going beyond this dissertation research are to disseminate this with the community organizations, residents, policymakers, and foundations currently collaborating with community organizations in New Orleans. I will consult with Sông CDC staff about how this research could be most beneficial to them and the community. A potential collaboration would be to work with Sông CDC to put together a short 5-page summary brief that provides my research findings but focuses heavily on the recommendations. This brief can then be distributed out to city and state governments as well as foundations to raise awareness of the issues that the community faces.

Concluding Dissertation Thoughts

In beginning my PhD journey, I had many qualms about the type of research project I would be able to conduct as well as whether I would be able to finish or not. I am very fortunate and thankful to my dissertation committee, all the community organizations I connected with in New Orleans, and all the residents that I met there to assist in making my proposed research come to fruition. In focusing on how this research could most benefit the community, it was also an introspective journey for me to be able to connect with my own roots as a Vietnamese American through the eyes and voices of the Vietnamese community in New Orleans. My interests in resilience stem from seeing how resilient my parents are in their journeys to resettle in the U.S. after the Vietnam War and I was able to greatly see this resilient spirit embodied within every person that I talked to.

My hope in conducting this critical analysis into resilience within this community is that it will provide deep integration of how governments and funders view resilient communities

while pushing them to outreach in a more localized effort to hear from the residents about their concerns and needs. Moreover, although this was a long journey for me to navigate this PhD, it genuinely allowed me to tune into my passions for environmental and climate justice and their intersections with community resilience work. It has inspired me to continue to pursue careers in these fields and to further community-engaged work through nonprofits, NGOs, think tanks, and government. To this end, I strive to carry out climate justice work not just in this community but in other refugee and immigrant frontline communities as well.

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Appendix

A. Interview Protocol (Semi-Structured)

Background, Migration History, and Community Relationships

1. Background & Migration History
 1. Where do you currently live? How long have you been living in this community?
 2. For Vietnamese Americans:
 - i. Where in Vietnam are you or your parents from?
 - ii. (If not born in the US) When did you migrate to the U.S.?
 - iii. If they migrated: What was your journey to this country/community like?
 3. Do you have any other experiences where you had to move or relocate to another place within the US? If so, what were the factors that led to your move?
2. Community Relationships
 1. Who or what organizations were most helpful with getting you settled in this community?
 2. In your journey of settling in this community (or experience growing up in this community), have you interacted with other racial and ethnic groups? If so, how would you review your relationship with these other groups in the community?
 - i. Probe: Has there been any events, natural disasters, or environmental pollution events that changed your relationship with these groups?

Climate Change, Networks of Support, and Adaptation

3. Climate Change
 1. What do you see as current major climate threats to this community (ie. hurricanes, flooding, season changes, drought, heat waves, etc.)?
 2. Have you and/or your family been affected by a natural disaster or an environmental pollution issue? If so, which type of event?
 3. How were you and your family affected?
4. Networks of Support
 1. How do you see climate threats being addressed in your community?
 2. During these events, who and/or which groups in the community provided you with support in response to the natural disasters or environmental pollution event?
 3. Are you familiar with Vietnamese-Americans Young Leaders Association of New Orleans (VAYLA-NO), Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation (MQVN-CDC), and/or the Mary Queen of Vietnam Church? If yes, how have you seen them playing a role during past natural disasters or environmental pollution events?
 4. Has the government (local, state, federal) been able to support the community during these events (natural disasters or environmental pollution)? If so, how have they helped the community?
5. Adaptation
 1. Are you currently doing anything to respond to the changes you are seeing in the climate and environment in your community? If so, what kinds of efforts are you engaged with?

Future Climate Outlook & Final Thoughts

6. Outlook

1. What do you think are some future climate change challenges your community may face? And where are the sources where you hear of this information?
2. Based on your experiences, how do you think resilience and/or adaptation could be strengthened in your community?
3. Do you think the government (local, state, federal) can reduce climate threats or prevent pollution disasters in your community? If so, how do you think the government can do so?

7. Final Thoughts

1. Are there any additional comments you would like to share?
2. Do you have any suggestions for people I should interview or talk to?

B. Meeting & Field Observation Protocol

Date/Time: _____

Location: _____

Number of People present: _____

(include breakdown of different stakeholder groups in attendance)

Meeting Observation Protocol

Sites: New Orleans East, Community organization meetings and workshops at the local office or via Zoom, public forums

Guiding Topics:

- How are community organization meetings conducted?
- How are community residents' issues or concerns raised and/or addressed?
- Stakeholder groups present:
 - Are community residents included in these meetings and how well are they included? (how often are residents participating and if their comments are considered by others).
 - Are other stakeholders, community organizations/groups, leaders present and how are they included in the discussions?
- What current initiatives related to climate change and the environment are being conducted by the community organization?
 - What is discussed and prioritized on issues related to climate change and environmental initiatives within the community?
 - What kinds of information is shared with the community on these initiatives?
- Are any experiences or information from previous natural disaster events brought up to inform current climate change and environmental initiatives?
- How is information about current and/or previous climate change events and issues shared with the community?

Field Observation Protocol

Sites: New Orleans East, VEGGI farming co-op community garden, public venues such as farmer markets, Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, festivals

Guiding Topics:

- Describe the interactions between community residents and other stakeholders/groups.
- What activities are residents and/or other stakeholder groups engaged in?
- For any conversations, what is being discussed and shared between parties?
- How are issues of climate change and environmental issues raised or discussed?
 - How are topics related to adaptation raised or discussed?
 - How are these topics and issues applied to the current venue/location?
- How are community organizations involved at these venues?
 - Are they hosted by residents and/or community leaders and organizations?