Crisis narratives and institutional resilience: a framework for analysis

Abstract: The term "resilience" is widely used in current analysis of world politics to refer to a situation where institutions surprisingly sustain themselves against otherwise dire prospects. Yet, discussions of institutional resilience tend to underappreciate its dynamic character. This article proposes a reconceptualization of institutional resilience that centers the productive power of crisis. It argues that institutional resilience is best understood as an interpretative process rooted in a co-constitutive dynamic of crisis and adaptation. Resilience is made possible through the (re)production of a crisis narrative in context. We illustrate this argument with two case studies looking into how this dynamic unfolds in the context of political regimes (Cameroon) and international organizations (ASEAN). Doing so, we make the case for the development of a broader research agenda that can contribute to a better understanding of how institutions that are portrayed as frail and unstable not only survive but transform over time.

Key words: Institutions; Africa; Crisis; Southeast Asia; Narratives; Resilience

About the authors

Anne-Laure Mahé, Fellow, Department of Methodology, London School of Economics and Political Science, Columbia House, Aldwych, London, WC2A 2AE, United Kingdom
+44 (0)7 59 88 26 150, a.mahe@lse.ac.uk (corresponding author)

Stéphanie Martel, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Studies, Queen's University
Mackintosh-Corry Hall, 68 University Avenue, Kingston, ON K7L 3N6, Canada
+ 1-613- 533-3120, stephanie.martel@queensu.ca

Anne-Laure Mahé is a Fellow in Qualitative Methodology in the Department of Methodology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She specializes in comparative politics, international relations and development studies. More specifically, she studies how authoritarian regimes sustain themselves, political violence, political transitions, and the relationship between regime and state institutions in Eastern Africa. She is also interested in international development and aid actors. Her work focuses especially on the case of Sudan and has been published in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *International Studies Perspectives*, and *Politique Africaine*.

Stéphanie Martel is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Studies and a Fellow at the Centre for International and Defence Policy at Queen's University. Her research focuses on multilateral diplomacy, security regionalism, and the role of discourse in the social construction of world politics, with a focus on Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Her work has been featured in *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Affairs*, and *European Journal of International Relations*, among others. She is the author of *Enacting the Security Community: ASEAN's Never-Ending Story* (2022, Stanford University Press).

Introduction

How do political institutions face crises? In the current "polycrisis" moment (Tooze 2022) resulting from climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, among other interconnected crises, this question has gained new relevance in scholarly and policy circles. A key concept to tackle such concerns is that of "resilience," used either as an objective descriptor of the interplay of risk, change, and continuity observable in various institutional contexts, a normative set of qualities that actors may acquire through specific policies (Brand and Jax 2007; Juncos and Bourbeau 2022), or as a tool of neoliberal governmentality (Aradau 2014; Joseph 2018).

Conceptually, resilience is typically defined as the capacity of a system to continually adapt yet remain within a critical threshold that allows it to maintain its core functions, structure, and identity (Folke *et al.* 2010; Walker *et al.* 2004). Resilience occurs when change within prevents a change –or collapse– of the system, allowing it to "bounce back" through a departure from the status quo ante. Resilience thus weaves together persistence, adaptation, and transformation, understood as a "process of patterned adjustments adopted in the face of endogenous or exogenous shocks, to maintain, to marginally modify, or to transform a referent object" (Bourbeau 2018). As a more specific form of resilience, and the core focus of this article, *institutional* resilience is distinct from demise, continuity, or radical transformation. The specificity and added value of the resilience concept is to enable us to think about the possibility of unstable yet durable institutions.[1] Indeed, institutions can be stable without necessarily being "resilient." Resilience implies an adaptative response to a crisis (Stollenwerk *et al.* 2021: 1223) i.e., a turning point that conveys a sense of urgency and the prospect of doom for a particular referent, against which an immediate response must be implemented. It is thus conceptually distinct from both other forms of adaptation not enabled by crisis, and forms of crisis management that extend beyond adaptation.

Despite the vast and interdisciplinary literature as well as the increasing attention paid to the socially constructed character of the resilience process (Bourbeau 2018), the central role of crisis as the "thing" institutional resilience provides an answer to remains surprisingly undertheorized. Despite acknowledgement by authors such as Bourbeau (2018: 28-29) that disturbances against which resilient entities react through adaptation are "interpretative moments", the unexpected event leading to an adaptative response is often reified, taken for granted as objective circumstance. Even when it is not, it tends to still be conceptualized as separate from resilience. Resilience, as a result, is often portrayed as an outcome or a process initiated in response to crisis. Yet, scholars in Comparative Politics (CP) and International Relations (IR) have paid serious attention to how events typically understood to be existing "out there" are socially constructed and discursively produced as a crisis, and the political effects of this process (Pauly 1993; Hay 1996; Blyth 2013). In this view, crisis is not merely the expression of objective forces but a socially constructed –and discursively produced– "opening for change" (Widmaier et al. 2007: 747) that enables the adoption of policies that would not have been considered otherwise. Inspired by those approaches, we aim to offer a productive way to bridge literatures on resilience on the one hand, and crisis narratives on the other, by highlighting how crisis is, in fact, constitutive of resilience.

This article builds on discussions of resilience in CP and IR to shed light on how the social and discursive construction of crisis relates to institutional resilience. We argue that institutional resilience can be understood as an interpretative process rooted in a co-constitutive dynamic of crisis and institutional adaptation, brought together through the (re)production of a crisis narrative in context. In other words, for institutional *resilience* to happen, social agents need to construct an event (or set of events) as a particular kind of crisis, requiring some form of adaptive change which, once put in place, contributes to the institution's longevity by fostering renewed commitment to it.

Our specific contributions are three-fold. First, we shift the focus of analysis to the specific meaning-making practices involved in the social construction of a crisis that make resilience (as opposed to something else) happen. Second, we zoom in on institutional resilience, which we define as an interpretative process produced by agents narrating crisis in a way that enables forms of adaptation allowing the institution to gather the (material and non-material) resources necessary to sustain itself over time. Importantly, we do not consider institutional resilience as a stable political outcome, but as a process always in the making. Third, our focus on the commonalities between domestic and international institutions experiencing resilience allows us to straddle the divide between CP and IR, whose examinations of resilience have up to now mostly happened in silo.

Drawing from our respective research programs and area-specific knowledge of specific cases of institutional resilience, we empirically develop our theoretical argument through two case studies. The first one focuses on Cameroon's electoral autocracy, led by Paul Biya since 1982, allowing us to analyze the productive role of crisis in institutional resilience in the context of political regimes. The second one, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) handling of its "Myanmar crisis," probes the heuristic character of our approach in the context of international institutions. Our case study design is "nominal," meaning it is meant to "advance insight, understanding, and explanation by conceptualizing the particular in more abstract terms, as an instance bearing on something more general" (Soss 2018: 23). It follows an established tradition of emphasizing the relevance of case studies for theory development and the exploration of complex causality, including when studying discursive processes (George and Bennett 2005). Our cases represent notable instances of the specific "class of events" (George and Bennett 2005: 18) that interests us: institutional resilience. Indeed, both institutions are commonly understood in case-specific scholarly literature as being simultaneously in a state of never-ending or repeated existential repeated crisis and having

proven capable of adapting to survive.[2] Social agents involved in the resilience process also understand "their" institution as such. This makes those cases appropriate to investigate the links between crisis narratives and institutional resilience. Further, since these cases are also anchored in distinct locales of the "Global South" that have not attracted as much attention from either crisis or resilience literature in our respective fields, they hold potential in increasing the ability of the literatures we bridge to travel across regions. This case selection thus serves two main purposes: first, to demonstrate how our proposed discourse-based approach can be applied to a diverse set of institutional contexts and objects of study, and second, to add to a broader research agenda on the concept of resilience in a way that can foster dialogue and conceptual advances across major fields of international studies.

Our inquiry highlights common patterns across the case studies in the construction of crisis narratives and the institutional adaptive processes they enable. We analyze the crisis narratives developed by social agents involved in the resilience process of both institutions through discourse analysis, by looking at key "texts," i.e., specific articulations of positions in a debate, by which certain representations of reality crystallize and specific policy responses that would not have been possible otherwise are enabled as a result. In the case of Cameroon, we focus on Biya's presidential speeches, which is justified by the close association between his persona and the regime. In the case of ASEAN, we analyze public documentation produced by the organization as well as a broader cluster of social agents that speak on its behalf. In both cases, and although this is not the core empirical focus of this article, our analysis is supplemented on a more ad hoc basis by texts that indicate how the crisis narratives are received by relevant audiences, and to showcase the presence of alternative crisis narratives that are sidelined.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, we critically engage with the literatures most directly relevant to our theoretical and empirical focus: studies of authoritarian

resilience in CP and scholarship on institutional adaptation of international organizations in IR. We highlight how a perspective focused on the discursive nature of crisis and its relations to institutional change can palliate some blind spots in these literatures and contribute to bridging these two fields. Second, we present our theoretical framework, grounded in the notion that crisis cannot be separated from institutional resilience in practice. Crisis and the adaptive response(s) to it are mutually constituted and discursively produced in tandem through the enactment of particular crisis narratives. The third and fourth sections apply this framework to our two cases to illustrate how crisis narratives enable institutional resilience in different institutional contexts.

Institutional resilience in international studies

There is an expansive literature on institutional change in Political Science, as well as a surge of interest for various forms of resilience at the crossroads of CP and IR. However, we focus here on two strands of literatures most directly relevant to our theoretical aims and empirical cases: the literature on authoritarian resilience (in CP), and scholarship on institutional adaptation of international organizations (in IR).

In the early 2000s, CP scholars started to investigate why and how authoritarian regimes had been able to sustain themselves through the third wave of democratization. They highlighted how autocratic elites implemented institutional changes that looked like democratization to alleviate external and/or internal pressures to democratize (Hawkins 1997; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010), but that those institutions continued to fulfill core functions in the reproduction of authoritarian domination, such as co-optation, repression, and legitimation (Gerschewski 2013). Autocrats created or reformed legislatures (e.g. Gandhi 2008; Valeri 2009; Roberts 2015), organized electoral processes (e.g. Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Levitsky and

Way 2010; Croissant and Hellmann 2018), and/or reformed the structures of the ruling party (e.g. Magaloni 2006; Brownlee 2007; Miller 2020).

These reforms fostered authoritarian resilience by facilitating cooperation and coordination between autocrat and their "winning coalition", the small group whose support keeps them in power (de Mesquita *et al.* 2005). The implementation and transformation of institutions are means for autocrats to signal their credible commitment to share power with those elites (Blaydes 2008; Boix and Svolik 2013; Meng 2020), who are also the main threat to their rule (Svolik 2009). Institutional arrangements provide mechanisms for accountability and oversight of both sides, enhancing trust, and fostering renewed commitment to the survival of the regime via the implementation of a new equilibrium of autocratic stability.

This dominant approach to authoritarian resilience provides "simple models" (Williamson and Magaloni 2020: 1526) of institutional change that emphasize autocrats' dominance in decision-making processes, their capacity to manipulate institutions in ways that benefit them (Pepinsky 2014: 632), and their ability to maintain elite support (Köllner and Kailitz 2013). As a consequence, scholars rarely question the crises that are understood as causing institutional adaptation. Furthermore, what autocrats say about those crises is seldom investigated, in part because auhoritarian regimes have long been understood as fundamentally deprived of legitimacy (Gerschewski 2013), but most importantly due to a materialistic understanding of authoritarian politics as a matter of interests. While some of this research treats autocrats' speeches as more than window-dressing (e.g. Wedeen 1999; Grauvogel and von Soest 2014; Dukalskis 2017), it mostly tackles them through the lense of legitimation. Our approach centered on crisis narratives can help shed light on an overlooked dimension of authoritarian resilience.

In turn, IR scholars of various theoretical persuasions along the rationalist/reflexivist spectrum have long emphasized how international organizations, whether they are explicitly deemed "resilient" or not, adapt to new circumstances, forms of uncertainty, or threats to their legitimacy to sustain themselves over time. Institutional responses to critical junctures, including various "crisis" moments (Ferrara and Kriesi 2021), cover a broad spectrum of responses that range from seizing new mandates (e.g. Gronau and Schmidtke 2016), adopting new rules, norms or procedures (e.g. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), creating new categories of actors (e.g. Abbott and Snidal 1998), engaging in persuasion (e.g. Johnston 2001) or relegitimization (e.g. Hurd 1999), or amending established practices (Milhorance and Soule-Kohndou, 2017), among others. Scholars often draw on institutionalist concepts that are not IR-specific, looking into path dependence, lock-in dynamics, ratchet effects, or even forms of pathological behaviour that constrain prospects of radical transformation (e.g. Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Hanrieder 2015).

International institutions rarely die off, although this possibility has been underestimated (Gray 2018). They can "muddle through" crisis mostly unchanged. Yet they are not only "sticky" in a passive sense, but often prove *resilient* as a result of their unique ability to deploy specific sources of (often non-material) power that sustains moderate institutional change against alternatives. Not enough attention has been devoted, however, to not only highlighting the productive effects of crisis on institutional resilience (Broome, Clegg and Rethel 2012; Brassett and Vaughan-Williams 2012) but interrogating why certain crisis narratives might be more conducive to it than others. Some scholars, such as those who draw from ontological security (Della Salla 2018; Mälksoo 2018; Klose 2020), do connect meaning-making practices of crisis construction with the ability of international organizations to adapt in order to sustain themselves over time. Such accounts, even when they avoid reifying crisis as something objective that happens "out there," nonetheless tend to treat it as a challenge external or separate

from the process of institutional adaptation initiated in response. Here again, our focus on the socially constructed character of crisis and its constitutive effects on institutional resilience holds promise.

Importantly, scholars of international studies at the intersection of CP and IR have paid a fair deal of separate attention to the socially and discursively produced character of crisis, and the kind of policy responses it makes possible. They emphasize how crisis is a socially and discursively constructed episode which may enable the adoption of policies that would not have been considered otherwise. In other words, crisis episodes are what social agents "imagine them to be" (Samman 2015: 967). Critical international political economy scholars show how crisis constructions are key in enabling the reproduction of neoliberal practices (e.g. Brassett and Vaughan-Williams, 2012; Broome, Clegg and Rethel, 2012; Carstensen 2013). Critical security scholars have similarly shown how fear of the "unknown unknowns" (Aradau 2014; Cavelty *et al.* 2015) can act as powerful discursive devices to justify the adoption of extraordinary measures while sidelining alternatives. Scholars of ontological security understand crisis as a social product grounded in feelings of anxiety that actors then respond to by invoking routines that render the "surprising event" familiar, as a way to stabilize their identity (Steele 2008; Chernobrov 2016; Mälksoo 2018; Della Salla 2018; Klose 2020). In what follows, we productively draw from a similar understanding of crisis as socially and discursively constructed to deepen our understanding of how it sustains the process of institutional resilience.

In sum, there has been significant work in both CP and IR on institutional adaptation on the one hand, and crisis construction on the other, but not enough on the interconnection between them, and the potential to reconcile them as parts of the same resilience process. These research foci can be bridged productively and supplemented by a more in-depth, theoretically informed examination of the constitutive role of crisis in the resilience process. In the following

section, we develop a theoretical framework that centres the constitutive role of crisis through an emphasis on its narrative construction as enabling institutional resilience.

Institutional resilience through crisis narratives: a framework for analysis

Building on prior constructivist and critical conceptualizations of crisis in international studies (Widmaier *et al.* 2007; Blyth 2007; Carstensen 2013), we treat crisis as the product of social agents deploying language that names, interprets, and dramatizes an event as such to compel a particular course of action. In this view, what makes an event a "crisis" is how social agents ascribe meaning to it, construct it as a particular kind of crisis, thus delineating the realm of possible action in relation to it. Our focus here is on how agents engage in the social – and discursive – construction of crisis in ways that make institutional resilience happen. We develop a framework that allows us to move away from a linear and sequential, and towards a constitutive, understanding of the relationship between crisis and resilience.

Crisis can be broken down into three distinct components: 1. the acknowledgement of the existence of an object, occurrence or phenomenon defined as crisis, 2. the (often contested) identification of the source of the crisis, its nature, and what it means for the institution faced with it, and 3. the adaptive solution(s) enabled by this particular definition of the crisis and carried out by the institution. For institutional resilience to be present, all components are needed. There can be no institutional resilience without a crisis narrative, mobilized through authoritative truth claims made by relevant agents, that supports the framing of institutional adaptation as the appropriate solution to the crisis thus defined. This resilience-as-process approach does not presuppose that the institution will prove resilient as an outcome, and even if it did, it would most likely be temporary. In fact, and as discussed above, institutional resilience is always in the making and likely never-ending (Martel 2022). The remainder of this section breaks down each component individually.

First, social agents need to successfully brand an event as a crisis, i.e., something that went, is going, or might go wrong, and that someone urgently ought to do something about *or else*... This process, as the following sections illustrate through case study analysis, does not necessarily, or even predominantly, follow a linear sequence where an event at time *t* is branded as a crisis at time *t+1*. The narrative construction of crisis starts to unfold right from the moment when an event is recognized as significant by social agents who, in a specific context, have the power, authority, and legitimacy to do so effectively, and who can inform, determine and/or implement courses of action taken in response.

The discursive production of a "crisis" does not necessarily take the form of a single utterance in a given, limited, and sudden moment. An event can also be embedded into a crisis narrative unfolding in the present either before or long after a crisis –according to the narrative– has occurred. It might also never occur, forever remaining within the realm of speculation and prevention. Samman (2015), for instance, shows how the characterization of the subprime crisis of 2008 as being reminiscent of the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s allowed representatives of the European Central Bank to dismiss the use of monetary levers as a solution. Furthermore, whether an event is "in fact" a crisis, and if so what the crisis "is," also tends to be ambiguous and debated by social agents in practice.

Second, a crisis narrative typically relies on a combination of four elements: 1. The identification of a cause to the crisis, 2. The attribution of blame, 3. The attribution of responsibility in providing a solution, and 4. The marginalization of alternative crisis-solution pairings (Carstensen 2013). Indeed, the meaning of crisis is often the terrain of a power struggle between competing crisis narratives. Although a crisis narrative often becomes hegemonic in a particular context, there can also be multiple causal stories competing for dominance, in addition to other narratives that might contest the branding of a phenomenon as a crisis in the first place. COVID-19 is a good example (Barnett 2020), as is climate change (Allan 2017).

For a particular course of action to be enabled, the crisis needs to be of a particular kind. The crisis and its solution are locked together in a co-constitutive relationship that makes a particular kind of solution possible. As Blyth (2007) explains, a crisis narrative not only needs to provide answers to "what went wrong", i.e., the source of the crisis, but also to "what to do about it" or what form the response should take. In his famous examination of the "winter of discontent", Hay (1996) shows how the discursive construction of this period as symptomatic of "a monolithic state besieged by trade unions" is what enabled the rise of Thatcherism. In his examination of politics of austerity in response to the European debt crisis, Blyth (2013) demonstrates how the framing of the crisis as a product of policy failure from governments as opposed to financial markets allows austerity to be repositioned as a natural solution, despite its ineffectiveness. Similar patterns are observable in our case studies of institutional resilience, as this process does not merely depend on the ability of social agents to successfully claim authority in branding an event as crisis, but to effectively impose a particular crisis narrative rooted in a specific pairing of problem and solution that enables institutional adaptation as opposed to other types of responses.

Third, for there to be resilience, an adaptive solution that matches the crisis as defined must be enabled and carried out by the institution in a way that fosters renewed commitment to it as the legitimate, authoritative crisis-solver, while marginalizing alternatives (as well as provide the material and/or non-material resources necessary for it to sustain itself). The 2015 "refugee crisis" in the European Union provides a good example. This crisis narrative could have led to reassess the efficiency of the main institution tasked with managing the EU external borders, Frontex. Instead, the agency itself promoted crisis narratives that contributed to its expansion and reaffirmed EU externalization policies (Perkowski *et al*. 2023). As we are talking about institutional adaptation, changes do not have to be all-encompassing for the institution to be deemed "resilient". Sometimes, mere adoption of a new policy or mechanism to deal with

the crisis will suffice. An adjustment in official rhetoric, under some circumstances, might even be enough to effectively (re)position the institution as the necessary vehicle for a solution to the crisis –at least until the next crisis moment.

Not all causal stories are equally supportive of institutional adaptation as a solution. Whereas Carstensen (2013: 556–561) describes adaptation as a political necessity in response to crisis, and passivity or resistance as infeasible, this does not have to be the case (Bourbeau and Ryan 2018). Fatalistic understandings of crisis may seem more attractive than alternatives that support a proactive course of action.[3] Therefore, when we look at the productive role of crisis in resilience, we are interested in uncovering how a relationship is established between crisis and solution that makes institutional adaptation happen. This relationship is co-constitutive: not only will the nature of the crisis determine the kind of solution deemed appropriate, but the solution itself will also shape how social actors determine what the crisis is ultimately about.

The following sections look at how crisis narratives unfold to support the resilience of two different types of political institutions: political regimes and international organizations. We apply our framework to the cases of the autocratic regime of Cameroon and ASEAN. We selected and focused our analysis on authoritative, widely read, and clearly articulated texts that engage in the (re)production of crisis narratives in connection with these institutions. In discourse analysis, a corpus is not meant to be exhaustive or fully representative of every text ever written in connection with a particular policy, issue, or event, but merely to allow the researcher to map out key articulations in a debate (Hansen 2006). As such, it is necessarily case-specific. Further, our focus in this article is the deployment of crisis narratives to support institutional adaptation, consequently most of our attention is directed at agents of the institution in question, as those with a clear vested interest in its resilience. We expand our focus, although less systematically, to show that alternative characterizations of crisis exist, and to provide some

evidence of the fact that the crisis narrative in support of institutional adaptation prevails over alternatives, eliciting the support the institution needs to sustain itself for the time being.

In the case of Cameroon, the analysis focuses on two crises: the incursion of Boko Haram (BH) in the northern parts of the country and the "Anglophone Crisis" in its western parts. Domestically and internationally, these crises have been portrayed as existential challenges to the very survival of the State and the regime, which are empirically almost equivalent given the authoritarian nature of the political system. The corpus primarily consists of President Biya's speeches[4], a choice motivated by the fact that he has a clear vested interest in the survival of the regime and therefore in the production of crisis narratives constitutive of institutional resilience. In addition, given the nature of the political system, he can broadly diffuse his narratives, imposing them upon other actors. In other word, while he is not the only actor engaging in the production of crisis narratives, he is a key one, which warrants a focus on this category of texts. The corpus is supplemented by secondary sources providing evidence of the reproduction of the President's narratives in other texts, such as newspapers articles, and of alternative narratives.

In the case of ASEAN, our analysis zooms in on three distinct but interconnected crisis moments that are part of a broader "Myanmar crisis" that has accompanied the development of the institution since the end of the Cold War and continues to be regarded as a litmus test of its ability to remain relevant, credible, and offer timely solutions to regional problems. Texts covered include official documentation by the institution and the Foreign Ministries of its member states, statements by ASEAN officials, complemented by media commentary. In both cases, our analysis reveals the textual mechanisms by which specific representations of the crisis, of the institution's Self, and of its agency in devising an appropriate solution are constructed, how alternatives are sidelined, and to what effect.

The following case studies show how, in each case, the construction of a particular crisis narrative that positions the institution as the only viable solution to crisis acts as the condition of possibility for institutional resilience. We do not investigate whether those narratives elicit belief, first due to empirical challenges in assessing such beliefs in closed political contexts, and second, because our theoretical perspective posits that narratives have effects on social reality irrespective of whether actors "truly believe" them, because they act upon them regardless. To reiterate, crisis narratives, and the specific texts in which they take form, do not alone "cause" institutional resilience –at least not on their own. Following others (see Hansen 2006, among others), we do suggest that discourse holds explanatory power because institutional resilience (as opposed to mere longevity, or alternatively, the institution's stagnating, unravelling, or transforming in more fundamental ways) could not be possible without it.

Crisis narratives and the production of authoritarian resilience in Cameroon

This section focuses on the case of Cameroon as an electoral autocracy (Letsa 2019), headed by President Paul Biya since 1982, and focuses on two specific "disturbing events" that elicited crisis narratives: the Boko Haram (BH) insurgency in the northern regions, and the "Anglophone crisis" in western Cameroon. This is a case where social agents themselves understand the institutions as resilient, as the President himself used the word to describe the situation of the country in his 2016 New Year's Eve address (Biya 2015). The analysis demonstrates how Cameroon is discursively (re)produced as being in a state of protracted crisis in a way that allows the regime to reposition itself as the sole defense against the breakdown of the nation-state. Central to this process is the development of a discursive equivalence between the "republican" institutions of Biya's regime, most notably the Presidency, and the State: as one comes to be construed as intrinsically connected or even confused with the other, a threat

to one becomes a threat to the other, and the resilience of one means the resilience of the other. This equivalence, given the autocratic context, contributes to marginalizing alternative crisis narratives, because criticisms of the President are thus framed as criticism of a State, which is an important legacy of the fight for decolonization.

Terrorists, secessionists and extremists: narrating the multiple threats to the Cameroonian State

The regime's crisis narratives about the BH and Anglophone crises are characterized by processes of naming that delineate the scope of policy options available. Violence in the North of the country rose to prominence in 2013, even though BH fighters hailing from Nigeria had already been present in the region for a few years and were initially tolerated by the regime. Initially, violent acts claimed by BH were blamed by students, bureaucrats, and elites from the main cities on Northern politicians, posited to be acting with the support of France (Pommerolle 2015: 163–164). Some members of the ruling party accused their colleagues from the North of supporting the insurgency in a bid to challenge the government (Tull 2015: 3), developing an alternative crisis narrative not of terrorist threat, but of internal strife within an aging regime.

It is only in 2014 that the narrative of a fight between the Cameroonian State and the *terrorist* group of BH took shape, when a regional mobilization "against terrorism" supported by France started to emerge (Pommerolle 2015: 164). In May 2014, Biya issued "a formal declaration of war on BH" (Tull 2015: 1) in a speech. This narrative quickly took hold in official and media discourse, a process fostered by the regime's repressive capacities, making party members unlikely to break discursive rank, and by the limited freedom of press in Cameroon. Alternative interpretations of the crisis remained in circulation but could never fully challenge the dominant one. Indeed, they could hardly gain the support of key actors. For instance, not only did the narrative of internal regime strife potentially run against Biya and his government's

interests – because it portrayed the regime as weaker than its domestically and internationally projected "propaganda of stability" (Eboko and Awondo 2018: 527) implied –, it was also competing with a well-established and externally supported crisis narrative that understands conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa as deriving from terrorist activity threatening important, if inefficient, state institutions. Broader discursive and material conditions favored the emergence and reproduction of the "terrorism" narrative.

By framing the violence as carried out by "terrorists," Biya's crisis narrative did away with the social and political causes of this violence, preventing further discussion of the unequal distribution of power among regional elites and growing poverty in the North (Tull, 2015: 2). The narrative made it possible to reduce the scope of policy answers to the crisis, as one of the particularities of "terrorism speak" is that it delegitimizes the opponent and places negotiations and peaceful resolution out of reach, since "we don't negotiate with terrorists" (Toros 2008).

A similar process is at work regarding the "Anglophone crisis," which Biya refers to euphemistically as "troubles" (Biya, 2018: 1). The origins of these "troubles" are deeply rooted in the colonial and post-colonial history of the Cameroonian State,[5] but the Anglophone part of the country was brought back into the spotlight in late 2016, in the context of protests led by lawyers and teachers to defend the special status of law and education in English-speaking regions (Pommerolle and Heungoup 2017: 526). In 2017, the government cut down Internet access in these regions for prolonged periods, preventing use of social media to organize protests, earning a condemnation from the UN. The first shutdown started in January 17, a few weeks after Biya, in his New Year's Eve speech, blamed multiple deaths and the destruction of private and public property on a "group of extremists protesters, manipulated or instrumentalized" (Biya, 2016), contrasting this violence with lawful protests. A year later, he mentioned that the government had responded to valid grievances, distinct from the "secessionist project" imposed "through violence" (Biya, 2017b: 3). This crisis narrative

delegitimized the mobilization and provided the rationale for a twofold solution: repression for grievances deemed secessionist, and dialogue and concessions for the other, valid ones. The narrative work over this crisis was therefore more complex, as it attempted to define and differentiate legitimate and illegitimate claims, and this complexity has been reflected in a terminology that remained in flux. For instance, protesters were still described as "terrorists" in media discourse, including in the *Cameroon Tribune,* which is owned by the government (Tabe and Fieze 2018: 78–79).

In both "crises", enemies were identified and named, categorized as violent actors, which supported an interpretation of the crises as security ones and, crucially, as posing existential threats to the State, most notably to its territorial integrity. Hence, in the fight against BH, Biya called on "army and nation [to] unite to preserve our territory and our sovereignty" (Biya, 2015: 3). The Anglophone crisis, on the other hand, further threatened the unity of the nation, which in Biya's words is a "precious heritage" that no one has the right to mishandle. Whatever the prior relevance of territorial claims, they lost all legitimacy as soon as they started to compromise, even only slightly, the construction of "national unity" (Biya, 2016: 4). "LE CAMEROUN EST UN ET INDIVISIBLE!" (Cameroon is one and indivisible) is written in all caps in the original French transcription of one of Biya's speeches. The *extremist secessionists* that manipulated the rest of the population into insurgency are presented as betraying the legacy of the fight for independence as a project of self-determination, peace, and economic development in the context of a unified Cameroon. They are also a threat to the republican order, its institutions, and the presidency at their core, having "desecrated" the "symbols of the Republic" (Biya, 2017b: 4).

Institutional adaptation through autocratization and (limited) liberalization

The portrayal of the two crises as existential threats to the Nation-State set the stage for the implementation of specific policies that mostly perpetuated the regime's usual ways to deal with challenges –repression and reelection of the President–, but also implied a degree of institutional change.

In the cases of BH, the narrative of the crisis as a terrorist threat implied institutional solutions that were based on strengthening the security apparatus, transforming it in ways deemed efficient to deal with this specific crisis. Hence, in this case, and contrary to what the authoritarian resilience literature tends to posit, institutional resilience stems not from a carefully orchestrated process of political liberalization, but a process of autocratization. In a regime that had been described less than ten years before as "post-authoritarianism" (Pommerolle 2008), this represents an important transformation. First, to fight BH, the government deployed more military resources in northern Cameroon, fast-tracking recruitment in the security forces (Tull, 2015: 2-3) and eulogizing the troops in official speeches, hereby reinforcing one of the main institution autocratic leaders are relying on for survival. Second, depicting the BH crisis and its protagonists as existential threats also legitimized a policy of "supervised spontaneous support" (Batchom 2016: 286) that invited people to actively back the war through the repurposing and strengthening of pre-existing institutions, in this case vigilance committees implemented by local communities and/or supported by government institutions, who mostly played an intelligence-gathering role. In his 2017 Youth Day address (2017a: 1), Biya celebrated this "determination to serve the Republic" found in security forces and vigilance committees. Third, using the framework of terrorism to interpret the BH crisis provided a rationale for the adoption of new counter-terrorism laws in 2014.

These laws, which adopted a broad definition of terrorist acts that included strikes and protests, were promptly denounced by human rights advocates and opposition parties as a tool to curtail civil and political rights and to eliminate political adversaries in the context of the struggle for Biya's succession (Tull, 2015). This expansive definition is the prolongation of autocratic practices dating back to post-colonial Cameroon, where the figures of the terrorist and the extremist have constantly been reinvented by rulers and used to justify authoritarian policies and the repression of various social groups deemed threatening and presented as the enemy of the Nation-State (Pommerolle 2015: 171). The concept of the Nation-State and the constant discursive reconstruction of its enemies is thus instrumentalized to preserve the integrity of a specific institutional order.

While counter-terrorism laws have been used to deal with the Anglophone crisis as well, for instance to repress journalists, the preeminence of the "secessionist" framing in official discourses about the Anglophone crisis was consequential. It kept open the possibility of another policy option: dialogue (Biya, 2016, 2017b), because negotiating with secessionists, by contrast to terrorists, is acceptable.

A formal National Dialogue was indeed organized in 2019. On the one hand, it was not a new practice in this context: when faced with mounting contestation in the 1990s, the regime did organize a *Conférence Tripartite* (trilateral conference) on the model of the *conférence nationale* (national conference) implemented during the same period in many Francophones African countries. On the other hand, this National Dialogue represented an innovative institutional response given the regime's reliance on repression, even though it was restricted. The power to draw the line between what was negotiable and what was not - the unity of Cameroon - remained firmly in the hands of the ruler, who, as demonstrated earlier, is the one with the power to delineate acceptable and unacceptable claims. Claims that are presented through "verbal escalation, street violence, and the challenge of authority" (Biya, 2016: 4) are

dismissed. For opponents, agreeing to engage in this dialogue therefore implied acknowledgment of the regime as a legitimate partner and ruler, of its institutions as the only space within which to negotiate, and of Biya's power, given that dialogue was framed as *his* initiative. In the end, despite official claims of inclusiveness, the dialogue was limited: important leaders of the contestation were still in jail at the time, the agenda was set by the government, and most of the final recommendations reaffirmed previous promises and policies, such as a commitment to decentralization that Biya had already announced in 2018 (Mehler *et al.* 2021). This is not to say it was inconsequential. As a staging of the regime's political liberalization and willingness to act in favor of peace, one that was addressed in large part to international audiences and aimed at temporarily alleviating the pressure on the regime, the dialogue was successful to some extent. It was endorsed by France, the EU, the African Union and the U.N. Secretary-General, easing previously strained relationships with actors who appeared unconvinced by the narrative of a fight against secessionists and extremists.

In addition, as Biya (2017b: 4) explained, since it was his duty to "ensure republican order, social peace, the unity of the Nation, and the integrity of Cameroon" as the guardian of the legacy of the fight for independence, the two crises represented a direct challenge that he needed to respond to personally. Hence, the "rally around the flag" effect intended by the discourse on the war is a "rally around Biya" effect given the personalization of power at work in the President's speeches. He is, for instance, the one who gave democracy to the Cameroonians, referring to "the democratic ideal I proposed to the Cameroonian people" (2016: 3). The representation of Biya as the last and only defense against the breakdown of the state is also reproduced in calls for his candidacy for each presidential election (Manga, 2018), saturating and framing public discourse around the issue. It also legitimates circumventing constitutional rules: in 2011, the Parliament reformed the Constitution to allow the President to run for more than two consecutive terms. Consequently, Biya's reelection should not be equated

with an absence of change: institutional reform is what enabled this outcome, which demonstrates the deep intermixing of dynamics of continuity and change that constitute institutional resilience. In the discursive architecture built by the regime, a threat to Biya's power is a threat to the Nation-State, and vice versa. The old President's resilience is the resilience of Cameroon, and the discourse of crisis is a resource to continue to rule.

The case of authoritarian resilience in Cameroon in a context of multiple identified "crises" provides us with important insight into how institutional resilience is constituted. The co-occuring crises narratives contribute to the simultaneous implementation of a priori antithetical solutions: institutional adaptation fostering repression and the circumventing of constitutional rules on one hand, and institutional adaptation fostering (limited) political participation on the other. While the former ensures the support of security actors and hardliners within the ruling party for the regime, the latter ensures that reformers and even opponents continue to engage with the at-risk institutions. Thus, a critical mass of key actors contributes to produce an open-ended process of resilience.

Resilience in international organizations: the case of ASEAN's "Myanmar crisis"

Despite being one of the oldest international organizations of the Global South, ASEAN is often portrayed as being in a state of "never-ending crisis" (Beeson and Diez, 2018). Its ability to manage its "Myanmar crisis", in particular, has been an ongoing challenge for the organization since the end of the Cold War, with dire repercussions on its reputation (Davies 2012). Part of ASEAN's problem is self-inflicted, as it faces persistent criticism for its "constructive engagement" towards Myanmar, characterized by support to the regime against pressures by external actors, non-confrontational encouragement of moderate political change, and prudent criticism within the limits of non-interference (Jones, 2008). This approach continues to inform the organization's thorny relationship with its unruly member state but has also adapted

overtime. In this section, we show how ASEAN's Myanmar crisis unfolds through a series of episodes -Myanmar's accession to ASEAN, Cyclone Nargis, and the Rohingya crisis- packaged into a coherent crisis narrative that feeds institutional adaptation, allowing ASEAN to reposition itself as a necessary solution to the crisis.

The ripple rffects of Myanmar's accession to ASEAN

In the years leading to its controversial accession to ASEAN, Myanmar had already been facing sustained criticism from the international community for its bleak human rights record, with adverse effects on the organization's credibility. Following the repression of nationwide pro-democracy protests in 1988, Myanmar was repeatedly targeted by U.N. resolutions, and ASEAN was faced with increased pressure given its plan to recognize a pariah state as one of its own in 1997. Significant debate took place within the organization, but consensus nonetheless emerged according to which ASEAN had no choice but to insulate both Myanmar and itself from foreign meddling (Ba, 2009: 117–20). This view is well illustrated by comments from Thailand's Foreign Minister at the time, according to whom the "heavy handed, even brutal move [from external, predominantly Western actors] galvanized ASEAN members who balked at the unjustified interference" (Khoman 1998, 84 in Ba 2009, 124). What had been initially conceived as a liability for the organization's image was thus reframed as an act of postcolonial emancipation. By allowing it to join, ASEAN tied its image to Myanmar in a more intricate way than ever before. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright targeted the organization as having a special responsibility in managing its rogue: "Burma's problems now become ASEAN's problems" (quoted in Jones, 2008: 277).

Initial ASEAN statements on Myanmar aligned with a fairly strict upholding of "constructive engagement," referring to "encouraging developments" and commending the "efforts" of the junta on national reconciliation (Jones, 2008). 2003, however, marks a shift in

this approach. The "Depayin Massacre," a government-sponsored mob attack on a convoy of National League of Democracy supporters carrying Aung San Suu Kyi, which killed 70 people, was portrayed by regional leaders as a "setback for ASEAN," a source of "embarrass[ment]", and a dent on its "reputation and image" (Jones, 2008: 279-280). The quality of this event as a "crisis" for the institution, as opposed to an incident rooted in the domestic affairs of a member state, is that ASEAN's credibility was under threat, with serious potential and actual consequences for the organization. This was well exemplified by Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, in the context of the 2003 Bali Summit, and according to whom Myanmar was threatening to derail ASEAN's "very important" agenda towards "irrelevant issues" (quoted in Jones, 2008: 281).

The adaptive shift in ASEAN's approach was accelerated by international pressure in the period leading to Myanmar's scheduled chairmanship of ASEAN in 2006 (Haacke, 2010; Tan, 2013). To preserve ASEAN's image, Myanmar leaders were strongly encouraged by their counterparts to "act in ASEAN's interest" by relinquishing the Chair (Davies, 2012), a request with which they complied in 2005. Against reports that pressure exercised on Myanmar behind closed doors amounted to a breach of ASEAN's non-interference principle, Singapore's Deputy Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar reinterpreted the event as a positive development, demonstrating that "ASEAN has developed to a point where we feel comfortable talking about each other's [domestic] concerns" (quoted in Haacke, 2005: 197). ASEAN's Myanmar crisis, therefore, was repurposed as a proof that the grouping could rise to the challenge and adapt in practice.

Amidst the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's intransigence was described in unusually harsh terms by one official during the following Summit as "a slap in the face of ASEAN," referring to a new realization among the group that it had "lost the credibility and ability to defend Myanmar" (Jones, 2008: 282-283). As a result, increasing efforts were made to insulate ASEAN from Myanmar's alleged attempt to keep it "hostage"

(Ibid). Such rhetorical action put additional pressure on the recalcitrant member while portraying ASEAN as the victim of its own optimism, in attempts to shield it from criticism that it had been dishonestly complacent. This proved especially useful in the face of the 2007 Saffron Revolution. In response to the junta's violent crackdown of protests led by Buddhist monks, a statement on behalf of the Foreign Ministers referring to their "revulsion" was met with praise in the West (e.g. The Star, 2007). ASEAN's portrayal of its Myanmar crisis as a matter of credibility mixed with its growing ability to take a firm public stand against, thus amending its initial approach, had proven relatively successful in establishing itself as an imperfect but necessary provider of the solution, leading to a relaxation of international pressure (Haacke, 2010: 165). Concerns for the grouping's image, however, continued to inform its relationship with Myanmar.

Cyclone Nargis

When Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar in May 2008, it quickly became clear that the decoupling strategy ASEAN had pursued was no longer tenable. While the international community offered immediate assistance, Naypyidaw obstructed foreign aid from reaching the affected areas, delaying the humanitarian effort with deadly consequences. Myanmar's response to the catastrophe was described as "malign neglect," prompting calls to invoke the responsibility to protect (R2P) principle and force international intervention without the junta's consent. Debates on how to characterize the crisis, and the Myanmar government's growing paranoia, opened up space for ASEAN to position itself, once again, as an unavoidable go-between.

Indeed, ASEAN leaders were consistent in their dismissal of an alternative crisis narrative that was quickly gaining traction among its Western partners, and which portrayed the junta's handling of the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis as a R2P matter. Doing so, they pleaded

in favor of ASEAN taking leadership on the relief effort as the only way to "get around a lot of suspicion [and] mistrust" (ASEAN, 2008) on the part of the junta. For Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo, while "many Western countries" felt that humanitarian intervention "should be forced on [the regime], I don't see how this can be done because if you try to do that, you make the situation worse and will only increase the suffering of the people in Myanmar" (quoted in Haacke, 2009: 172). ASEAN's Secretary-General, Surin Pitsuwan, also criticized invoking R2P because "it won't work" and doing so would be "giving ASEAN a kiss of death" by branding the grouping's tireless efforts a failure prematurely (quoted in Haacke, 2009: 173). On May 19, Myanmar gave its conditional acceptance to a multilateral relief effort as long as it was led and coordinated by ASEAN, with the guarantee that "international assistance would not be politicized". The ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis, supervised by a Tripartite Core Group consisting of representatives from Myanmar, ASEAN, and the UN, acted as the main conduit of humanitarian assistance in affected areas. This mechanism, the first of its kind in the context of ASEAN, is yet another departure from its initial approach. It would also serve as an important precedent for its handling of future moments in its "Myanmar crisis."

Nargis was simultaneously framed as a threat to ASEAN and a demonstration of its ability to develop adaptative, effective solutions to the "surprising event." ASEAN was presented as having surmounted intra-mural tensions while preventing the international community from ceding to interventionist impulses potentially leading to tragic consequences, thus justifying its existence against critics pointing to its impotent and obsolete character. According to Lee Hsien Loong, the "crisis […] tested ASEAN's unity", but in the end the organization could not "stand aside" and, as a result, "the situation [was] clearly better than if ASEAN had not intervened" (National Archives of Singapore, 2008). By overcoming a "moral dilemma" in order to "help people", ASEAN had proven to the world that it was an effective

institution that warranted support from the international community (MOFA Singapore, 2008). The organization's ability to impose its narrative on Nargis, which presented institutional adaptation as a necessity while ensuring the compatibility of the response with existing practices of non-interference, is what paved the stage for ASEAN's first-ever collective engagement in a disaster management and humanitarian assistance mission. This important precedent would significantly inform ASEAN's response to the Rohingya Crisis.

The Rohingya crisis

In May 2012, a surge in sectarian violence in Rakhine was widely interpreted among policymakers and commentators as a sign that "ASEAN's credibility [was] again at stake" due to its ongoing Myanmar problem (Kassim, 2012). Surin called for an ASEAN-led humanitarian intervention to prevent the crisis from destabilizing the region, and his offer was turned down by Naypyidaw on the basis that it was a domestic matter. Surin was effective, again, in dismissing this alternative framing, arguing that the crisis could lead to the "radicalization" of the Rohingya, thus threatening regional stability (VOA News, 2012). ASEAN could not "be perceived to be standing by," especially now that Myanmar was finally scheduled to take the helm of the organization in 2014 (Kassim, 2012).

ASEAN's approach to the Rohingya crisis, in line with established practice of non-interference in the grouping, initially involved quiet diplomacy, carefully worded statements from individual members, and discussions outside the purview of ASEAN. In May 2015, the discovery of mass graves near the Thai-Malaysian border and widespread international condemnation of the refoulement of refugee boats by Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia pushed ASEAN in a different direction.

On May 20, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand held a trilateral ministerial meeting to "find a solution to the crisis", described as an influx of "irregular migrants" impacting the

national security of neighbouring countries. The meeting's framing of the crisis was reminiscent of its portrayal of the Cambodian conflict. While some reference was made to the need to tackle "root causes" that remained unspecified, there was no mention of the situation in Rakhine, and no substantial discussion of a role for ASEAN in mitigating the crisis (MOFA Malaysia, 2015). On May 29, Myanmar agreed to take part in a meeting in Thailand as long as the term "Rohingya" was not used. The responsibility of the crisis was instead attributed to "transnational organized criminal syndicates", while Myanmar was presented as a "most affected country" (MOFA, Thailand 2015). An Emergency ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime Concerning Irregular Movement of Persons in Southeast Asia in July 2015 adopted a similar stance, but brought the issue into ASEAN's fold. At that time, ASEAN was the target of an emerging consensus both within and outside the institution that the plight of the Rohingya, which had been ongoing for years, had reached existential proportions from the standpoint of the organization as "the greatest embarrassment [it had] ever faced" (Hunt, 2015).

In this context, ASEAN member states proved increasingly prone to express their disquiet openly, and the tone by which they conveyed it was unprecedented. Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razaq, in radical departure from the "ASEAN Way," referred to the Rohingya crisis as a "genocide" (Reuters, 2016). At a Retreat, Malaysia's Foreign Minister, in the presence of his Myanmar counterpart, also expressed "grave concern" at the "troubling reports" of brutal acts carried out by the military in Rakhine and called on the regime to dispel allegations of "genocide" by taking "the necessary steps to restore peace". He proposed that ASEAN coordinated humanitarian assistance in Rakhine on the basis of the Nargis precedent, stressing that its quality as a R2P matter could no longer be dismissed (MOFA Malaysia, 2016).

A wave of attacks carried out by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army in August 2017, met with a brutal crackdown by the military, then led to an additional 700,000 people crossing the border into Bangladesh. On September 11, the U.N. High Commissioner on Human Rights

called the military operation a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" (UN, 2017). On September 23, a particularly complacent Chairman Statement released by the Philippine's Secretary of Foreign Affairs on behalf of the ASEAN Ministers (ASEAN, 2017) saw Malaysia formally disassociating itself from what it referred to as "misrepresentation of reality" (MOFA Malaysia, 2017). The view that the grouping had not taken substantive measures on the Rohingya issue, beyond limited rhetorical action and quiet diplomatic pressure, was increasingly prevalent both within and outside the organization.

In November 2018, ASEAN was finally in a position to try and mend its image, after Myanmar formally extended an invitation to the grouping to dispatch a needs assessment team in Rakhine to "facilitate the repatriation process". In its strongest formulation yet, again breaking from usual practice, ASEAN Leaders "*expect[ed]* Myanmar to *seek accountability* by carrying out an independent and *impartial* investigation of the alleged human rights violations and related issues [emphasis added]" (ASEAN, 2018). The lack of attention given to root causes and the absence of any reference to Naypyidaw's responsibility in the assessment team's report led to ASEAN being accused of "turning a blind eye" to "atrocities" carried out by the Myanmar military (HRW, 2019; Forum Asia, 2019). Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir lambasted Myanmar at the U.N. General Assembly, again referring to the situation in Rakhine as a "genocide" (Channel News Asia, 2019). This framing of the crisis was now supported by a new U.N. report stating that "Myanmar continue[d] to harbour genocidal intent" (Al Jazeera, 2019).

These forms of institutional adaptation could easily be dismissed as merely "rhetorical" at first glance. Yet this focus on the way ASEAN adapts its narrative on Myanmar as an exemplar of institutional adaptation makes much sense given that this organization's "soft institutionalism" leads it to operate primarily through the issuance of statements as institutional "action." Nonetheless, ASEAN has proven remarkably capable of attracting ongoing support to its approach while dismissing alternative problem-solution pairings, and despite a well-

documented inability to offer tangible responses to its "Myanmar crisis," among many other regional challenges (Martel 2022).

As shown by recent developments surrounding the 2021 coup, ASEAN's discursive handling of its never-ending "Myanmar crisis" is ongoing, and it is highly unlikely that it will be resolved anytime soon. It will continue to put a strain on the organization's credibility, and lead to calls that it should be supplemented by, or even dismissed in favour of, alternative solutions. It remains to be seen how ASEAN will continue to respond to growing yet familiar claims that it is an ineffective, obsolete institution that should be replaced. If the past is any indication, however, this response will come in the form of additional adaptive responses, grounded in a particular crisis narrative that presents the crisis as a threat to the organization that calls for renewed commitment to its model as the only realistic solution. Despite ASEAN being consistently blamed for, at best, blatant inefficiency and at worse, complicity when it comes to Myanmar, the notion that if only it stepped up through some further adjustment of its approach, the crisis would be mitigated, remains surprisingly persistent (e.g. Kang, 2017). ASEAN has repeatedly emerged from this persistent crisis by highlighting its capacity to adapt in order to better manage crisis, which now extends to R2P-related matters –something that was unimaginable in previous "Myanmar crisis" moments.

Conclusion

This article has built upon recent debates on institutional resilience in Comparative Politics and International Relations by looking at crisis as a fundamental part of this process, emphasizing the crucial role played by crisis narratives. Our approach to institutional resilience allowed us to emphasize crisis alongside adaptation in a comprehensive understanding of resilience as a process always in the making. Instead of treating crisis and resilience as sequential steps along a linear timeline, we have shown how they are mutually constituted. Moving away from an

understanding of crisis as an objective event situated "out there" that is readily available for the researcher to observe, we made a case for the systematic re-evaluation of our preconceived notions about crisis, and for shifting the emphasis on the effects of crisis narratives on political institutions. Understanding resilience requires a rigorous investigation of who is involved in the construction of an event as crisis, what causal narratives are competing and/or dominating, and how they relate to specific processes of change.

Through our examination of Cameroon and ASEAN's Myanmar crisis, we have shown that resilience is not simply born out of crisis, or merely a mechanical reaction whose absence suggests the essential inadequacy of a structure. It is a product of contestation between alternative interpretations of the "surprising event", and of the ability of a particular crisis narrative that repositions the institution as the most appropriate solution to uncertainty to prevail over alternatives.

In the case of Cameroon, the depiction of BH actions and of the Anglophone mobilizations as existential threats to the postcolonial Nation-State and the values it is founded upon legitimizes both the reinforcement of the repressive apparatus and the opening of novel, limited spaces of political participation. The institutions of the state and of the regime are further conflated through crisis narrative that constructs President Biya as the guarantor of the Nation-State. His continued reelection thus appears as an existential necessity, in a context where there is no alternative but chaos. Hence, institutional resilience here is based on discourses constantly reproducing the leader as the only one able to provide stability, all the while keeping stability elusive through the constant reproduction of the notion of a state in crisis.

In the case of ASEAN, the institution's discursive intervention in the construction of "crisis moments" allowed it to turn what was broadly conceived as a potential last nail in the coffin of the regional process into an opportunity to reassert itself as an unavoidable provider of solutions to crisis through institutional adaptation. Each crisis moment, and the institutional

response it enabled, informed how the organization would tackle the next one. Yet this was only possible by the active participation of key ASEAN policymakers who connected the dots in a way that fostered institutional resilience, as opposed to passivity or fundamental transformation.

In both instances, political institutions deemed to be stuck in a "never-ending" crisis came out of the discursive process transformed, still fragile, but reaffirmed as the only solution to the crisis, at least for the time being. This is resilience at work. Crisis narratives, as such, form an unavoidable part of the institutional resilience story.

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[1] Institutions are the "formal and informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions, embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy" (Hall and Taylor 1996: 938).

[2] On Cameroon, see: Konings 2011; Emmanuel 2013; Morse 2017 among others. On ASEAN, see, among others: Ba 2009, Acharya 2014, Martel 2022.

[3] Research on climate change, for instance, shows how beliefs that climate change is "unstoppable" hampers policy action despite an acute sense of crisis (Mayer and Smith 2019).

[4] The original speeches (in French) are available on the website of the Presidential Office: https://www.prc.cm/fr/actualites/discours

[5] The "issue" of the Anglophone regions dates to when the territory, a German protectorate, was divided after the first World War between France and Great Britain under the supervision of the League of Nation (Pommerolle and Heungoup 2017: 526).

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