



# Resonating Crises: A Longitudinal Study of Ruptures in Times of Crises

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## Abstract

Crises have usually been considered temporary states of exception, but research is increasingly exploring slower, less visible, and more chronic crises, acknowledging that they differ in their characteristics and experiences. Echoing these shifts, we explore how crises and ruptures resonate through time. Using natural language processing and conventional qualitative methodologies to analyse diaries written over more than two decades, we noticed that events people reported as personal ruptures did not always correspond to societal crises. Instead, they often invoked other crises meaningful to them. The ruptures were also rarely experienced as isolated events but, at times, seemed to “resonate” with one another on different grounds. These resonances could either mitigate or amplify how crises and ruptures were experienced. Based on an analysis of one diary, written by a man in his seventies from the southern United States, we theorise three characteristics of resonances: temporal, embodied, and cumulative. We argue that resonance may also influence whether the crisis becomes a rupture, how it is made sense of, and acted upon – in other words, whether it contributes to the person’s development.

**Keywords** Crises · Longitudinal · Ruptures · Development · Diaries

## Introduction

Still feeling somewhat dazed after two days on the endless American interstate, we left our hotel around 8:30 a.m. to meet Brickpaver at his house. After five minutes on foot, we entered a neighbourhood with detached houses and the incessant presence of cars diminished. We spotted Brickpaver’s brightly coloured house from a distance and noticed a figure moving about on the front porch, camouflaged by a cocoon of trees and bushes. A quaint miniature gate, barely high enough to keep a toddler out, opened to a brick-paved path lead-

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ing to a raised porch with Roman columns. Brickpaver met us at the stairs with a welcoming smile. He quickly invited us inside the house, where he had lived for nearly 30 years, and about which we had already read so much. The interior was homely and antique, with yellow walls and custom-made panelling. Thick red patterned carpets covered much of the floor, and most of the furniture was made of dark wood. Chandeliers dangled from the ceiling and the strained-glass windows gave the living and dining rooms a cosy lighting. After some excellent home-cooked waffles with blueberries and a generous amount of syrup, Brickpaver gave us a tour of his house, including a listen to the phonographs he collects and restores, now displayed throughout his house. We eventually settled on his front porch – our preferred spot for the many conversations and interviews that followed over the next five days.

At the time we met Brickpaver, we were one year into a project studying online diaries written by people over the course of 20 years. Out of several hundred diaries found on different online platforms, we had focused on around ten, aiming to explore people’s continuous and open-ended experiences of major societal crises. Using a combination of natural language processing and conventional qualitative methodologies, we explore when crises appear throughout the life course, how these processes unfold over time, and how the past feed forward into the future. We argue that these questions are especially pertinent because existing research often lacks the longitudinal depth to capture and theorise such processes. Furthermore, we noticed that events diarists reported as personal ruptures did not always correspond to societal crises. Instead, they often invoked other crises meaningful to them. The ruptures were rarely experienced as isolated events but, at times, seemed to “resonate” with one another on different grounds. When we asked Brickpaver about some of these ruptures and crises he had written about, he described one particularly difficult period years back, saying “[things were] building up, building up, building up”. We will explore this experience of “building up” because it suggests that crises can resonate across time with one another. Such resonance might also be consequential for whether a crisis becomes a rupture and how it is made sense of and acted upon – in other words, whether it participates in a person’s development.

We will explore this intuition by first discussing the existing literature on crises and ruptures, followed by articulating a working definition of *resonance* from a sociocultural psychological perspective. We will theorise three characteristics of resonances (temporal, embodied, and culminative), and, in what follows, present them through Brickpaver’s diary. For each, we show the conditions under which they emerge, the scale at which they operate, and what their consequences might be.

## Theorising Crises and Ruptures in the Life Course

The use and interrogation of the concepts of *crisis* and *rupture* have seen an uptick in recent years, likely because humanity is said to live in a condition of “polycrisis” (Henig & Knight, 2023). At a societal level, crisis is usually defined as a temporary state of exception requiring a decision (Koselleck & Richter, 2006). However, recent research has attempted to break the concept from its somewhat privileged understanding of temporality (Vigh, 2022). Crisis has commonly been defined as “a rupture in the normal passage of time, which happens ‘at the moment of danger’” and “implies a before and after” (Fassin, 2022, p. 461), but many peo-

ple around the world live in a state of chronic crisis (Vigh, 2008). Vigh argues that crisis are not always an unexpected, “single incident” but rather “an expected state of affairs” (2022, p. 523). Furthermore, crises are rarely monolithic; they come in a wide array of shapes and sizes, operating on different temporalities, intensities, and scales (Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022; Rydstrom, 2022). Some crises are displaced and slow-building (Nixon, 2011), others are recurrent (Pedersen, 2023) or chronic (Vigh, 2008). Crises are also not static. For example, a crisis can shift from being catastrophic to chronic (Zhukova, 2022) and vice versa. The challenge is finding an approach that can capture the different characteristics of crisis and trace their trajectories, which ultimately shape how people experience them (Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022). Echoing Mbembe and Roitman call “to treat the crises as, above all, lived experience” (1995, p. 325), we are concerned with how people experience crises over time.

Research on the connection between ruptures, transitions, and societal crises (e.g. Zittoun et al., 2008) has highlighted that people do not experience crises the same way. Unlike events designated politically or collectively as crises, the notion of “rupture” designates events subjectively experienced as a disruption or suspension of their taken-for-granted realities across multiple domains, for example people’s relation to time or space (Hawlina & Zittoun, 2025). Ruptures also often imply a sense of heightened uncertainty, which can be followed by positive or negative affects (Zittoun et al., 2003). Some ruptures are anticipated (e.g. starting university) while others are unexpected (e.g. the sudden loss of relative). Ruptures usually punctuate the normal progression of events towards the future and therefore require integration of the new situation, and, as such, are likely to instigate a transition, whereby the individual seeks to re-establish an equilibrium. Transitions can therefore be described as catalysed processes of change (Kadianaki & Zittoun, 2014). People can use a variety of elements as resources to support both continuity and change – these include other people, past experiences, and cultural elements, among others (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010b). Eventually, transitions can lead to qualitative transformations in the form of new understandings, identity positions, sense making, or imaginations. Studying people living in countries at war or under changing political regimes, some have argued that what is politically or historically considered as a crisis might, though not categorically, constitute ruptures in people’s lives. For example, a young woman first experienced the crisis of Great Britain entering Second World War when queuing for potatoes for the first time (Zittoun et al., 2008). More personal ruptures can overshadow societal crises. For the same young woman, the rupture of starting a new professional life overshadowed the duress of life during the war (Zittoun et al., 2012). However, so far, ruptures have usually been studied as isolated events in people’s lives. Yet, if collective crises evolve over time, people’s experiences of ruptures are equally likely to change and entangle with previous experiences. This is why we approach them from a life course perspective.

Life course research has long claimed that people develop through their entire life, and that these lives are marked by transitions situated in biographical and historical times (Elder & Giele, 2009; Levy et al., 2005). From this perspective, crises and transitions might be consequential for upcoming life experiences, depending on how much these crises correspond to normative expectations, if these are socially shared, or if societal resources exist to ease a person through a given type of crisis. People find resources along their life courses, but when they lack resources, crises can become vulnerabilising events (Spini et al., 2017), especially when they accumulate (Zittoun et al., 2023a, b).

Based on these different lines of research, we extract three assumptions that underpin our approach to ruptures and crises. First, societal crises do not always translate into experienced ruptures. Second, events experienced as ruptures are not isolated but part of a biography (Elder & Giele, 2009). Third, given people's fundamental need to attribute sense to their experience, people might draw on their experiences of previous ruptures to make sense of current ones. We assume that crises and ruptures both destabilise normal expectations and make the future opaque, yet they differ in scale. "Crisis" is used to designate destabilising events that a group or community label as such, though always a matter of perspective, whereas a "rupture" denotes destabilising events for the individual, which can correspond to crisis. This working definition is productive for teasing out tensions between the individual and collective experience. And indeed, our reading of diaries suggests that the modalities of sense-making of various experienced ruptures might somehow "resonate". If so, how can we qualify such resonance, and what might its effect be?

## A Working Definition of Resonances

What do we mean, when we say that crises or ruptures "resonate" for a person? In psychology and developmental studies, the term "resonance" captures the dynamic feedback loops between new cues to which an organism is exposed and its existing knowledge. For example, referring to Piaget's circular and multimodal reactions (Piaget, 1952), Grossberg's "adaptive resonance" refers to a situation in which a child responds with physical movements to an adult's vocalisation on the same rhythm and intensity; such "resonance" between experiences facilitates their integration into an existing scheme (Grossberg, 1976). A more recent usage of the notion has resurfaced in research on cultures of listening (Motzkau & Lee, 2023) emphasising the attention one may have to what people mean beyond their explicit discourse. Drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy's (2002) work on listening, Motzkau and Lee define resonances as "relationship between different bodies vibrating at the same frequency, their ability to affect one another" (2023, p. 13) making it an intersubjective and embodied process that informs sense making. Relatedly, sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2019) defines resonance as a mode of relating to the world and as counter-reaction to his diagnosis of its alienating acceleration. Hence, resonance is a form of relationship between two entities – the person and the other, the person and the world – with a dynamic and dialogical quality. In the fields of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, the term resonance is used to describe intersubjective dynamics, such as the emotional responses involved in transference and counter-transference, accounting for reverberations between unconscious and conscious processes (Amado, 2010), or the resonance between a social event and more personal psychic reality (Jeammet, 2007). Such resonances would be characterised by a mode of thinking which is "fluid, intuitive, figurative and imaginative" (Lito, 2016, p. 237). Relatedly, "historical analogies" capture the processes through which people draws on the collective past to make the unfamiliar familiar and guide action in the present (Wagoner & Herbig, 2025). Taken together, these accounts highlight that resonances can be developmental, happen across time, reflect a relation within the person, or between the person, others and the world, and might emerge under shared characteristics, such as their rhythms, intensity or frequencies.

We aim to account for resonance in people's diary writing, focusing on the psychological processes that might be revealed in journaling (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010a). We attempt to stabilise the notion, drawing on the uses of resonance in psychology that investigate potential developmental processes in a person's relation to the world. Resonances can metaphorically be described as physical properties of different entities entering into vibration, despite differences in their material properties. Instead of searching for resonance in the relationship between the person and others or the world, we focus on inner dialogue, as it can be revealed in diary writing. We assume that resonance occurs when one's present, past and imagined experiences are experienced as co-vibrating. More specifically, resonance occurs when a person's experience awakens another through associations. We attempt to enrich a simple physical metaphor with attention to psychological movements that may be awakened by any experience as represented in the diaries.

Scientific metaphors have the advantage of carrying with them a whole domain that enables analogical reasoning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and can foster scientific imagination (Zittoun, 2021b). The metaphor of resonance carries acoustic and physical properties that open up new possibilities: if two entities of different kinds resonate and vibrate, can the vibration become amplified or saturated? Can two contrary vibrations neutralise each other? What happens when frequencies desynchronise? We thus propose to further explore and qualify resonances between experienced crises, as these can appear in diary-writing.

Inspired by the works discussed, we approach resonances as intra-psychological dialogue between events through which people make sense over the life course. We assert that resonance can occur when a person experiences a form of association between ruptures and/or crises – either based on a resemblance of types of events, affective commonalities, similar sense-making, or any other association. Resonances connect temporally distant events and can feed forward.

More precisely, we distinguish between three characteristics of resonances: (1) a temporal resonance, designating the phenomenon by which experiences in the present resonate with one or more experiences from the past; (2), an embodied resonance occurring when a current event resonates with the embodied feeling of a previous event; and (3), cumulative resonance, referring to the resonance arising from different near-simultaneous ruptures. The proposed characteristics can co-exist but can also occur alone and, as we will discuss, operate on different levels of semiotic mediation via diary writing (Valsiner, 2021). We will also discuss the consequences of such resonances. Following the metaphor, resonances might either amplify each other up to saturation, which may be experienced as a feeling of being overwhelmed (akin of depression, vulnerability, etc.) or become mutually softening – meaning that the experience of one might become a resource used to make sense of present or future experiences.

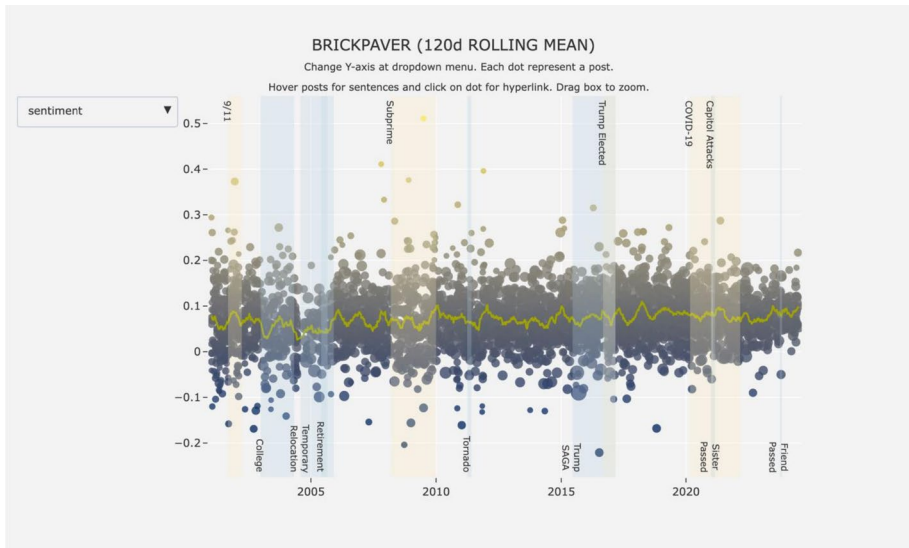
## Method

Resonances are elusive because of their non-normative emergence and intra-psychological nature. However, we maintain that studying online diaries written for more than 20 years allows us to identify resonances when they occur, the events they connect, and their possible developmental implications.

Diaries are usually viewed as “windows” into people’s lived experiences, offering advantages when researching psychological processes over time (Pinheiro et al., 2022; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2018) and within specific sociopolitical periods (Hyers, 2018) – such as pandemics (Hawlina & Zittoun, 2025) and wars (Sederberg, 2017). However, research shows that the act of writing can be transformative in and of itself (Bernal Marcos et al., 2023), and that diaries become artefacts through which help people later reflect on past experiences (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2021). First, diaries are written close to real-time and capture life as lived forward (Kaun, 2010), meaning that diarists do not know where their story will end at the time of writing, making them ideal for studying how people make sense of crises and ruptures. Second, these online diaries are “naturally” occurring data (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2018) and are therefore likely to reflect what is significant to the diarists at the time of writing, providing the opportunity to explore when destabilising events appear and in what form. Third, diaries have an inherent longitudinal character, qualifying them as optimal for capturing the transformations that happen over time – changes that are likely missed by more retrospective designs. Combined, these features make diaries particularly adept at capturing when and how people experience crises and ruptures over time, including their possible resonances.

We scraped several online journalling platforms and contacted 266 people, who had written consistently for more than ten years, of whom 41 consented to participate. This subset of 41 diaries contains more than 80,000 entries and 35 million words, spanning from the late 1990s to mid-2024. We decided to focus on people who have written consistently for more than 20 years, and who have lived through three societal crises: the 9/11 attacks, the Great Recession, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the number of words in the diaries, which would require hundreds of days of non-stop reading, we used natural language processing to assist the analytical process and visual mapping of the diaries. To explore resonances, we selected a single diary as a case study for a deeper and longitudinal exploration of how one person experiences crises and ruptures over time. Such an approach has, among others, proven useful for studying manifestations and imaginations of the climate crisis in the life of a single person across two decades (Perrin & Pedersen, 2025). Case studies are generally useful for capturing contextual details (Flyvbjerg, 2011) and processes (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010) without losing sight of individual experiences and agency (Cornish, 2020). In particular, we chose the diary of “Brickpaver” because it contained several instances of resonances, and he was one of the few diarists we had met and maintains contact with. His diary contains more than two million words, and to aid the analytical process, Alex Gillespie created the initial script for the visualisation presented below in a slightly modified form (Fig. 1).

This visualisation displays Brickpaver’s entire diary until the cut-off date in late-2024. Each dot represents a journal entry, and the yellow line is a 120-days rolling sentiment line, calculated with VADER (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014), indicating whether the writing is positive or negative. Light-coloured columns highlight societal crises in yellow and personal ruptures in blue. In practice, we use the peaks and drops in the sentiment line to orient our reading – what others have called “zooming in”, that is, moving from general measurements to thicker descriptions and the identification of processes (Gillespie et al., 2024a, b). Any change in the sentiment line – positive or negative – may suggest that the diarist experienced a significant event (Zittoun et al., 2023a, b), which we then examined through closer qualitative reading. The boxes indicating potential crises or ruptures were used to assess whether



**Fig. 1** Visualisation of Brickpaver's diary

changing sentiment corresponded with specific events. Throughout this process, we iteratively constructed chronological biographies (Rosenthal, 1993), capturing major events and gathering extracts thematically around the most prevalent crises in the diary. In this iterative process of zooming-in and out, we first theorised that resonance might explain how diarists drew links between crises and ruptures. We then abductively went through the various crises defined in the visualisation above with an openness to surprises (Earl Rinehart, 2021; Gillespie et al., 2024a, b), which ultimately produced the 3 characteristics of resonances. These are presented through illustrative examples in the analysis below (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Yet, diaries represent just a fraction of people's experiences (Lejeune, 2009) and do not always report events in the order they are experienced, so we felt it was important to ask diarists about significant events in their lives. In addition, analysing texts is, of course, open to interpretation, and we wanted to discuss our readings with the diarists to limit epistemic violence (Cannella & Lincoln, 2007). We therefore contacted diarists still actively writing and with those who agreed, held an online conversation about the project and their writing. Several diarists also agreed to meet us in person. We were privileged to visit a few diarists and spend time with them to strengthen our understanding of biographical events and their chronology, and to discuss and expand our interpretations of their diaries. We saw where they lived, partook in some of their routine activities, and got a glimpse into their life and social circle. Such patchwork ethnography (Günel & Watanabe, 2024) combined with the diary analysis helped integrate first-person and a third-person perspectives (Zittoun et al., 2023a, b) because we could gather information on people's lives not readily available in the diaries – such as the socio-material landscape and sensory experiences (Pink, 2015) – and contrast ongoing and retrospective accounts (Zittoun, 2009). Finally, our visit also represented a modest attempt at reducing the stark informational asymmetries by putting a face to some of the people whose diaries we were reading and analysing from afar, granting them the possibility of asking questions about us and the project. Indeed, by the time we arrived,

we had read large chunks of their diaries and created biographies, while the diarists had little clue who those strangers from Switzerland were. This discrepancy was apparent in how the diarists sometimes ended sentences with “as you already know”. Visiting the diarists was a small step towards a more processual and dialogical ethical engagement (Cannella & Lincoln, 2007; Marková et al., 2020). We remain in semi-regular touch with them and now feature in their diaries as well.

In 2023, we visited four diarists selected pragmatically because they fulfilled the “writing criteria” and had agreed to meet us. Brickpaver was one of the diarists we visited and spent several days with. We took walks, spent many hours talking on his porch, listened to his phonographs, met his friends, and much more. We have recently visited him again, although we do not include our recent dialogues in this paper. We believe that ethical responsibility extends beyond obtaining consent and informing participants, so we share and discuss anything written about him to ensure that he is comfortable with how his story is conveyed. This ethical stance requires an ongoing commitment and transparency and, to some extent, more collaborative research process.

## Resonances in Brickpaver’s Life

Brickpaver is a seventy-something retired automobile assembly-line worker. Early in his life, Brickpaver developed an interest in phonographs and began to collect and restore them, as well as to frequent collectors’ societies. He is also an avid brick collector – hence the name. These two hobbies have led to countless road trips through the US to attend conferences, auctions, and brick swaps. Since the late 1990s, he has lived in the south in a detached house, now together with two cats, Holly and Snowcat, and one dog, Annie. Like most people his age, Brickpaver has lived through various crises and ruptures, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis in the 1960s, deindustrialisation in the 1980s and onwards, the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early-1990s, 9/11 in the 2000s. In what follows, we explore how more recent crises and ruptures give rise to resonances in Brickpaver’s experiences, and how these resonances contribute to his experiences and responses to them. We do so not chronologically but according to the three characteristics proposed earlier.

### Temporal Resonances

The first characteristic of resonances is their temporal nature. It designates the connections made by a diarist between temporally distinct crises and ruptures, because they make connections between personally relevant events, and/or between events affecting society, as we will show.

Seven days after his first diary mention of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brickpaver linked it to living through the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. While both crises were societal, gay men were disproportionately impacted by the latter, highlighting that societal crises are experienced very differently. In Brickpaver’s case, his past experiences were used to make sense of the present, particularly the “silence” from the policymakers in Washington – a resemblance possibly facilitating the resonance. The following diary entry was written at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic:

19/03/2020: Compare and Contrast. There was a tragic undercurrent in my life all through the 1980's. It started out as a warning of "gay cancer" and pretty much total silence from the nation's leaders in Washington. Sometimes there would be an off-hand joke or snickering from those in power but this oncoming crisis was pretty much ignored. So long as it was only the queers dying nobody cared. I don't think Ronald Reagan ever said the word "AIDS" during his entire administration. Doing a compare and contrast of how I survived the "AIDS Years" to the Corona Virus today, I feel like I've lived a lifetime in the past three months. The dotard (I will not say or type the orange turd's name) totally disregarded the freight train of this pandemic and instead attempted to gaslight the nation.

The first recognised cases of the AIDS epidemic emerged in the early 1980s among gay men in New York and Los Angeles. By mid-1982, a group of community leaders had proposed the term AIDS, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) adopted later that year. The epidemic spread rapidly, but the media gave it little airtime and the sitting president, Ronald Reagan, did not mention AIDS publicly until the fall 1985. Federal funding specifically for AIDS research was also not allocated until autumn that year – four years after the CDC published its first report. This loud silence, invisibilisation, and inaction from the wider community as well as the government caused a massive number of deaths and suffering, and it is this silence that resonates with Brickpaver's experience of COVID-19. He compared the governments presiding over each crisis, referencing the acting presidents at these two times and describing their inaction similarly ("pretty much ignore" and "total disregard"). Ten days after, Brickpaver felt "it is like reliving the worst days of the AIDS crisis":

29/03/2020: This Coronavirus 19 is wearing me out. It is like reliving the worst days of the AIDS crisis. 35 years ago, Ronald Reagan ignored and made jokes of it. The dotard tried the same strategy with the current plague to disastrous results. The outrage over AIDS took years to boil over into the mainstream society. This current plague it has only taken a few weeks.

The resonance was also evident in how Brickpaver began using the term "plague" to describe the COVID-19, which refers back to the term "gay plague" often used in the media at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, fuelling waves of discrimination and stigma. Brickpaver also noticed how different was the time for the public to react to the "disastrous" handling of the crisis. With the AIDS crisis, it took years – and tremendous effort from groups like ACT UP – before the outrage "boil[ed] over into the mainstream society", whereas with COVID-19, it took just weeks.

### Conditions for Temporal Resonances

If we look closer at the resonance, several features may have contributed to the process. First, structurally, the two crises are health-related and impacted some parts of the population disproportionately affected (gay men in one case, older people in the other). Second, both crises lacked a strong institutional response. Ronald Reagan took years to publicly acknowledge the crisis, while Donald Trump suggested that drinking bleach might help.

A third element also emerges related to both crises: the fact that they were experienced as obscuring possible futures.

A few months after the outbreak of COVID-19, testing became widely available, though it also resonated back to the AIDS crisis.

10/07/2020: COVID is hitting close to home now. I would like to get tested but the way the restrictions are all over the place. I'm really not entitled to test as I'm not showing any symptoms. When COVID first began to make the news in early February I had such a sense of *déjà vu*. By the time we hit mid-March I felt I had relived the years of 1987-1992 all over again in just a few short weeks. The parallels of the onset of AIDS and COVID are so similar right down to uncaring, incompetent leadership at the White House. [...] In the 1980's through the early 1990's a positive HIV status was a death sentence. I did not want to know my status. [...] I needed to know if I'd live to see retirement. [...] Blood samples were drawn and sent off. It took two weeks to get the results back. Those two weeks waiting was lived in dread. When I got the results back of HIV- it was like having my life saved and handed back to me. COVID is so much worse. Transmission is so easy, and the lingering effects can be debilitating. [...] I don't foresee any kind of travels in my future. As much as I miss my road trips, I realize it is for my survival to stay in place and isolate.

Although Brickpaver connected AIDS and COVID-19 through the theme of testing, there was also a noticeable difference between the two experiences. During COVID-19, he wanted to get tested, whereas during the AIDS pandemic, Brickpaver initially preferred not to know his status. In both instances, however, being tested shaped his sense of possible futures. During AIDS, getting tested carried significant risk and often had to be done anonymously, as the stigma of being HIV positive could jeopardize one's employment and health insurance. Eventually, Brickpaver decided to get tested at his partner's encouragement and because he needed to plan the future – specifically to know if “[he]’d live to see retirement”. His negative results opened the future again, as captured in his reflection that “it was like having my life saved and handed back to me”, after which he began saving more diligently.

Similarly, during the COVID-19, the future once again felt uncertain. Brickpaver's frequent road trips suddenly came to a halt because he could not imagine how the situation would unfold, and he prioritized preserving his health. He also compared the transmission of both diseases, observing that “COVID is so much worse” implying a greater sense of lack of control. Indeed, with COVID-19 the spread was wider, and as a member of the more vulnerable part of the population, perhaps drawing on his past experience, Brickpaver did not hesitate to get tested.

Hence, Brickpaver's resonance between the two societal crises rests on both structural and biographical analogies – such as governments silencing the crises, personal vulnerabilities, and the link between testing and jeopardizing one's future. Besides aiding sense making processes of the COVID-19 pandemic, we also propose that resonances can produce more lasting patterns.

### Consequence of Temporal Resonance: Developing Resources for Crises

Brickpaver's resonance between major crises and ruptures seemed to have helped him develop resources to handle new crises. The resonance feed forward to support the present crisis. We theorise two main resources: first, a distancing resource that allows him to keep crises and ruptures at arm's length, and second, an ability to recognise the onset of new crises or ruptures and what activities might mitigate these emergent feelings.

In 2014, Brickpaver wrote, "the armor that shields my heart from the sadness and melancholy of loss gets ripped open every year on World Aids Day. I've had my breakdown, time to start building it back up again." Losing his life partner and countless friends during the AIDS pandemic led Brickpaver to erect an armour to prevent his wounds from getting slashed open each year. During our visit in 2023, we asked him about this "armour", and this is what he responded:

Brickpaver: Oh, God. Well, you... You know what's happening, but you don't let it pierce your heart and break you. You have to accept that it's happening, and you have to live with it, but you can't let it destroy you. Because I've seen so many people just... My oldest sister is a perfect example. When my dad died, she never got over that. That just haunted her. She would go down to the cemetery and just cry at his grave scene. She would go down there in the wintertime and have to get towed out. She was just so upset over that loss of her life. And I miss my mom and dad, but if I mourned them in that way, they would come back and kick me in the ass. You know, I know they would. It's just...

While people grief differently, Brickpaver reflected that living through the AIDS crisis had equipped him with the capacity to keep pain and grief at a distance – what he called "an armour". This resource was further supported by maintaining a close group of friends and occasionally using humour to navigate the passing of loved ones. The armour helped him through the experience of losing his parents without being overwhelmed by grief unlike his sister and, more generally, of losing a partner and countless friends to AIDS – all life-defining ruptures. Yet this armour also functioned as a form of self-preservation, akin to Sisyphus' refusal to yield to despair even as he pushes the boulder uphill. By continuing this task, Sisyphus asserts a form of agency and transcends his condition. Similarly, the temporal resonances related to loss provide Brickpaver with a resource that enables him to confront loss without surrendering to the overwhelming pain, thereby containing rather than being consumed by his emotions.

Besides the "armour", Brickpaver also discussed how these resonances fostered an awareness of when grey clouds begin to gather on the horizon. Brickpaver's past experiences with depressive periods or adverse events resonate forward, such that when he "feel[s] life going in that direction again", Brickpaver now recognizes the signals – perhaps the onset of another potential rupture:

Brickpaver: And when I can feel life going in that direction again, which it does. I mean, I, I've gone through a lot of down periods. But you can cope with it so much better. And, and I've got the skills now to, to go with it and, and to combat it.

[...]

Oliver: Do you have any examples of that? So, you say that it allowed you to deal with the situations better?

Brickpaver: Yeah. Well, well like when Trump was elected. You know, that set me in such a, such a sense of depression. But I would journal. I'd work on my journal. And I'd, I'd be working on that. And I stopped watching the news pretty much. I didn't concentrate on that so much. And I would go to Celtic music. And I would have that playing in the background when I would work on my journal. And then I would work out in the yard. And things would just get better. They, you know, I'm not going to say they were ecstatically happy. But that helped me cope with, with the horrible realization that asshole was running the country.

Trump's election in 2016 sent Brickpaver into "such a state of depression". However, instead of being consumed by these feelings, the resonance between crises had taught Brickpaver to recognise the potential onset of a rupture and how to act to mitigate its possible consequences. He mobilised a series of symbolic resources – journaling, listening to Celtic music, working in the garden, or engaging in one of his restoration projects. Thanks to his symbolic competencies, that is, the deliberate use of resources grounding in a reflexive understanding of their effects (Zittoun, 2004), Brickpaver managed to keep the incipient depressive emotions at bay, even if he could not eliminate them entirely. In our conversations, and throughout his diary, we noted how Brickpaver used such activities to manage with possible ruptures: "just some fussy work to keep my mind occupied". This suggests that, over time, resonances themselves can become resources, as Brickpaver learned what to do to maintain a sense of calm despite a potential rupture looming.

Brickpaver appears to experience temporal resonances between ruptures based on diverse circumstances, from structural similarities to positionality and experience of uncertainty. These resonances appear to have an empowering effect by enabling him to recognise emerging ruptures and mobilise resources to handle new ruptures to regulate their potential emotional impact, maintaining them at a manageable level. In this sense, the experiences connected with AIDS resonate forward to support Brickpaver during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Embodied Resonances**

While resonances might be characterised by similarities that people have consciously identified or explicitly articulated, some seem to be experienced more viscerally and in a less semiotically mediated form – a second characteristic that we label "embodied resonance". Embodied resonance occurs when distinct ruptures or crises are linked by the diarist because they invoke similar feelings. Brickpaver's experience of the 9/11 attacks produced an embodied reaction, drawing parallels to a range of other violent societal events. During an interview, he described this embodied experience, revealing the emotional weight that 9/11 carried for him.

Brickpaver: It was, it was almost like how—it was almost like after President Kennedy was shot. There was just an empty, empty hollow feeling inside and you just felt washed out and you just felt dead. It was just a dead feeling that you felt and I'm trying to think of how to describe it. It it's not so much remorse or misery or—it's just such an empty, empty feeling and you just feel bleak and lifeless and like all the color's been taken out of life. And I felt like that with 9/11, and then I felt like that with all the mass shootings. It's like almost every time there's a mass shooting, I would feel that way, and when the Pulse nightclub happened that really sent me on a tailspin.

Brickpaver felt an “empty, empty feeling” and that the “colour [was] taken out of one’s life”, a sensation he had also experienced during Kennedy’s assassination and subsequent mass shootings, particularly the Pulse nightclub (a gay club in Orlando, Florida) attack in 2016 – one of the deadliest shootings. These events all happened unexpectedly and were extremely violent, leading to similar feelings of hollowness and despair. This immediate embodied resonance seemed to be rooted in the similarities between the events, both being abrupt and violent terrorist attacks.

### Conditions for Embodied Resonance

The intensity of the resonance between these events suggests that their emotional load had not been fully semiotically elaborated – that is, contained, symbolised, or transformed into a thinkable or shareable form (Zittoun, 2021a). Consequently, the embodied reaction to violence appears to directly reactivate affects associated with previous ruptures. As Brickpaver wrote, the pulse nightclub shooting evoked “the long repressed feeling”, particularly because it targeted the gay community – a group that had also suffered tremendously during the AIDS crisis.

Another example of embodied resonance occurred in 2011, when a tornado devastated Brickpaver’s town. In this example, again because the immediate – non-mediated – nature of the affects, it is difficult to distinguish the conditions from the resonance itself, as what is reported is an enduring feeling of being emotionally overwhelmed:

2011-05-18: Tuesday morning I approached the church with a dull leaden feeling. I can feel burn-out happening. This feeling reminds me all too well how I lived throughout 1997-1998. I was living with Joe waiting for the elusive transfer south. I was a mess: (not the good kind of mess!) It was in November 1997 I had [partner]’s Cat Chloe put down. That traumatic event was like turning a switch. From that time on I just lived to work. Overtime was off the charts then and I was working 60+ hours a week. That period of time is very painful to look back on for me.□ The dull, dead feeling is returning as I try to do all I can to help in the clean-up. I need to have time to take care of my life. There are stacks of mail to go through and projects of mine to do.

Brickpaver linked the aftermath of the tornado to a burnout and emotional exhaustion experienced in 1997–1998, when a series of personal ruptures coalesced, and his life largely revolved around work. In both experiences, his time was consumed by external demands – either the clean-up after the tornado’s devastating destruction throughout the town, or working up to 60 h a week at the plant. These experiences produced a similar emotional

response: a “dull, dead feeling”. He consciously identified this resonance in his writing and stressed that “[I] need time to take care of my life”, recognising that it is not so much about the events themselves but rather about the continuous toll of work and lack of self-time imposed on him.

By focusing on 9/11 and the period in the late 1990s as examples of embodied resonance, Brickpaver’s experience serves as an illustration of how distinct crises can elicit similar immediate physical and embodied reactions. The violent, sudden nature of 9/11 and mass shootings contrasts with the continuously exhausting toll of the tornado clean-up, but in both cases, part of the resonance had a deeply embodied character. This pattern shows how embodied resonance can manifest across different kinds of crises.

### Consequences of Embodied Resonance

Embodied resonances couple events with similar emotional valences and can create lasting patterns that may resonate forward. One thing is learning to recognise and deal with a crisis intellectually; another is to respond to a more visceral and emotional signal that indicates the onset of a possible rupture. Brickpaver learned through experience what feelings might suggest that grey clouds are on the horizon and also what activities might allow for a little light to shine through. In these situations, he consistently returned to writing, gardening, restoration projects, and other activities to focus on the immediate and diminish the intensity of feelings of despair and hopelessness. Writing about these experiences in hindsight, Brickpaver semiotised them, created distance, and transformed them into resources. However, there is another aspect to resonance that occasionally brings about a “perfect storm” that can be hard to ignore.

### Cumulative Resonances

When ruptures occur in close temporal proximity, the cumulation of events can also resonate, creating the risk of reaching a saturation – we call these characteristics cumulative resonances. These describe different crises and/or ruptures which, when added together, become mutually amplifying. Individual ruptures consequently entangle and bur into each other, impeding sense-making processes. Before visiting Brickpaver, we had formed some assumptions of which periods in his life might have been most challenging. Yet after spending time with him, we learned about an event never mentioned in his diary, one that condensed a long period of hardship and grief. For Brickpaver, this event became “the straw that broke the camel’s back”. Since the road incident emerged in our conversations rather than in the diary, it carries a different analytical weight. Unlike the other extracts, part of its significance may stem from retrospective sense-making. However, as our goal is not to establish timeless truth, and because the resonating events are documented in the diary, we chose to include this example, as it epitomises this type of resonance.

Sitting on his front porch one sunny day in October 2023, Brickpaver spontaneously mentioned a driving infraction that never appeared in his diary. He described it as “the worst thing that ever happened” and said it had sent him “in[to] such a state of depression”. The incident, as he put it, “smacked” him right in the face, leaving him worried that he had disgraced his friends and family and jeopardised up his future. Reflecting on why this event

had felt so devastating, Brickpaver hinted that things had been “building up, building up, building up” in the period leading up to the infraction.

We sought to better understand this cumulation of different ruptures. We asked Brickpaver what had led him to describe this event the worst thing that ever happened, considering everything he went through. It became clear that, at the time of the incident in the late-1990s, Brickpaver had been living through a series of ruptures that seemed to condense into this one event. AIDS had taken his “life partner” and “countless friends”; his mother had passed; a colleague had killed himself; and he found himself stuck “in a limbo”, unable to move into the house he had bought down south. His transfer took a year and half to come through. While waiting, he stayed with a close friend and worked 50 to 60 h a week at the plant to “deaden the pain”, as he put it. The infraction happened during this period.

Brickpaver: Well, it was a culmination. Because all through the 90s, I lost over 50 people that were close to me. And then my mom died. And then [partner’s] cat died on me. When I was trying to move down here, you had the plant up in [north], it didn’t want people to move out because it was going to get them below a certain people level, that was going to change all the union positions around. The union down here didn’t want people to come down because it screwed up their seniority. So, there was nobody to fight for you. There was supposed to be a move coming down here and it just vanished. [...] And so having to go through all of that and have my life be on hold, I was living... I didn’t have anything. Everything I owned was a thousand miles away down here in [city]. And I was just living in limbo. I was working 60 hours a week because there wasn’t anything else to do.

Brickpaver explained that he was stuck due to conflicts between his employer and the union, using the term “limbo” to make sense of the in-betweenness he felt – a space between where he was and where he wanted to be (Turner, 1967). Being “in the zone” of a liminal experience also entails being both out of the social order and socially regulated time (Stenner, 2017). In that sense, Brickpaver use of “limbo” suggests a form of temporal stuckness (Hage, 2009) and lack of temporal agency (Ringel, 2016) – in other words, a “liminal hotspot” (Stenner et al., 2017). He lost countless people close to him and longed to move towards a new life yet found himself unable to. He even drew comparison between his physical appearance and mental well-being. The Brickpaver’s gruelling work schedule, he recalled, had altered his appearance so drastically that a friend suspected he had AIDS because his “face was so grey”.

### Conditions of Cumulative Resonance

Hence, Brickpaver reported that one event – a driving infraction – which from the outside might not appear related to the other ruptures and events, ignited a series of resonance that led to saturation and ultimately became the major tipping point of a personal rupture. We suggest that the previous ruptures he mentioned had accumulated and condensed into this over-charged single event (Ahmann, 2018). This cumulation of ruptures emphasise how experiences of ruptures depend on people’s unique life courses, in which some ruptures become antecedent of others (Rydstrom, 2022). Brickpaver’s trajectory made him particularly vulnerable: his sexual orientation and profession exposed him both to the AIDS crisis

and to the instabilities of the automobile industry and therefore entangled different, seemingly unrelated crises in his life. These entanglements created the conditions for a seemingly negligible incident to become a catalysing crisis, producing the cumulation that Brickpaver described.

### Consequence of Cumulative Resonance

The cumulative effects of resonances differ from the temporal ones in that they generate a form of saturation. In Brickpaver's case, one of the worst moments of his life arose when a wave of previous ruptures condensed into the driving infraction. The sheer intensity and magnitude of this cumulation initially short-circuited the resources that would normally have a mitigating effect. However, since the cumulation of ruptures had placed Brickpaver in a liminal hotspot – a state of stasis – the driving incident may paradoxically have functioned as a rupture that enabled a new developmental movement or transition. Fortunately, at this point, Brickpaver managed to navigate the rupture largely thanks to his friends, who “all came around and got me through it”, becoming a social resource. When the transfer finally materialised, moving south, he said, helped him “reset”: “I just had to walk into the door. And my – it is like my life started again”. His transition was further supported by adopting two kittens from the shelter, “those two kittens came home with me. And they just – once we got into our routine, it was like the clouds parted and the sun came through. I mean, it was just an upward from that time on”. The fact that the driving infraction itself acted as a catalysator may explain why it is not mentioned in the diary, whereas the other ruptures were semiotised through writing.

### Discussion and Conclusions

In this longitudinal analysis of Brickpaver's life and diary, we have conceptualised the psychological concept of *resonance* to capture distinct dynamics related to ruptures and crises, particularly their entanglement over time. We hope to contribute to the literature on resonance, loosely discussed in psychology and sociology. This concept reveals the connections people establish across both personal ruptures and collective crises, often based on resemblances within their experiences as well as through their dialogue with others and the world. Resonances thus constitute a form of *listening in* to one's experience – ideally fostered through diary-writing, which cultivates an inner dialogue (Zittoun, 2014).

Based on Brickpaver's experiences, we theorised three characteristics of resonances: temporal, embodied, and cumulative. Each can emerge under specific conditions of crisis and rupture and operates on different levels of semiotic mediation. *Temporal* resonances arise through similarities in people's sense makings of past and present ruptures and/or crises, as seen when Brickpaver reflected on his current experience in light of past ones. *Embodied* resonances reflect affects that are not yet fully semiotised – feelings first experienced bodily and later rendered comprehensible through writing. *Cumulative* resonances occur when multiple ruptures in close temporal proximity condense into one another, fusing otherwise distinct events. All three types may emerge during either spectacular or mundane events, illustrating the complexity of how individuals make sense of their experience – each life course being unique (Zittoun et al., 2013). This framework highlights that not all crises

become ruptures and, vice versa, not all ruptures become crises: events that appear mundane from the “outside” can radically disrupt a life. We hope this analysis can contribute to the study of crises in the life course in four ways.

First, it advances understanding of the relationship between collective crises and personal ruptures. Research has begun examining diverse crisis experiences as discussed (Fassin, 2022; Rydstrom, 2022), though the connections between crises and ruptures are still not well understood or sometimes assumed. While people may be aware of a collective crisis, it only becomes a rupture when affecting people’s lives – focusing on a single life course and its resonances supports the notion that there is no universal experience of crises. Whether a person experiences crises as a rupture is contingent upon earlier ruptures, their intensity and cumulative effect, and the impact on the future. We suggest that the question of whether crisis becomes a rupture hinge on the nature and characteristics of resonance. Whereas a rupture might derive from the lack of resources (Spini et al., 2017), or absence of resonance, we want to emphasize how past experiences can both be productive and destructive. Crises may resonate in people’s lives when a connection emerges from biographical or historical parallels. People’s life course also informs their emotional reactions, which events resonate, and what stands out during a crisis – that is, their situated experience. While life course research highlights that individual experience of crisis cannot be analysed independently from the life course and wider societal events, we also want to draw attention to the fact that they cannot be defined a priori nor remain temporally static – what destabilises expectations and the future is to be situated across time. For example, a person living through repeated crises might not experience a rupture (Pedersen, 2023) and whether a given crises constitute a rupture might change through time (Hawlina & Zittoun, 2025; Perrin & Pedersen, 2025). Individuals are not blank slates; past experiences resonate new possibly disrupting events, and these rarely occur in isolation. Life course research should therefore be wary about defining crises and ruptures from the “outside” but instead follow people’s ever-changing experiences. This, we propose, is why resonance is useful for longitudinal analysis, especially of naturally occurring and close-to-real-time data.

Second, it contributes to understanding crisis and vulnerability. Tracing the resonances between crisis and rupture over the life course shows how cumulation can lead to saturation and become vulnerabilising (Spini et al., 2017; Zittoun et al., 2023a, b). Conversely, crises and/or ruptures can also inform future imaginations, sense makings, and emotional reactions. Resonances can provide a person with resources to handle new crises – for example, through the recognition of warning signs or strategies for dealing with inchoate ruptures. This point relates to what Papadopoulos (2002) calls “Adversity Activated Development”, or the ability to use a variety of resources to handle the anxiety and uncertainty raised by ruptures (Zittoun et al., 2023a, b). In Brickpaver’s case, turning off the media, listening to music, writing in his journal, and focusing on his restoration project and gardening. Therefore, people can also learn about themselves through crisis experiences, yet excessive resonance can lead to emotional saturation, which constitutes a new personal rupture.

Third, our approach contributes to the understanding of people’s development in the life course. We maintain that a longitudinal perspective, such as the one offered by diaries, can enable researchers to move beyond approaching ruptures and crises as isolated or singular events (Alhadeff-Jones, 2021), and instead explore when and how these might resonate over time (Sánchez-Mira & Bernardi, 2022). This approach foregrounds people’s experiences,

emphasises biographies, and accounts for the wider context to better grasp whether previous crises become resources for navigating present crises – and to highlight how experiences can mitigate or amplify the impact of societal crises. Empirically, it also breaks down the neat temporal distinction between crises that researchers sometimes assume, as the starting and end point marking discontinuity to continuity is difficult to pinpoint. That is, it can be difficult to establish when the development happens and how sense making occurs if crises or ruptures are studied in isolation because the boundaries between ruptures are murky at best and often intertwined across time. From a life course and developmental perspective, we demonstrated that the same rupture could shift meaning over time (Zittoun et al., 2012) and be transformed into resources, for future ruptures, through semiotic elaboration. Hence, the concept of resonance brings a new type of resource sustaining sensemaking processes, for sociocultural psychology. Studying resonances can help research focus on developmental processes associated with crises and ruptures over time, especially if approached with longitudinal methodologies (Hyers, 2018). Development unfolds through both material engagements and symbolic processes. The former involves mobilizing available resources in times of rupture – such as activities, environments, or social support. Symbolic processes are enabled through semiotic mediation, like diary writing, which creates distance from affects and allows for reconfiguring experience. Through writing, a “new sense making experience” can emerge (Zittoun et al., 2023a, b, p. 9), generating novelty and opening the possibility for fresh perspective on the situation recalled in writing.

Fourth, we have attempted to construct an in-depth case study, combining both a longitudinal and ethnographic approach. The use of natural language processing techniques facilitated a multiresolution analysis (Gillespie et al., 2024a, b), which can help researchers navigate the immense and rich longitudinal data, whereas the ethnography added a sensitivity to context of writing and what might potentially be left out of the diaries. We argue that such an approach, albeit time and resource consuming, is a step towards building complex and longitudinal case studies that can capture processes and experiences developing over longer time spans, using rich and readily available material.

Altogether, we propose that the concept of *resonance* both captures how people’s experiences of crises and ruptures reverberate through times and address the limitations of studying these in isolation. We hope that this concept can be useful for teasing out the tensions between the scales – between crises and ruptures – through sensitivity to people’s unique life courses. Furthermore, it can also reveal different ways past events and conditions feed forward, shaping what events destabilise expectations and disrupt imaginations of the future but also help people recognise the clouds on the horizon and how to mitigate them.

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**Data Availability** The data is publicly available and can be made available upon request.

## Declarations

**Ethical Approval and Informed Consent Statements** We have obtained written consent for Brickpaver and have showed him the article before submission to “reconfirm” his consent. The project has also received approval by the ethics committee of the University of Neuchâtel.

**Competing interests** The authors declare no competing interests.

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