

Reworking Resilience

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Reworking Resilience: A Conceptual Framework

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Resilience – a term that describes “a system's capacity to absorb disturbance and still retain its basic function and structure”—has relatively suddenly become prominent in conversations about global and planetary conditions (Walker and Salt 2006, p.1); in 2012 the term was even given the title of “word of the year” (Bergman 2012, Juniper 2012). A notable feature of this prominence is the application of the concept of resilience to a remarkable variety of things and scales, including personal character, buildings, communities, businesses, technical systems, eco-systems, and the planet itself.

The questions provoked by resilience's new prominence have inspired a sizeable number of analytical responses. These tend to take one of two general orientations. The first *optimistic* orientation is to see resilience as an admirable and desirable quality, and then to explore how it might be enhanced. These types of responses have been evident for all the things and scales mentioned above, from self-help publications aimed at strengthening individual resilience, through community readiness manuals for coping with disaster, to scientific studies about how our planet's ecosystems might survive the stress that human societies are creating in them. Particularly when applied to a social context, the optimistic approaches emphasize agency and the capacity of actors to creatively exert power. However, this approach can overemphasize the autonomy of actors who are called upon to be resilient, since these actors' connections—to other actors and objects and to the past and future—are crucial to understanding their capacities to sustain themselves in crisis conditions.

The second *skeptical* orientation is to criticize resilience for downloading problems that can only really be addressed through larger and more ambitious forms of collective action due to their complexity, scale, or structural properties, onto individuals or communities who then are exhorted to cope on their own, and shamed when they fail to do so. This is linked to the excessive expansion of markets and the accompanying celebration of the individual entrepreneur, together with antipathy to the idea of the social and to our mutual responsibility to one another and the planet. In this orientation both the crises that call for resilience as a response and the resilient responses themselves have a structural quality that outweighs any agency of the type that the optimistic orientation celebrates. Despite the value of this critique, it can overstate the

relentlessness of calls for resilience and obscure the potential for creative responses both to crisis and to calls for actors to be resilient.

In this paper we aim to contribute to better understanding the significance of resilience in two main ways. The first is to bring together the admirable and desirable features of resilience highlighted by the first of the two orientations discussed above with the critical sensitivity to the problematic political and social structural¹ aspects of resilience: in short, to *rework* resilience. In reworking resilience, then, we wish to integrate the optimistic orientation's emphasis on agency and the skeptical orientation's emphasis on structure.² This is important both theoretically, to better understand the limitations and potential of the proliferating references to the concept of resilience, and practically, to understand better how people and things can sustain themselves in a crisis-laden world. In so doing, we must critically examine the concept of agency that informs the idea of resilience in order to identify forms of agency that are more connected and relational, and that can thereby avoid the overemphasis on autonomy of the optimistic approach.

For instance, this might involve asking how individuals or communities can work collectively and creatively, not just to sustain themselves, but to challenge the larger forces that are driving the crises that call for resilient responses. It might equally involve more fully recognizing the ambiguous mix of opportunity and constraint that is present in resilience. In developing this approach we are adding to a small but growing set of researchers who have emphasized the transformative potential of resilience (Chandler 2014; Cretney and Bond 2014; Hornborg 2013; Nelson 2014). We begin this task in our section on agency below, drawing on feminist and new materialist theorizing, which have not received sufficient attention in the resilience literature.

The second goal of this paper is to link resilience to changes in the powerful and related structural forces that are transforming our contemporary world, adding to the efforts of those examining the transformative potential of resilience to focus on the agency of local actors. These structural forces include globalization and time, the intersection of which is closely related to the proliferation of references to resilience, as we discuss below, drawing on our recent research on these forces (Huebener et al. 2016, 2017). However, there are many other structural forces, or ways of framing structural forces, to which this type of analysis can be extended, including for instance global capitalism, late modernity, ecological crisis, risk society, and others. By emphasizing the political and socially constructed character of these ostensibly structural forces, therefore, we can better understand how resilient actors may be able to challenge them. In other

¹ "Structure" here refers simply to persistent patterns that are self-reproducing to some extent, and does not indicate a commitment to structural analysis.

² While our analysis focuses on questions surrounding the temporality of resilience, and the tension between structure and agency, many other critiques of resilience have emerged in the wake of the concept's rise to popularity that we do not take up here. These include the charge that resilience promotes a depleted "bare life" existence, versus more politicized or joyful conceptions of being (Clark 2, Dillon 533), and that its universalist framework precludes reflexivity or an acknowledgment of the situatedness of knowledge (Walker and Cooper 2011, Arora-Jonsson 2016).

words, we can better challenge the sense of inevitability of the crises that call for resilience and highlight their political aspects, while also highlighting the ways that resilience can sustain the capacity of individual actors and communities to initiate such challenges.

For instance, how do the temporalities of globalization contribute to the proliferation of resilience as a goal, practice, or restraint? In our own work on globalization and time, we have noted that both have been incorrectly seen as forces that operate independently of humans who then have to adjust to them (Huebener et al. 2016, 2017). Both are implicated in the crises to which resilience is supposed to be an appropriate response. In the clearest example, preventing catastrophic climate change is now most often seen as impossible: there is simply not enough *time* to organize the required *global* responses. We are not saying that climate change is not an urgent global problem, but rather that a resignation and fatalism can set in if the lack of time and the difficulty of organizing a global response are taken to be too structural, too far from the reach of creative human agency to be modified. Resilience involves surviving, and even thriving, in conditions of crisis that are always either present or imminent. Globalization and time are entangled with both the crises, and with the properties of resilience as a response, in ways that are often not recognized. These work at multiple scales, from larger scale entanglements with a structural character to the most personal emotional responses to risks that are complicated by globalization, which can bring together the personal and the distant, and also complicated by time, which can bring the future into an ever accelerating present. For instance, resilience calls upon actors to prepare now for an uncertain future, drawing on the experience of the past. Crises disrupt the continuity of experience through time. Resilience then involves travelling through turbulent temporal flows and waves, trying to remain afloat, getting to a better place, and enlisting the winds and currents that are coming from afar to do so.

In the sections that follow we explore these types of entanglements. We start with sections on agency, globality and temporality. Since we are interested in linking the agency that resilience signifies with the structural effects that it involves, we then turn to a section on politics and ethics. This interplay between agency and structure is related to the interplay between ideas and materiality. Reworking resilience therefore involves challenging the view that is prevalent in the self-help strain of resilience thinking, that crises are wholly material, beyond human agency, while resilience is ideational, whether positive or negative. Our next section accordingly focuses on materiality. We then turn to crisis—often invoked together with of resilience, as the occasion that variously prompts and necessitates its development, before concluding. Throughout, our goal is to “rework resilience”, to envision how resilience might engage more productively and positively with the structural forces to which it responds.

Agency

Calls to be resilient or to resist resilience often do not adequately consider the assumptions about agency that they imply. *Agency* refers to the power to act. Though early ecological approaches to

resilience did not theorize human agency, they did, as we suggest below, implicitly adopt assumptions of human consciousness and action that in some ways contradict the framing model of the complex adaptive system. As the social aspects of resilience have received more attention, the optimistic view of resilience has emphasized the capacity of individuals or collectivities to anticipate and cope with disasters and crises. This is implicitly or explicitly counter-posed to an alternative of being buffeted or destroyed through vulnerability and powerlessness—or being protected from risks by the state or some other larger collectivity, which also implies passivity on the part of those protected. The skeptical view reverses this and often implicitly assumes that those called upon to be resilient cannot reasonably be expected to do so on their own. Moreover, the treatment of resilience as a problematic discourse that compels individual actors to try to survive on their own, foreclosing larger and more collective transformations of the conditions that create crisis, tends to further diminish the role of agency.

To rework resilience, it is useful to re-examine these assumptions about agency. We are interested in the relational aspects of agency, the ways in which agency can express power, but not only in a way that is autonomous, or independent of the context and structures within which it is exercised. This is closely connected to our interest in reconnecting resilience to acknowledgement of, resistance to, and productive engagement with those structural forces to which it is supposed to respond. Feminist and new materialist reflections on agency are especially useful for this.

As Willett *et al.* (2015) have noted:

Extending into contemporary moral and political thought is this idea that the self is a free, rational chooser and actor—an autonomous agent...these conceptions of the self isolate the individual from personal and social relationships and from biological and social forces. For the Kantian ethical subject, emotional and social bonds imperil objectivity and undermine rational commitment to duty. For homo economicus, it makes no difference what forces shape one's desires provided they do not result from coercion or fraud, and one's ties to other people are to be factored into one's calculations and planning along with the rest of one's desires...the decontextualized individualism and the abstraction of reason from other capacities inherent in these two dominant views trouble many feminist philosophers who have sought alternative perspectives on the self as a result.

Traditionally the relations that are obscured by these dominant views are cast as feminine, inferior, and associated with a lack of power and agency. These include the connections of the self with the body and the physical world, as well as with other selves. As well, “in dominant conceptions of the self, no one seems to be born and raised, for birth mothers and caregivers are driven offstage...No one's powers ever seem to deteriorate, either, for time is suspended along with biology” (Willett et al, 2015). The dependency and vulnerability that are thought to

characterize these relations seem to be incompatible with agency or resilience. A challenge then for feminist theorizing is how to acknowledge the distinctive value and role of these relations in a way that is enabling and empowering. This can involve seeing the role of empathy, caring, the interpersonal, sensitivity to context, and passion as crucial elements of agency.³ Moreover the self, rather than being the possession of the autonomous individual, can be multidimensional and social, as with the concept of intersectionality and poststructuralist approaches.

As Seigworth and Gregg (2010: 1-2) suggest, this can include affect, which is:

the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing...that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability...affect can be understood then as a gradient of bodily capacity.

This points towards the physical, material character of the relations that enable agency. These can include objects and their relations with human bodies. For instance, Butler (2014 :101-2) points to the material preconditions for political action, which can include the sustenance for bodies, and the streets in which crowds assemble:

the street is not just the basis or platform for a political demand, but an infrastructural good...demands made in the name of the body (its protection, shelter, nourishment, mobility, expression) sometimes must take place with and through the body...If we cannot really speak about bodies at all without the environments, the machines, and the complex systems of social interdependency upon which they rely, then all of these non-human dimensions of bodily life prove to be constitutive dimensions of human survival and their flourishing.⁴

The aspects of the self and identity that the literature on intersectionality identifies, such as race, class, and gender, can be integrated with an assemblage approach that emphasizes the emergent flows, connections, relations of force, of humans and non-humans, that can come together to produce agency (Puar 2012).⁵

This is similar to Jane Bennett's (2010: 21, 29-30) notion of "agentic swarms":

³ The feminist literature on care has identified three ontological dimensions of care: labour, affect, and ethics. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) notes, "we learn from feminist approaches that it is not a notion to embrace innocently" (p. 7). It can be paternalistic, it can essentialize the relationship of women to it, not having to care can in some situations be liberating, and "relations of dependency care can be cruel as much as loving" (p. 11).

Nevertheless, it can be a valuable signifier, commitment, and activity, bringing together the connection between engaged, situated knowledge, the relations of humans with one another, and the larger world we act within.

⁴ See also Butler 2011.

⁵ The French term for assemblage is more often "agencement". In Deleuze and Guattari's use of this term it implies the coming together of things to produce an event. This fits with a relational concept of agency. See Phillips (2006).

an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation or interactive interference of many bodies and forces. A lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and once humans themselves are assessed not as autonyms but as vital materialities...a theory of distributive agency, in contrast, does not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect. There are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play. The task becomes to identify the contours of the swarm and the kind of relations that obtain between its bits. To figure the generative source of effects as a swarm is to see human intentions as always in competition and confederation with many other strivings.

For Butler (2014: 114-6) the relational aspect of agency involves vulnerability, which can mean “being open to a world that is not fully known or predictable” and also means that bodies “are always in some sense outside themselves, exploring or navigating their environment, extended and even sometimes dispossessed through the senses...Populations marked by differential vulnerability and precarity are not for that reason immobilized. When political struggles emerge to oppose such conditions they are mobilizing precarity...vulnerability is itself mobilized, not as an individual strategy, but in concert.” In the literature on resilience, especially the “pressure and release model” that has become influential in disaster management, vulnerability is often taken to be its opposite (Oxley, 2005; Cutter 2008; Miller et al, 2010; Wisner et al, 2003). Butler’s perspective usefully challenges this binary distinction.

Overall then, these relational approaches to agency are helpful in reworking resilience. The type of agency that is assumed to be associated with resilience does not have to be autonomous and independent, but instead can be connected and relational, concerned not only with the resilient actor’s own survival, but with political challenges to the conditions that call for resilient responses. This approach to agency can highlight the connections of the resilient actor to the contextual and structural properties of the forces that produce crises, as well as how social creativity might be mobilized to alter those forces.

A relational or assemblage approach to agency can also challenge the systems model of resilience that dominates the discipline of ecology. Like modes of resilience that focus on individual subjects, systems-focused concepts of resilience tend to overlook the historical and political role of structures in constraining change. But the similarities between “system” and “individual”-based resilience go farther: those approaches that address ecology, especially those focused on social-ecological systems, tend implicitly to subscribe to conventional notions of agency in their elevation of the power of rational decision-making in enhancing community resilience. Though resilience is understood to be complex, and dependent on the operation of multi-scalar networks, sustaining resilient systems comes down to individuals making “smart choices” about how best to manage them; the UN is an especially vocal proponent of this approach (Geburu 2015, Filho 2015, UN General Assembly 2012). An emphasis on education

tends to play down the role of dynamics such as politics, culture or affect in shaping individual and collective action. Relational approaches such as those described above operate in the difficult terrain between individuals and systems, asserting an important role for human agency, but recognizing the complex ways that it is both constrained and enabled.

Globalization

Globalization forms a backdrop to the emergent popularity of resilience. In turn, resilience thinking, as it has come to inform the planning and policies of government, business and other organizations affects the way globalization plays out both as an idea, and a set of material processes. On the one hand, the embrace of resilience has arguably helped to consolidate the belief that the economic, political, cultural and environmental turbulence associated with globalization is an inevitable set of circumstances to which we are bound to adapt. On the other hand, resilience-thinking has been useful for imagining creative responses to globalization that seek neither to go enthusiastically (or anxiously) with the flow, nor to retreat nostalgically to the solidity and stability (at least partly imagined) of older identities, but rather to formulate modes of collective, flexible and democratic agency that are able to respond effectively *and* ethically to contemporary challenges. Thinking about resilience through the lens of globalization allows us to recognize the entanglement of ideas/ideologies and materiality, and to raise questions about prevailing ideas of autonomy and subjection, agency and structure or system.

In quite a concrete way, resilience thinking can be seen as a response to a world increasingly comprised not of discretely bounded human or ecological communities, but rather of fluid and heterogeneous systems. In the 1973 paper that is frequently cited as the first iteration of resilience ecology, forest ecologist C.S. (Buzz) Holling contrasts a traditional model of a lake—a self-contained community that is “climatically buffered, fairly homogeneous and self-contained” (qtd. in Robin, 48)—with a new model characterized by heterogeneity and transformation. As environmental historian Libby Robin puts it, “the rapidly changing world of the latter half of the twentieth century, where cities were growing, land-clearing rates were high and pollution was changing the way the natural world worked, demanded new models” (48). Resilience ecology provided such a model, in its attention to the constitutive role of shocks and disruption in shaping the structure and function of ecosystems. Robin suggests that global shifts also paved the way for resilience thinking in more indirect ways: “[1973] was significant for the international political context that was all about shocks, particularly the oil shocks that suggested that western society could not continue to grow indefinitely on the basis of fossil fuel economies” (53-54). Resilience comes to serve as a linchpin in the development of “global change science”, a “suite of knowledge systems that include climate change science, global economics, demography, biodiversity science and global environmental change in all its facets” (Robin, 53). These “systems” were characterized by their broad scope, linking society and nature, science and policy. Recognizing the implication of these systems in projects of planetary management, it is important to see resilience as not just illuminating the dynamic character of the contemporary

world, but also shaping it in certain ways, lending weight to the idea of globalization as an inevitable process, its shocks part of the natural order of things. This shaping role becomes clear in the extension of resilience thinking to diverse sites, including the realms of global business and security.

Shell was one of the first companies to embrace resilience thinking in an effort to take account of the volatile economic and political climate of the 1970s. Conventional planning models proved inadequate to a world in which the globalization of trade and finance, along with the reverberations of decolonization, was contributing to unprecedented levels of turbulence. Ruefully recalling a recent past in which, as one company official put it, “we thought the world was makeable” (Heinzen, Maliro, van der Heijden, & Collyns, 2004, p. 9), Shell turned to the then-fairly new discipline of scenario planning as a way to model a world understood as a complex system, whose future would unfold as a narrative of complex, non-linear changes to which successful businesses must learn to adapt. This understanding of the world as a complex adaptive system came to inform—and to serve as a logical bridge between—diverse fields of management and governance. “Resilience”, suggest Melinda Cooper and Jeremy Walker, “has become ubiquitous as an operational strategy of emergency preparedness, crisis response and national security” (2011, 152), in a discursive context that reflects “the acceptance of disequilibrium itself as a principle of organization” (Cooper and Walker, 154). Though they cite the US Department of Homeland Security as an exemplary instance of the merging of environmental crisis management, security, and urban planning, Cooper and Walker suggest that the application of resilience across a broad spectrum of arenas is most evident at the transnational level, in institutions ranging from the Stockholm Resilience Centre (a think-tank that bridges scientific and policy realms) to the World Bank, the IMF and the UN.

For all that the burgeoning of resilience thinking has occurred alongside, and often in explicit concert with globalization, it is often promoted as part of a localist project. In some instances, resilience offers cover for a neoliberal agenda of downloading of services and responsibilities to individuals and communities (Cooper and Walker, 155). But it can also be incorporated into activist movements aimed at reclaiming local autonomy over services such as food and energy production. For example, the relocalisation movement Transition employs the concept of resilience in the service of a “grassroots” program focused on community autonomy and local ecology (Hopkins). Linking ecological principles, such as diversity, modularity (self-organized micro-systems) and tight feedbacks to ethical and political values of self-reliance and strengthened democracy, the movement aims to build resilient communities, which are able to “respond creatively to change and shock” (Hopkins).

At their best, such initiatives deploy the idea of resilience to better work out ways to live adaptively, to integrate local lifeways into global and planetary networks without sacrificing the history and ongoing viability of the former to the forces of economic globalization. At their worst, projects to reclaim a vision of the local, at whatever scale, against the global, (think

Trump's "Make American Great Again!" slogan) end up repudiating the adaptive orientation of resilience in favour of a posture of rigid defiance, fueled by defensive nostalgia for an imagined time of unquestioned self-sufficiency.

Temporality

Resilience is, at least partially, an inherently temporal notion. The capacity to recover from a disruptive event or to maintain a given form amidst uncertain circumstances is one that is inevitably expressed in temporal terms as a process that unfolds from one moment to another. Significantly, though, temporality itself is best understood not as a purely objective measurement or even as a neutral collection of lived experiences of time, but rather as a shifting multitude of complex power relations. For example, Sarah Sharma's research into differential experiences of time reveals "an uneven multiplicity of temporalities that is complicated by the labor arrangements, cultural practices, technological environments, and social spaces that respond to this so-called globalized, speedy world" (2014, 9). Thus, understanding resilience requires paying close attention to the forms of power and difference that are always tied up in diverse experiences of time.

Because of the close links between resilience and temporality, concepts associated with the critical study of time can productively inform investigations into the politics and power relations of resilience. These concepts may include chronopolitics (Fabian, 1983, 144), timescapes (Adam, 1998), slow violence (Nixon, 2011), social acceleration (Rosa, 2013), power-chronography (Sharma, 2014, 9), and critical temporal literacy (Huebener, 2015, 19). Many of these approaches also consider time itself as a form of power and can thus illuminate the types of control or inequity that are tangled up in the idea of resilience.

Consider, for instance, the different ways in which resilience can be understood to engage with the past, the present, and the future. Understood in relation to the discourse of risk, which seeks to shape the future, and appeals to tradition that seek to replicate a particular past, calls for resilience can, on the one hand, be said to demonstrate a desire to reinforce the present (Hornborg 2009, Evans and Reid 2013, 2015, Lejeune 2014). On the other hand, resilience can also be seen to try to reconcile or resolve a tension between the past and the future. In ecological contexts, building resilience is sometimes understood as an interplay between processes that ecologist Carl Folke (2006) terms "revolt" and "remember." In yet other formulations, resilience is understood as a process of bouncing "back" or a process of bouncing "forward." Put another way, resilience is sometimes applied as an adaptive strategy that works in concert with forces of social change – a process that metaphorically moves forward – but at other times it is employed as a form of resistance *against* change, carrying out a "return" to a previous state that may be held up on a pedestal of nostalgia.

Many questions arise when we consider these different visions of the temporality of resilience. If resilience is a reinforcing of the present, whose particular interpretation of the present might

claim and reclaim this power? If resilience is a negotiation between remember and revolt – or between bouncing “back” and bouncing “forward” – how are established forms of power at stake in the way these temporal categorizations are applied? Who decides which parts of an ecological or social system should be preserved and which parts demand transformation? If resilience is a process of bouncing back, whose vision of the past is eligible for replication (one thinks of anti-immigrant rhetoric that imagines a nostalgic past of cultural or ethnic purity)? If resilience involves bouncing forward, who decides on the envisioned temporal destination?

Not only is the future a contested arena for conflicting visions of society, but even the scope of the future that is at stake cannot be assumed. For instance, resilience seems particularly important for thinking towards the future in terms of environmental sustainability, yet the scale of this future – and thus the temporal horizon of resilience – can expand uncomfortably beyond the usual timeframe of months or years. In her discussion of environmental hazards such as nuclear waste, Barbara Adam notes that “the effects of decisions often outlast the governments who made them by many generations” (1998, 109). The deep past, too, as Timothy Morton points out, is not so much “a succession of atomic instants” as it is “a nested series of catastrophes that are still playing out” (2016, 69). The nested layers of social actions, policy decisions, and ecological changes enacted within many different present moments accumulate over time, opening up difficult questions about the accountability of different resiliences. Many different desires, anxieties, and dynamics of power operate within contested temporalities, and careful attention to the politics of time can illuminate the ways in which these claims have never been neutral.

Politics and ethics

Our discussion thus far has noted in multiple ways that resilience is not merely a technocratic solution to emergent problems; it is also a conceptual framework imbued with extensive ethical and political implications that must be reckoned with in any attempt to “rework” it. The wider literature on the subject implies that a primary point of contestation around resilience is not so much its abstract meaning as what is at stake in the ongoing emergence of a social world increasingly shaped by its logics. For instance, some see resilience as the logical next step in the paradigm of societal governance enacted by what Beck famously described as the “risk society”, in that it signifies a shift from what appear to be increasingly ineffective attempts at preemptively overcoming emergent uncertainties to a notion of “living with” them in perpetuity (Brassett *et al.* 2013, 223). But as critics have pointed out, such a shift also implies the effective acceptance of a condition of permanent crisis, whose consequences must be recurrently absorbed by resilient subjects rather than precluded through progressive change aimed at removing their underlying causes (Anderson and Adey 2011).

As was mentioned in the discussion of temporality, this can manifest as an inherently conservative bias toward the ongoing maintenance of the status quo. It is in this respect that

resilience discourses are often pointed to as merely newer manifestations of neoliberal governmentality, as they involve the production of “subjects that are capable of securing themselves” through the cultivation of a capacity to withstand the inevitable traumas of the contemporary human condition (Reid 2012, 74; Brassett *et al.* 2013, 224). Notably, it is in this context that a commitment to fostering resilience becomes a *moral* imperative, such that a perceived failure to develop an adequate capacity for resilience signifies at least a failure of responsible citizenship, if not a discreditable deficiency of character.

This normative dimension of resilience discourses only further entrenches “neoliberal frameworks of governance as part of the natural order of things” (Brassett *et al.* 2013, 224). Positing a capacity for resistance as a laudable human virtue, in other words, does significant political work by *depoliticizing* the broader social conditions that create the need to be “resilient” in the first place. Strong critical cases can thus be made that resilience entails an “effacement of power and inequality” that forecloses the discursive space necessary for progressive change (Bulley 2013). As one critic aptly puts it, “demands for resilience have become a cleverly coded way to shame those speaking out against injustices” (Sehgal 2015). However, as Wanda Vradi and Nicholas Michelsen observe in their introduction to a discussion of the possible relation between resilience and solidarity: “As a concept, resilience is resilient. It is highly adaptable and expandable, signifying endurance, preparedness, adaptability, ingenuity, activation, expansion, collective intelligence and even democratic mutualism” (2017: 3).

Further untangling the conceptual core of resilience from its most common practical enactments suggests that there may be space for the concept to be reworked in such a way that it can be mobilized for precisely the disruptive ends it appears premised upon foreclosing. Recall from the preceding section that although resilience implies a capacity to rebound after absorbing a violent blow, this rebounding need not necessarily take the form of a return to the status quo ante. The performance of resilience may thus instead serve as the basis for productive, or more importantly, strategic adaptation rather than the continuation of what came before, thereby providing the basis for resistance to the extant conditions whose blow had to be absorbed. While less common in popular and social scientific understandings of the term, this conceptualization is not inconsistent with its use in, for instance, ecological contexts (Walker *et al.* 2004). This suggests that there is still space for the notion of resilience to be conceptually reworked and practically harnessed by interests motivated by the creation of alternative futures, in contrast to its more common deployment by interests committed to the continuation of the present.

Returning to the earlier discussion of agency, this suggests the possibility of types of agency *within* resilience that are not considered by the conventional “optimist” or “pessimist” perspectives. Indeed, a reclaiming of resilience through its mobilization toward transformative rather than conservative ends implies the possibility of its use as a vehicle for exercising individual, collective, and relational agency in direct opposition to entrenched political and social structures whose rigid limitations might thereby be loosened, if not fully overcome.

Finally, it is important to highlight a latent ambiguity in the ethical and political discourse of resilience that adds an additional layer of complexity to the way it has become embedded in the contemporary social lexicon. While it is most often cast as a capacity that must be widely cultivated as a way to manage some of the most pressing societal problems, the term is also paradoxically deployed to signify the nagging persistence of those problems as issues in need of managing. This is productively illustrated by former US President Barack Obama's conspicuously frequent use of the term in a series of in-depth interviews for an acclaimed *Atlantic* article examining his approach to foreign policy (Goldberg 2016). On the one hand, when speaking of the often overwrought reactions to terrorism in the US, Obama claimed he would "like to see resilience replace panic in American society"—using the term in a more conventional sense to imply that the paradigm of resilience might serve as a less disruptive, more measured response to the terrorist threat. Yet when speaking about the sources of that threat and related global security problems, Obama somewhat indelicately decried both "the destructive resilience of tribalism" and the "resilience of small men who rule large countries contrary to their own best interests"—implying that forms of resilience are a key component of those problems toward whose consequences we are inveighed to become resilient. In our contemporary context, therefore, resilience is at once something to be striven for, and something to be opposed. This suggests an important rhetorical divergence between "right" and "wrong" types of resilience—the distinctions between which require further consideration to fully unpack the implications of integrating resilience thinking into contemporary modes of societal governance.

In short, the practical consequences of resilience's rise as a technology of social organization and moral authority are quite marked, thereby emphasizing the importance of maintaining a critical posture as the concept becomes further entrenched in our political and ethical vernaculars. Such a stance may open up space for reworking and subsequently reclaiming resilience in potentially transgressive ways.

Materiality

A key challenge in reclaiming resilience is to better understand the relationship between materiality and immaterial ideas and culture. Typically, the crises that call for resilience have a material quality, which contributes to their perceived imperviousness to alteration, which then requires that the resilient individual or community adjusts. Examples of such crises include hurricanes, economic crises, war, or the precarity of employment. Resilience, in contrast, is, at least in its social iterations, more often associated with ideas: as an attitude, if it is seen positively, or as an effect of an ideology, if it is seen negatively. Yet this is too simple, since crises can be experienced as ideas, such as the proliferation of uncertainties which undermine one's personal feeling of stability, for which a resilient response involves other feelings, all of which are experienced physically. Or a community may respond to an as yet still immaterial threat of a hurricane by building dikes and other physical infrastructure. Or an ecosystem's or

building's resilience may seem wholly material, with both stressors and responses being expressed in physical forms.

As Christmann et al (2012: 22) have argued, it is important to “overcome the dichotomies between culture and nature and the social and the material”. This will help better understand the interaction of seemingly immaterial aspects of things that are important to resilience like hope, foresight, power, and strength of community and character and the material aspects, like floods, neighbourhoods located on earthquake fault lines, and the limits and capacities of the human body. Raymond Williams's concept of “structures of feeling”—the term he uses to describe “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt”, which has significantly shaped the discipline of Cultural Studies (1977:130-135)—challenges the conventional assumption that affects like hope or nostalgia are immaterial—i.e. they both are and do not matter. As Christmann et al. suggest from a different perspective, the material/immaterial distinction intersects with the time and space distinctions: the need for resilience is experienced in its most material form when the events that call for it are here and now. When they are further away in time and space, we must instead imagine them, and this is a challenge for our ability to address them.

Rethinking the material/immaterial distinction is important for our call to rework resilience. The relational approach to agency that this involves includes understanding better the connections between apparently immaterial elements of resilience such as those associated with hope, foresight, or caring and the materiality of bodies and the physical properties of the environments that sustain them, as noted by Butler's comment about the material preconditions for political action that was quoted above. In the “new materialisms” literatures, which seeks to “rewrite the default grammar of agency, a grammar that assigns activity to people and passivity to things”, this can include the agency of non-humans, and “vibrant matter”.⁶ Resilient relational agency can then also link humans and non-humans in new ways.

What makes resilience different than simple adjustment to or withstanding changing conditions? A key difference is that resilience is more active and adjustment or withstanding are more passive. One would not say that a rock is resilient if it is not altered by a hurricane. For human individuals or communities this active quality involves agency, the ability to proactively respond in ways that preserve the integrity of the actor, even if it changes. In general, this active anticipatory capacity we think of as having a quality that transcends the actor's material characteristics, that we may think of as immaterial. In non-human resilience, such as in other species or ecosystems, there is an active aspect to resilient responses as well.

⁶ This is the title of Jane Bennett's book (2010: 119), from which this quote is taken. Braidotti's (2013) analysis of the “post-human” similarly highlights the connections of humans and non-humans, through the life-energy that flows between them. For an insightful application to resilience of actor-network theory that also highlights these connections see Dwiartama and Rosin (2014).

The material properties of time and globalization then present challenges for the active anticipation that is required for resilience. Both time and globalization imply distant material forces that are relatively impervious to the agency of the resilient actor. Yet in practice time and globalization have only been constructed in a way that creates this appearance, with the role of agency concealed in material artefacts such as high-speed networks, clocks, and calendars. The anticipatory aspect of resilience requires the actor to prepare materially, whether by adjusting individual affective responses or reworking local infrastructures, before the anticipated threat materializes. Reclaiming resilience then requires knowing how the imaginative, anticipatory aspect of agency can be brought to bear on both the materiality of globally and temporally distant threats, and the most local material capacities that are needed for the actor to be sustained.

Crisis

In recent years the discourses of resilience and of crisis have become increasingly interwoven: in particular, resilience has been assumed to be, or been promoted as, a primary adaptive response to a wide range of risks, hardships, tragedies and crises, from personal adversity to natural disaster and human-made global economic crisis (Akter & Mallick, 2013; Lenette, Brough & Cox, 2013; van Apeldoorn, Graaff & Overbeek, 2012, Walker and Cooper, 2011; Wolf and Bonanno, 2013). Given the diversity and complexity of the causes, the nature, and the naming and framing of these crises, the tendency to standardize or legitimize “resilience” – a set of contested and shifting discourses – as a normative expectation about, or default approach to, crisis response across contexts is highly problematic. In the past decade social, economic, political, and ecological crises have been uninterrupted, simultaneous, and worldwide, but integrating “resilience” into the normative crisis rhetoric, as well as risk management and crisis adaption strategies, has not only naturalized the crises. It has also generated ambivalence and ambiguity between human strength and political maneuvering, between cause and consequence, and between the responsible and the affected.

For socially, economically, geographically, and occupationally vulnerable individuals and communities, crisis – in such forms as elevated rates of tuberculosis infection on First Nations reserves and among Inuit communities; the alarming number of fatalities and injuries in tropical, cyclone prone coastal communities in Bangladesh; the healthcare crisis of burnt-out physicians in Canada; and the recent Hurricane Harvey flooding in Houston in the contexts of climate change and Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris climate accord – is neither unpredictable nor unexpected. It does not fit with the conventional assumption of a crisis as occupying a discrete (and often spectacular) moment in time, either. Such complex disasters conform, rather, to Rob Nixon’s (2011) concept of “slow violence”. Resilience, in each of these cases, seems indispensable, if insufficient, for survival (Haque et al., 2012; Thomas, 2015; Vogel, 2017). In the very different scenario of the 2007-08 global financial crisis, although many capitalist states successfully manipulated the crisis discourses, thereby securing the public’s consent to austerity measures, a more important question – is the crisis *in* the [global capitalist]

system, or *of it?* – was rarely asked (McBride & Merolli, 2013). Failure to disentangle the nexus of crisis and resilience prevents us from understanding each in its own context, as well as the complex relationships (e.g., connections, interdependence, disjuncture, tension, and conflict) between them. Without adequate and authentic responses to the conditions in which crises – as well as imminent risks, irreversible adversities, catastrophic changes, systematic ruptures, future uncertainties, and impasses – arise, the discursive reinforcement of that nexus may further disadvantage those vulnerable groups, rather than benefit or empower them.

To make visible the neglected links between crisis and resilience, therefore, we urgently need to further critically interrogate the crisis-resilience nexus. The questions include: who defines or claims the crisis; what or who causes it; is it preventable; whose resilience is being advocated, and to what purposes; is resilience alone enough to respond to the crisis, or the crisis to come; and, what can be done to increase the capacity of life to survive crisis? Answering these questions will help us differentiate strength-based resilience that recognizes human autonomy from pragmatism-oriented resilience that is part of “roll-with-it” neoliberalism (Garrett, 2014), thus reclaiming the hijacked concept for the interests of those affected by crises and making the responsible and the powerful accountable. More importantly, such an exploration can also expand our imaginations beyond the crisis-resilience nexus, and thus help us see the possibilities of resilience beyond crisis.

Summaries of Contributions

The papers that follow are developments of contributions to a McMaster workshop on Crisis and Resilience held on 20 May 2016, hosted by the Time and Globalization Working Group. The Call for Papers stipulated that “rather than taking ‘crisis’ only as a given condition of the world today, and ‘resilience’ only as a way of measuring and cultivating our capacity to deal with it, we want to think about the implications and impacts of how the concepts of crisis and resilience are formulated, paying particular attention to the cross-border and temporal aspects of these.” The CFP went on to emphasize the interdisciplinary dimension of the workshop, noting that: “While the conveners work in the humanities and social sciences, the workshop also welcomes contributions from other disciplines, since a principal aim is to foster productive, critical conversations across the wide variety of contexts in which ‘resilience’ has become an increasingly crucial idea.” Even this relatively small sample of papers demonstrates that, while the term “resilience” has currency in many disciplines, the theory and methodology surrounding it varies considerably.

Several theorists have addressed the disciplinary frameworks that shape particular conceptions of resilience, particularly physical vs. social science (Olsson et al. 2005, Brand and Jax 2007, Cote and Nightingale 2012, Davidson 2010, Kirchoff et. al. 2010, Davoudi 2012, Biermann 2016, Cutter 2016, Arora-Jonsson, 2016). These frameworks are sometimes (arguably more often in the physical sciences) invisible, with the result that certain disciplinary perspectives present

themselves in the terms of universal, rather than situated knowledge (Arora-Jonsson, 2016, Kirchoff et. al. 2010, Olsson et. al 2005, Biermann et al, 2016). Though the trend is more evident in the social sciences, a growing number of scholars across the disciplinary spectrum are arguing for the need to incorporate a critical theoretical perspective into resilience thinking (Arora-Jonsson, 2016; Biermann et al. 2016). Though persuaded by this perspective, the editors have chosen not to prescribe a particular approach to resilience; thus the papers that follow define the concept in different ways, in the context of diverse projects, defined by variously conceptual and/or practical aims.

Manuel Campidelli, Wael El-Dakhkhni, Michael Tait and Waleed Mekky note that the response to natural disasters has been increasingly presented under the banner of resilience. However, as stakeholders and policy makers have come to realize, building resilient communities is a wicked problem that defies a simple definition, much less a solution. In their commentary on resilience in a multi-hazard environment, they examine the divide between interpretations of resilience in engineering and the social sciences. Furthermore, they interrogate the ontology of natural disasters in light of the wealth of information from historical disaster records and projections—primarily pertaining to major floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes.

Meaghan Frauts' contribution, "The Cultural Politics of Resilience in Kingston, Jamaica," argues for the need to examine the idea of resilience in places "that have usually been ignored." While discussions of resilience have often focused on disaster management, Frauts' work aims to understand how resilience takes shape through cultural practices. Looking specifically at Jamaican street dances – events that evolved from 18th-century slave dances and which "have always been sites of both domination and resistance" – Frauts' project uncovers a range of ambiguities, showing that resilience is both a form of adaptation to violence and a method for exceeding imposed limits.

In his contribution, "Resilience as Irony; or, Looking Forward to Climate Change," Paul Huebener explores some of the repercussions of theories which argue that resilience serves the function of recreating conditions, relationships, and ecosystems that are both "the same" and *not* the same as what came before. Through the example of the speculative fiction book *The Collapse of Western Civilization*, considered alongside theories of narrative and identity, he considers how climate change "requires us to see the very notion of resilience through both an earnest and an ironic perspective, as an inevitability and an impossibility."

Susie O'Brien takes Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's 2016 comments about Canadian resilience following Alberta wildfires as a starting point to think through the potential and the limitations of invoking resilience as a way of navigating tragedy. Focusing on three key aspects of resilience thinking – tension between transformation and conservation; self-organization, and social and ecological interdependence – the paper highlights problems with the ritual invocation of resilience as part of a nationalist response to tragedy, and calls instead for an approach to

resilience based on an acknowledgement of Canada's role as a settler colonial state, in line with the imperative of decolonization.

Tony Porter argues that resilience can be a form of governance, similar to other informal types of governance such as risk models, benchmarking, or best practices. For all these actors are inspired to alter their conduct due to both a desire to optimize it and fear of the consequences if they do not. None of these, including resilience, are inherently good or bad: instead their effects depend on the presence or absence in them of democratic elements. Porter illustrates this by looking at mechanisms to foster resilience in transnational governance of global finance and disaster risk reduction.

Nowrin Tabassum's contribution, "'Resilience' in the Climate Refugee Politics" examines the gaps between the different interpretations of *resilience* in the contexts of climate change and climate-refugees. On the one hand, climate-refugees must survive precarious conditions, including the lack of institutional protection. On the other hand, the international society has implemented the climate change adaptation and mitigation policies without considering climate-refugees. She proposes bridging the two perspectives on resilience by integrating the issue of climate-refugees into the climate change adaptation and mitigation policies at national, international and regional levels.

Carolyn Veldstra's contribution, "Rethinking Affective Resilience in the Ordinary Crisis of Precarious Work," speaks directly to themes of relational agency by considering whether and how the lived experiences of late capitalism's precarious workers might enable the productive reclamation of resilience as the basis for effective political mobilization. Focusing in particular on how the "affective resilience" demanded of precarious service workers requires the internalization and normalization of continuous crisis, she explores how, in addition to its overtly oppressive consequences, such conditions may function "as a ground on which emerging collectivities might be built," pointing to such movements as the "Fight for \$15" minimum wage campaign as potentially leading the way.

In their contribution "'Resilient' social workers: A new spirit in human services, or a new form of governmentality?" Y. Rachel Zhou and Kelly Coxson engage in a critical analysis of the expanding use of "resilience" in social work – in particular, from service users to social workers themselves – in the context of neoliberal welfare restructuring (which takes forms such as austerity, managerism, and privatization). They contend that using this "pseudo-scientific" concept in human services is regressive, and that encouraging the resilience of social workers in a resource-constrained context should be understood as a form of governmentality aiming to stabilize the eroded welfare system.

Conclusion

In this project, we seek to bring together diverse disciplinary perspectives on resilience in order to illuminate the concept's constraints, as well as its potential to describe and to guide projects of collective flourishing. This objective necessitates careful attention to the wealth of current scholarship on resilience, informed by wariness of its dominant trends towards celebration or condemnation. In conceiving of our approach as a project of *reworking* (rather than, for instance, reclaiming or rejecting) resilience, we recognize that resilience is neither simply an in-built, natural quality of an ecosystem, community or individual; nor is it simply a matter of consciously choosing to be self-directed, flexible, or brave. Rather it is a dynamic orientation to a changing world, a stance of adaptability or transformation that must constantly be constituted, nurtured, supported, challenged, renewed, and reworked, by agents of varying experiences and capacities. Dominant accounts suggest that to be resilient is to retain autonomy (or self-organization in the case of ecosystems) in the face of the unpredictable, uncontrollable turbulence of the outside world—turbulence that globalization is understood to have intensified. We seek to trouble that account by focusing critical attention on the line that is understood to divide the resilient actor or system from the turbulent world.

Our work suggests that the effects of globalization are both weaker and stronger than often assumed: they are weaker in the sense that they are largely the product of human decisions rather than inevitable consequences of natural economic processes, and stronger in that they have accelerated the breakdown of traditional structures of identity, including nations, ecosystems and individuals. At the same time that globalization has intensified the urgency of calls to be resilient, it has raised the question of who or what should be resilient to what or whom. Our approach rejects accounts of resilience that rest on the idea of autonomous subjects prevailing against a world of swirling, chaotic forces. Rather, we want to consider a range of possible alliances and collectivities determining ways to persist through time and across spaces. This is not a state, condition or quality, but rather a process requiring agency and openness, deliberate strategy and questioning, as well as material resources, power, and creativity; it is a process of *work* to which we hope this project will contribute.

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Can a New Interpretation of “Natural” Disasters Foster a More Resilient Built Environment?

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Resilience in the social sciences and engineering

In the broadest terms, resilience refers to the act of preserving some feature of the natural or social environment that is worth protecting. Therefore, any problem associated with the word resilience can be classified as (1) *resilience ontology*, i.e. the quest for what ought to be protected—and thus resilient; and (2) *resilience epistemology*, i.e. the investigation on how to measure and build resilience. The distinction between these two classes of problems is not arbitrary: Class 1 problems are wicked—they defy a clear definition and are never conclusively solved (Rittel and Webber 1973); class 2 problems are mostly tame—despite the technical challenges involved, a consensus on the solution of a tame problem is always achieved. This distinction is especially needed to guide the interpretation of resilience, which, in the social sciences, is used with a purely descriptive, ethically neutral connotation—as in Walker et al. (2006)—and with a prescriptive, ethically normative attribute—as in Folke et al. (2008). Conversely, in engineering, despite a proliferation of definitions (Bilal 2015), there is a general consensus on the meaning of resilience in a descriptive sense, which presupposes the worthiness of the engineering systems being studied. The National Infrastructure Advisory Council (NIAC 2010) provides a definition of resilience that is sufficiently representative of its connotation in engineering. NIAC defines infrastructure resilience as “[enhancing] the ability of critical infrastructure systems, networks, and functions to withstand and rapidly recover from damage and disruption and adapt to changing conditions”. The latter definition introduces the concepts of *system* and *function*, which, although ubiquitous in engineering, are controversial subjects in the social sciences, as pointed out by Olsson et al. (2015).

The dimensions of resilience within the context of the built infrastructure include robustness, rapidity, resourcefulness, and redundancy (Bruneau et al. 2003). Of these, robustness and rapidity are the key factors that can be translated in quantitative terms, clearly defined on the basis of the function that measures a desirable feature of a system. If the case of a suspension bridge is taken as an example, its purpose is to provide passage over an obstacle and its ability to do so can be quantified by the traffic capacity. Assuming a full capacity of 100 vehicles/minute, the bridge robustness would be determined by the number of vehicles able to transit after the impact of different stressors—including flood, landslide, hurricane, earthquake, etc. If, for instance, 20 vehicles/minute were able to transit after a category 3 hurricane, then $20/100 = 20\%$

would be the measure of the bridge robustness. The rapidity would relate to the time required to “bounce back” and restore full functionality, i.e. a pre-disaster traffic flow. Subsuming all four dimensions, resilience has been proposed as an overall measure of how a system can withstand the impact of several hazards and remain functional. Bruneau et al. (2003) define the loss of resilience as the loss of functionality integrated over the time of recovery; more direct definitions of the “resilience index” refer to the mean functionality over the time of recovery (Attoh-Okine et al. 2009).

Resilient infrastructure in a multi-hazard environment: Ontology of natural disasters

The expression “natural disaster” often ignores the agency of those perceived to be on the receiving end of nature’s most destructive phenomena. It is our contention that such terminology is highly suggestive of any lack of interaction between the natural environment and the built infrastructure, when the opposite is in fact the case. Based on the vast historical records on floods, hurricanes, and seismic activity, to denote the impact of these hazards on the affected populations as natural disasters appears to be a category mistake. To support this point of view, we recall three disaster scenarios—as a way to understand the lack of resilience inherent in the policies put in place to prevent them.

In the Red River Valley (Manitoba, Canada), flood prevention and mitigation measures included a C\$63.2 million “floodway project”, undertaken in 1958, and a disaster policy that provides hierarchical funding assistance, wherein the responsibility is first assumed by the individual and then borne by higher levels of authority (Haque 2000). With these policies in place, the Red River Valley has suffered from the consequences of several floods, the latest of which occurred in 1997 and 2009. The 1997 “flood of the century” covered 1,836 km² in water and caused damages in excess of C\$500 million (Robert et al. 2003). Yet, home development and property values in floodplains have grown at a rate equivalent to that in flood-free areas. In particular, urban development has increased in the floodplain upstream from Winnipeg, owing to the false sense of security engendered by the floodway (Robert et al. 2003).

In Louisiana (US), the Hurricane Protection Project in the Flood Control Act of 1965 had the purpose of building a series of control structures, such as floodwalls and levees, to provide hurricane protection in areas around Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi watershed. The cost of the project grew to US\$738 million in 2005, about 72% of which was covered by the US Federal Government (USACE 2005). In addition, a system of subsidized flood insurance was in place. When Hurricane Katrina struck, it caused the destruction of more than 283,000 homes and 1,500 lives; overall, direct economic losses and insured losses in the southeast were estimated in the amounts of US\$125 and US\$40.6 billion, respectively (FEMA 2006). These losses have been partly ascribed to the land development policies underpinning the Hurricane Protection Project,

whose benefits were assumed to come, in the extraordinary proportion of 79%, from new urban development protected by the enhanced levee system (Burby 2006).

One of the most feared catastrophes likely to affect Canada in the coming decades is a megathrust earthquake in British Columbia (BC), which is estimated to have a probability of occurrence of ~35% in the next 50 years (Azadbakht and Yim 2015). Its consequences have been modeled by AIR Worldwide (2013) and their study reveals a domino effect following the ground shaking—including landslides, tsunamis, and fires—with severe repercussions on the built environment of southwestern BC. To quantify the consequences, the AIR study assumes different levels of system resilience, which is defined as the ability of a network to maintain its functionality following a disruption. In terms of resilience epistemology, the tactics taken into account include conservation of material and utilities critical to production (e.g. electrical grid); insulation of production processes from disruptions (as in most agriculture, which does not require electrical power); offsetting of lost production via overtime work; and offsetting the consequences of damage to the transportation network via re-routing. Based on all of the above, the projections of economic ruin following a megathrust earthquake are C\$60 and C\$20.7 billion in direct and insured property losses, respectively, and C\$1.9 billion in direct losses to infrastructure; furthermore, depending on the level of infrastructure resilience—determined by the ability to implement the foregoing resilience tactics—the indirect losses are estimated to be within the range C\$4.1–21.4 billion.

The three disaster scenarios recapped herein, although quite different in their manifestation, possess a common thread, which suggests a new ontology of “natural disasters” at the societal level. However natural all these disasters may appear, their destructive character is bestowed by the agency of human settlers via policies of land development, urban planning, and construction codes, which historically had far too often the effect of increasing the risk by moving entire communities in harm’s way. Such trends have been noticed and documented by Robert et al. (2003) in Quebec and Manitoba and by Burby (2006) in Louisiana. In his analysis, Burby (2006) identified the “safe development paradox” and “local government paradox”, which explain why measures for reducing risk ultimately led to its increase.

Resilience and the ethics of self-reliance

The history of natural disasters suggests the necessity of a broader epistemology of resilience, one that would encompass land planning and the behaviour of private citizens. This need is demonstrated by the effects of past land development and risk transfer mechanisms—including insurance markets and public disaster relief funds—that rendered the risk of natural disasters less transparent and ultimately resulted in greatly diminished community resilience. A possible way forward, to mitigate risk and build resilient settlements, may be a gradual transition from welfare state driven initiatives to a social structure based on the ethics of self-reliance (Sniderman and Brody 1977), which demands that each community bear the brunt of local

policies of land development. By a self-reliant community in Vancouver, the consequences of a megathrust earthquake would be understood as a man-made disaster, driven either by inadequate design and construction standards or by the desire to avoid relocation to safer areas. Although conceptually this approach would represent a major shift in disaster ontology, from a pragmatic standpoint the change in the economic impact on individuals would be negligible: As the historical record shows, the bulk of the losses are borne neither by governments nor by insurance markets, but by the victims (Burby 2006). Therefore, any significant changes likely to stem from an ethics of self-reliance would be limited to more perspicacious policies of land development and risk management. The greatest challenge faced by self-reliant communities would be the determination of what ought to be resilient. This problem is unavoidable; its solution, ill-defined; yet a consensus can be achieved, however short-lived.

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The Cultural Politics of Resilience in Kingston, Jamaica

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The discourse of resilience circulates widely in Jamaica. It is invoked in policy, development programs, and everyday life. If the goal of this collection of working papers is to “rework” resilience, then it is necessary to examine resilience in places and contexts that have usually been ignored. While the implications of resilience have been discussed in relation to disaster management, climate change and urban scholarship, how resilience operates and is exercised through cultural practices and cultural production, understood as creative practice and the symbolic (re)production of everyday life, has not been adequately explored. Moreover, resilience scholarship has also been silent on a cultural politics approach to understanding the subject. The purpose of this paper is to show how a cultural politics approach to resilience unveils resilience’s ambiguous nature and in doing so reworks the notion that resilience is either wholly positive or wholly negative. Methodologically, this is best done by grounding resilience in context-specific sites that often reveal ambiguous and contradictory results. A particularly illuminating series of spaces regarding the ambiguity of resilience are street dances, or “dancehall,” in Kingston, Jamaica.

While mainstream development organizations (UN, IMF, WB) and scholars embrace resilience as a necessary, normative and positive attribute that allows us to prepare for, adapt to, and survive any number of crises (economic, social, ecological etc.), many are divided on how resilience should be understood. Critics argue that resilience may debase human subjectivity, empty out the political and foreclose the ability to resist that which is threatening (Evans and Reid 2014). Instead, resilience leads to increased neoliberal-led governmentality and securitization (Joseph 2013). Others argue that diverse accounts should not be overwritten into “an inevitable, universal resilience project” (Grove and Adey 2015: 78). Such a universal conceptualization of resilience risks establishing a hegemonic metanarrative that serves the very systems resilience is ostensibly opposing.

A way to avoid this universalizing and rework resilience in a way that pays due diligence to its complexity is to emphasize the cultural politics of resilience discourses that challenge blanket understanding of not only how resilience ought to be practiced, but also how it ought to be theoretically framed or resisted. This means seeing resilience as diverse and ambiguous and, although contradictions may arise, reworking resilience in this way renders it as a rhetoric and practice that can both pave the way for governmentality and domination as well as antagonize them. The use of ambiguity is not a duplicitous operationalization of the term. Rather, it is a way to acknowledge the complexity of resilience as it moves in and out of disciplines and context-specific sites. An emphasis on cultural politics (Li 1999, 2007; Mitchell 2002, 2008;

Moore 1999) does not conceive of resilience discourse as “overdetermining the shape of politics” (Moore 1999: 673). A cultural politics approach broadly understands that culture has become a site of struggle. To comprehend the complexity of resilience it must be understood that resilience discourses and their effects “confront not docile bodies but the situated cultural practices and sedimented histories of people and place” (ibid: 658). Discourses, as Lowe (1991) argues, “operate in conflict; they overlap and collude; they do not produce fixed or unified objects” (cited in Moore: 673). This approach provides space for context specificity that helps us understand resilience’s definition not as a supposed universal, “principal true” everywhere, to borrow from Timothy Mitchell (2002), but as a concept mobilized, hidden, lost or co-opted in multiple ways. In short, people do not adopt a particular type of resilience simply because a discourse summons them to do so. This attribute will be observed in the particular case study I will use to explore the complexity of resilience.

Dancehall is ubiquitous in Jamaica. Street dances and dancehall culture are ubiquitous in Kingston. There are nightly dancehall parties that take place on roads, neighborhoods, clubs and store fronts and have existed since 18th century colonialism in the form of slave dances (Stanley Niaah 2010). Historically, street dances have always been sites of both domination and resistance. As Saidiya Hartman (1997) has illustrated, Saturday night slave dances, in the United States were an everyday “account for the state of domination and the possibilities seized in practice” (Hartman 1997: 55). In Jamaica, colonial diaries reveal how everyday practices, like slave dances, were used to “cultivate hegemony, harness pleasure for productive forces and regulate modes of permitted expression” (Hartman 1997: 44) even if at the same time these dances were spiritual and liberatory practices to escape enslavement (Beckles 2002: 224). Colonists used slave dances as discipline and to ensure plantation Jamaica’s capital accumulation. Often dances were performed at the behest of, were frequented by, and arbitrarily shut down by slave masters. Such forms of surveillance were part of the violence that ensured that slaves were always aware of the extent of domination in plantation Jamaica. Indeed, Deborah Thomas (2011) writes that these “spectacular” forms of violence amounted to “ever increasing levels of shock and disbelief but that nevertheless are quickly enfolded into the realm of imaginable possibilities” (110). These acts increasingly shifted the reference of acceptability to which slaves had to adapt. Slaves were thus forced to frequently become more resilient to dangers and increasing levels of domination. Methods of adaptation and resilience included participating in acts of merriment and celebration—including slave dances—to survive; in fact, unless they chose death,⁷ resilience was one of the only forms of security they had.⁸ And yet, in

⁷ As C.L.R. James (1963) points out, suicide among slaves was common and death meant a release from enslavement (see pgs. 15-16). I am differentiating between “socially-dead” (See Orlando Patterson 1985) and physical death.

⁸ Vincent Brown (2007) also discusses the ways in which during their capture Africans had to constantly form and re-form social bonds and connections even prior to making it to Jamaica and the rest of the Americas. This continual adaptation to the unknown and loss or “spiritual cataclysm,” as Vincent Brown writes, was “perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the experience of enslavement” (43).

revealing how domination necessitates resilience, domination also uncovers struggle and transgression.

Dances provided instances, as Hartman (1997) argues, for slaves to “steal away” from masters’ time, space and property (namely themselves) and appeared like “small-scale battles with owners, local whites and the law” which could only conceive slaves as property, as things, and as such, pointedly not human (68). So, as much as these acts of cultural practice may be “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott 1990) they were also acts and sites of extraordinary refusal which had the capacity to facilitate occasions of violent resistance and outright rebellion. Thus, resilience and resistance are not collapsed into each other, as some scholars argue (Evans and Reid 2014), but instead appear at the same time in the same space, complicating the notion that resilience is simply passive adaptation.

Some scholars (Stanely Niaah 2010; Stolzoff 2000) trace the connections between slave dances and celebration in post-Emancipation dancehall’s street dances. These are everyday contemporary spaces expressing another site of the afterlife of slavery. These spaces of cultural practice emphasize how vulnerable citizens use the dancehall as a space of resistance to “rigid social conventions of the everyday” and state regimes (Cooper 2005:1). But these spaces are also sites of resilience, such as an access point to community, (embodied) knowledge and celebration in spite of ongoing struggles in the form of structural inequality (i.e. global neoliberalism, racism etc.). Further, these spaces provide a means for social reproduction because they offer work for thousands of informal labourers, a trend that seems to be rising. They are thus sites of resourcefulness and resilience on the part of citizens who have learned to adapt to Jamaica’s numerous crises.

However, dancehall also creates sites of resistance. Dancehall is often associated with the poor or working class, and is known for its ‘slack’ (or low-brow) culture. Scholars argue that it is “a metaphorical revolt against law and order” (Cooper 1995: 141). This is exemplified in the lyrics of songs that directly confront the state’s neglect of its own people (e.g. Lady Saw and Buju Banton), in the ways that dancehall culture upsets “middle-class respectabilities” (141) and the ways that citizens circumnavigate the legalities, either by not obeying the noise abatement laws or failing to apply for an entertainment license for hosting dances in their communities. For many, they continue to be sites of “possibility seized in practice” (Hartman 1997: 55) by the marginalized.

Recently the government has more regularly enforced the noise abatement laws to shut down or lock-off dances (and consequently communities’ livelihoods) in Kingston. The tightening of the lock-offs seems to be part of a broader creative economies development strategy supported by Jamaica’s cultural policy (*Jamaica Towards the Cultural Superstate*) and its development plan (*Vision 2030*). In general, creative economies are known for their flexibility, entrepreneurial focus, and resiliency. In 2013, a public government meeting revealed

that the Ministry of Entertainment and Ministry of Security had proposed a zoning plan that would effectively move the street dances outside of the communities in which they take place. The goal is to create a formal facility where the state can capitalize on dancehall's global popularity, generate rent through private partnerships, keep track of data to ensure it meets development goals and better control criminality.⁹ It is thus not only about enhancing Dancehall culture but also introducing new forms of control, capital accumulation and securitization. Strikingly, the cultural policy asks Jamaicans to recall their historical resilience to bolster support for the policies. As an informant explained to me, cultural resilience is the ability for Jamaicans to hold on to their culture and “survive” and “thrive” in the harshest of circumstances, from slavery to neoliberalism (Frauts 2016: 103). Thus, recalling resilience as it manifested during slavery is a real source of inspiration for cultural practices and individual and national identity. Resilience in this contemporary context can only be understood vis-à-vis the historical specificity of Jamaica's colonial history. Resilience is not, by default, adaptation to structural inequality but also about pushing or exceeding the limits that have been drawn around you by others. Therefore this context specific understanding of resilience does not simply connote an apolitical adaptation. And yet, at the exact same time, resilience appears as a cruel triumph because it reveals the insistence of the capitalist state, despite its policies that claim otherwise, on producing insecurity for its citizens. This is because the zoning project, as part of a creative economies development plan, could potentially undermine its citizens by removing these informal spaces in which they find resiliency. Therefore, in the quest for an increasingly resilient and entrepreneurial economy, the state ironically undermines its citizens' capacities to be resilient and entrepreneurial.

The above example reveals that approaching resilience through a cultural politics lens reworks resilience to capture the ambiguity (and complexity) of the concept. Such an approach brings together context, sedimented histories and the afterlife of people and places including everyday cultural practices and cultural production. Precisely for that reason, this illuminates the contradictions and possibilities of resilience in lived reality: in ordinary but poignant and active spaces of struggle. Here I have shown how resilience operates as adaptation to violences in the form of Jamaica's history of colonialism and its contemporary experiences with neoliberal development, but also how it is used to represent the ways that people exceeded and continue to exceed these violences. Resilience appears alongside resistance, suggesting a more complicated relationship between them than some allow. Resilience is not simply apolitical, static, and pessimistic, but also potentially, and even simultaneously, political, active, and even optimistic.

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⁹ In 2013, The Jamaican Constabulary Force started targeting gang related activities in communities under the name “Operation Resilience.”

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Resilience as Irony; or, Looking Forward to Climate Change

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A recent palaeobiological study describes an enormous flightless bird that lived 50 million years ago in what is now Nunavut. At that time the Arctic was “a hot, swampy environment, home to giant turtles, alligators, primates and hippo-like beasts” (Goodyear). One of the study’s authors, Jaelyn Eberle, points out that this information “gives us some idea of what to expect as climate change dramatically alters the northern landscape” (Goodyear).

Eberle is not announcing a literal return of the conditions of the Eocene epoch, but the conceptual link between the Arctic of the deep past and the Arctic of the future involves a strange form of cyclical time and a perhaps uncomfortable form of resilience. What does it mean for the sustainability or resilience of human societies if the alien ecosystems of the prehistoric world provide a glimpse of what we can *anticipate* in a world of carbon combustion and climate change? Bishnupriya Ghosh notes that the etymology of the word resilience – from the Latin for “rebound or recoil” – implies a sense of “physical elasticity,” involving “the capacity to return to a prior state after deformation (in physics) or disturbance (in the biosciences).” If ancient human-free ecosystems, or something like them, “bounce back” due to our carbon emissions, does the concept of resilience become our enemy? Of course, even if Eberle’s comments turn out to be more literally true than we might expect – even if the Arctic alligators reappear – they will not be the same alligators that are visible within the ancient fossil record. They will be newly adapted creatures making a way of life within newly unfolding conditions. In the living world, cyclical time is never *entirely* cyclical and resilience can never offer a complete return to the past.

The notion of the Arctic alligator swamp affords an example of the ways in which the multiple crises associated with climate change and ecological disruption require deep rethinking of many of our assumptions. Among the concepts that will require ongoing reassessment are our cultural narratives of resilience itself. Patrick Martin-Breen and J. Marty Anderies usefully argue that “resilience thinking” requires “embracing change and embracing complexity” (52). In considering how we might respond resiliently to the changing circumstances brought about by climate change or by specific disruptive events, they suggest that “what one has before and after will not necessarily be identical, but they can serve the same function” (52). The resourcefulness and adaptability for which this vision of resilience advocates are certainly vital for thinking through the survival of human societies in the twenty-first century and beyond. At the same time, though, complex questions of identity are wrapped up in the language of “embracing change” and of cultural apparatuses that, both before and after disruptive events, “serve the same function.” As we wait for the Arctic alligator swamp – so to speak – we may find that the combined ecological crises that we face in this century will test the limits of the change that we

are prepared to embrace, will compel us to ask uncomfortable questions about the extent to which collapsing or shifting sociocultural “functions” are effectively “the same,” and may require us to consider how the notion of resilience is tied inevitably to the complexities of narrative, time, and identity.

The literary theorist Paul Ricoeur asks: “What justifies our taking the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death? The answer has to be narrative” (3: 246). He also goes on to argue in his seminal work *Time and Narrative* that “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative” (1: 3). His arguments suggest that identity itself depends on the coherence of narrative – and that the coherence of narrative is inextricably linked with its ability to structure experiences of time. The perception of any constant identity is possible only through the perception of continuity, the perception that one moment in time can be understood narratively in terms of another. Is it possible, then, that a radical disruption to our temporal experience – that is, a radical disruption to the narratives by which we understand our own cultural identities – could transform our collective identity beyond what we might consider a resilient threshold? Even if *someone* manages to embrace the exceptional changes associated with long-term climate change, will there be a point at which those people, by virtue of their radically different circumstances and cultural and ecological contexts, will no longer be “us”?

I would like to consider these issues in the context of Naomi Oreskes’ and Erik Conway’s 2014 volume *The Collapse of Western Civilization* (I’ll refer to the book as *Collapse*). This story takes place 400 years in the future, where an unnamed scholar provides an account of the events in the late twentieth to mid twenty-first centuries that led to the “Great Collapse,” the disastrous breakdown of Western civilization as a result of anthropogenic climate change. Blending actual historical details with fictional constructions of future events, the book explicitly explains why humanity allowed disastrous climate change to occur despite foreknowledge and implicitly urges actual present-day readers to avert the catastrophic “history” that it describes. Significant portions of the narrative are devoted to explanations of neoliberal capitalism and what the unnamed scholar refers to as the “carbon-combustion complex,” the “interlinked fossil fuel extraction, refinement, and combustion industries, financiers, and government ‘regulatory’ agencies that enabled and defended destabilization of the world’s climate in the name of employment, growth, and prosperity” (54-55).

The earlier stages of the book recount historical events that are familiar to us – the disappointing climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009, the unusually warm winter in the United States in 2012 – but soon the narrative bypasses our current historical moment and becomes a work of speculative fiction. The scholar recounts the “year of perpetual summer” in 2023 which killed 500,000 people (8), the widespread implementation of “water and food rationing” by 2040 (24), the breakdown of social order and the overthrow of governments in the 2050s (25), the collapse of the West Antarctica Ice Sheet and the Greenland Ice Sheet in the later years of the

century and the resulting seven-metre rise in sea levels (29-30), the emergence of “the Second Black Death” which kills about half of the population in many parts of the world (31), and the extinction of at least 60 to 70% of all species (31).

One of the particular assertions that *Collapse* makes within this context is that the trajectory towards ecological collapse is occurring despite the fact that we *understand* the link between carbon combustion and climate disruption. As the unnamed scholar writes, “Given the events recounted here, it is hard to imagine why anyone in the twentieth century would have argued against government protection of the natural environment on which human life depends. Yet such arguments were not just made, they dominated the public sphere” (48). Elsewhere they explain that “To the historian studying this tragic period of human history, the most astounding fact is that the victims *knew what was happening and why*” (35). This future incredulity about the past is key to the blended genre of the book, as both speculative fiction and contemporary cultural commentary. The idea that our own everyday world is “hard to imagine” finds its converse in the difficulty with which we must imagine the post-collapse world.

The future scenario that *Collapse* envisions is thus simultaneously familiar and unrecognizable. It is familiar in the sense that there are still human societies; there are still scholars who research extinct civilizations, who speak in a language we can understand, and who debate the causation behind historical events – a significant triumph given the magnitude of the disasters that have unfolded. At the same time, though, much of the context, both cultural and ecological, through which we understand our own identities, has been radically reconfigured. Coastlines and geopolitical boundaries are unrecognizable; the world’s great cities are mythical, watery memories. Democracy has long ago been outlawed and much of the world has been depopulated. Archaic terms such as “capitalism” and “environment” require explanation. Those who remain have proven themselves capable of the incredible feat of survival, yet may not be capable of the supremely difficult task of understanding why the people of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries knowingly participated in their own destruction. The book laments the collapse of our own everyday world at the same time that it portrays our world as a distant object of scholarly curiosity. In a sense, the story almost allows us to feel *relieved* that our own world no longer exists – a sense of double vision that embodies the height of irony.

Irony has often been the hidden double agent within the notion of resilience. Mulligan et al. note the irony in the fact that resilience requires transformability yet is often understood “in a rather static and prescriptive fashion” (353). Investigating what they call “the ‘dark side’ of resilience,” Williams et al. note that people who identify themselves as resilient may become more satisfied with their capabilities and therefore less likely to learn and adapt in the face of failure (47); they also observe that the desire for resilience can increase the “commitment to failing courses of action” and that, “somewhat ironically, resilience to adversity may – under some conditions – create the basis for a subsequent major disruption” (48-49).

Reading works such as *Collapse* can help us to see irony not just as a feature of some of the problems that emerge from resilience, but as central to understanding resilience itself. *Collapse* is a narrative about the impressive resilience of the human species even while it tells the story of the irrevocable destruction of the world we know. It is a narrative of the fulfilment of resilience and the end of resilience. As such, it requires us to see the very notion of resilience through both an earnest and an ironic perspective, as an inevitability and an impossibility. It reveals that resilience has always been something to desire as well as something to fear.

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Postcolonial Resilience Narratives for “Difficult Times”

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On Day 4 of the wildfire that ravaged Fort McMurray, Alberta in May, 2016, Prime Minister Trudeau concluded a speech in the House of Commons: “To those who have lost so much: we are resilient, we are Canadians, and we will make it through this difficult time, together.” The word “resilient”, describing a system’s capacity to retain its function and structure in the face of disturbance (Walker and Salt, xiii), has become an almost obligatory element in public responses to disaster. This paper takes Trudeau’s comments as a starting place to think about the kind of narrative work that resilience does, or might do, to deal with “difficult times”.

Resilience narratives signify powerfully, if not exactly coherently, at a time when disaster, both real and imagined, looms large. Operating in a range of disciplines across the physical and social sciences, the currency of resilience also derives from culture, operating as a historically specific bearer of ideas, values, ideologies, hopes and fears. To say that culture informs scientific theory is not to dismiss scientific theories as fictions, a point Gillian Beers makes in her study of the narratives that Darwin’s theory of evolution drew on and generated. Beers “does not imply that Darwin’s work is ‘fiction’. . . [but] that how Darwin said things was a crucial part of his struggle to think things ” (xxv). She goes on to note that evolutionary theory, because of its preoccupation with time and change, has “particular implications for narrative and for the composition of fiction” (5); this is also true of resilience theory. Like the concept of natural selection, resilience encompasses tensions between identity and transformation, organization and contingency. Both theories reverberated beyond the biological phenomena that they initially sought to describe, to help make sense of a world in flux, in which the laws of nature operate in complex tension with political and social forces. Colonialism dominated the backdrop of Darwin’s theorizing, inflecting his interrogation of traditional hierarchies of life, and the history of the human species. Resilience theory emerges in the context of globalization, a more recent and comprehensive process of planetary integration, which bears more than a trace of the violence that characterized colonial encounters. Even where it does not touch directly on globalization, resilience theory reflects its central elements of heterogeneity and volatility, and their implications for imagining and managing an uncertain future. Depending on how these elements are mobilized in different iterations of resilience, they can serve conservative or progressive political aims.

Three elements of resilience are particularly suggestive in their imagination of global change:

1) **Temporality:** Resilience ecology focuses on complex adaptive systems, which consist of multiple scales, operating at different rhythms. Challenging older notions of homeostasis, resilience ecology attends to shifts between periods of stability and processes of transformation, between functions that ecologist Carl Folke terms "revolt" and "remember" (259). "Revolt" refers to the cascading effects of a disturbance throughout a system—e.g., a forest fire, while "remember" is a form of "cross-scale connection" that draws on the seed bank, surviving species, physical structures and forms of communication that remain. . . , along with those from the wider landscape" (Folke, 259). The dynamic relation between these processes informs system resilience.

2) **Self-organization:** Resilience also depends on "the degree to which [a system] is capable of self-organization" as opposed to the absence of organization, or organization imposed from outside. (Folke et al, 260-61). Resilience theory has significant implications for ecological management, demonstrating that interventions that attempt to stabilize a system, or optimize a certain part of it, can actually disrupt normal processes of breakdown and renewal, making the system less resilient.

3) **Social-ecological interdependence:** Resilience theory recognizes the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds. Their functions cannot be considered in isolation from one another.

As a non-biologist, what I find exciting (and frustrating) about these elements of resilience thinking is the way they engage, without satisfactorily resolving, contradiction and ambiguity. With respect to the tension between conservation and change, at what point—at what level of transformation—do we determine that a system is not actually resilient but fatally fragile, leading it to cross a threshold (in human terms, to lose its identity) and become something different? This leads to questions about self-organization: how do we determine the boundaries of the system or organism whose resilience we are concerned with measuring or cultivating? This is a particularly pertinent question in a period of global and planetary flux. Finally, it's important that we recognize the interconnections between ecological and social systems, nature and culture, but given our own complicated biological, ideological embodiment at that interface, how can we adequately come to understand it?

Back to the Trudeau speech. As the linchpin of a narrative of adaptation to adversity, the word "resilient" invokes a number of key themes that resonate superficially with the aspects of resilience theory noted above.

1) **Temporality:** The temporality of resilience ecology is complex. The temporality in Trudeau's speech is relatively simple, if contradictory. On the one hand, consistent with an emphasis on transformation, the perspective is forward- looking, projected towards an uncertain

but putatively navigable future. In this perspective, “difficult times” are recurrent phenomena that we can survive and even thrive in (there’s already talk about how the fire, however devastating, provides an opportunity for smarter urban planning [Friesen]). On the other hand, calling the fire a “tragedy” in the beginning of his speech, Trudeau invokes a more conventional model of time, in which the dimensions of disaster are self-contained, an interruption to the normal course of linear progress to which we will eventually return. Questions we might ask are: What is the temporality of “difficult times,” and what is the threshold that will (or should) precipitate a shift into a different regime? What dynamic of reorganization/transformation and conservation will strengthen the resilience of the system? This last question is a political one, which leads us to:

2) Self-organization.

Resilience requires a complex adaptive community, capable of marshalling its resources and networks to cope with disaster. In what has become a familiar political response to disaster, Trudeau describes the nation as “resilient”, a rhetorical move that summons simultaneously the empathy of imagined community *and* the virtues of self-reliance. Among the questions that the idea of “resilient Canadians” brackets are: what kinds of resources ensure Canadian resilience? Who determines the allocation of these resources? Are all Canadians equally resilient? (which raises an even simpler question: who is “we”?) This brings us to:

3) **Social-ecological interdependence.** This part of resilience thinking isn’t acknowledged in Trudeau’s speech, which follows a common post-disaster rhetorical strategy of erecting a garrison around the human community—“we”—against the natural world, understood as the source of the trouble. This rhetoric diminishes the role of nature in recovery (especially key in forest fires), and the role of humans in precipitating disruption. This does not mean blaming the people of Fort McMurray for what happened, but rather acknowledging the context of environmental-human interactions, including climate change, in which events like the fire occur (the oil sands that dominate Fort McMurray are part of that process, though it is an error, not just of taste but also of scale, to equate them).

So what might narratives of resilience tell us about the “difficult times” we are living through, of which the fire in Fort McMurray is a recent, spectacular example? In the larger project of which this is part, I’m trying to think about what resilience means in a settler-colonial environment that has the potential to become unsettled, and maybe transformed, by indigenous resurgence movements. In this context, it’s important both to call out simplistic invocations of resilience that signal the morality of neoliberalism, *and* to think about how resilience might figure in alternate narratives of our social-ecological community.

To this end, we could consider how resilience theory might fruitfully complicate the conventional temporality of disaster as self-contained tragedy. Is there a way that its conceptual framework could incorporate into our understanding of disruption the slow violence of

colonialism (Nixon, Carrigan)? And could it prompt us to acknowledge the often forgotten importance of memory that, along with transformation, is necessary for survival? We might also consider the terms of inclusion in our understanding of a self-organized system. Who or what is part of the resilient organism or community? By what criteria is belonging determined? How does the principal of self-organization relate to governance?—a question that is particularly pertinent in relation to disputed sovereignty in settler-colonial states. Finally, indigenous conceptions of community take as a given the interdependence of human and non-human lives. It is on these grounds that many Indigenous groups protest extractivist practices like those of the oil industry, which they see as a continuation of colonialism (Simpson).

I'm not suggesting that we take Indigenous perspectives and incorporate them into the concept of resilience (another form of extractivism!). Rather, I think we should analyze dominant resilience narratives, the values they express, and the futures they imagine. It's also crucial, though not part of this paper, to consider if/how resilience figures in anti-colonial, indigenous narratives, as a way through a long history of "difficult times".

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Resilience as Democratic Transnational Governance?

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In recent years “resilience” has become increasingly prominent in a wide variety of aspects of contemporary life. Resilience has been defined as “the ability to cope with stress or, more precisely, to return to some form of normal condition after a period of stress”¹⁰. Reflecting its origins in environmental science, originally it was often seen as a property of an ecological system that allowed the system to return to its prior state after a disturbance. As noted in the introduction to this working paper, as the idea of resilience has been applied to humans it has tended to be seen either optimistically, as a positive capacity of humans to sustain themselves and their communities through crises, or pessimistically, as downloading of governmental responsibility for managing challenges onto individuals or local communities. I focus in this paper on the idea that resilience, rather than being inherently good or bad, is a form of governance, and thus the question of whether its effects are positive or negative depends crucially on whether this governance has features that render it democratic or not. This form of governance can operate at multiple interrelated scales, from the individual up to global governance. I focus in my examples on governance that crosses borders: transnational governance of global finance and of natural disasters.

Some authors have begun to conceptualize resilience as governance. For instance, Joseph has argued that resilience is a “neoliberal form of governmentality that places emphasis on individual adaptability”.¹¹ The idea of governmentality, initially developed by Foucault, is that centralized top down command and control has increasingly been replaced by decentralized mechanisms of control at a distance, which call upon individual actors to self-regulate, bringing their behaviours into alignment with the imperatives of power. This is consistent with a more pessimistic view of resilience. Chandler provides a more optimistic view of resilience in calling it “the new art of governing complexity”. He argues that contemporary societies have become so complex that the only feasible way of governing is to shift its focus to allow local reflexive initiatives, “rearticulating complex life as the positive promise of transformative possibilities.”¹² Similarly, Nelson sees resilience as enabling bottom up action that can have larger systemic effects, seeing this as consistent with Hardt and Negri’s vision of a global “multitude” creating

¹⁰ Olsson, Lennart et al (2015) “Why resilience is unappealing to social science: Theoretical and empirical investigations of the scientific use of resilience”, *Science Advances*, 1:e1400217, May, p. 1.

¹¹ Joseph, Jonathan (2013) “Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: A governmentality approach”. *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, 1, 38–52.

¹² Chandler, David (2014). “Beyond neoliberalism: Resilience, the new art of governing complexity”. *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, 2, 47–63. The first quote is from the article title, and the second from p. 63.

“institutions of the common” outside the individualized commodified world created by capitalism and neoliberalism.¹³

Resilience is similar to the proliferation of governance instruments and practices that have proliferated in recent years, including risk models, benchmarking, codes of conduct, or best practices. All these are forms of professional knowledge, but they also work as governance: shaping actors’ behaviours, made effective both by actors’ desire to optimize their own performance, and by the material or reputational consequences if they fail to do so. With resilience, as with all these governance instruments, their positive or negative effects are best assessed with reference to the presence or absence of democratic qualities in any particular case.¹⁴

There can be a technical aspect to resilience, but there are numerous political questions as well, such as what risks are addressed; who bears the costs associated with being resilient; what are the differential consequences for people when options are discarded in order to adopt a particular strategy of resilience; and what coercive mechanisms are mobilized when the costs and benefits of resilience are unevenly distributed across time or locations?¹⁵ In complex forms of governance, including transnational ones, traditional democratic practices such as elections are not feasible, and therefore the degree of democracy can best be assessed with more generic criteria such as participation, accountability and transparency.¹⁶

In the remainder of this mini-paper I illustrate the relevance of this approach by briefly examining two cases of the promotion of resilience in transnational governance. The first is the global provisions for managing systemic risk and promoting resilience in global finance. The second is the promotion of resilience as a response to disasters, such as with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. These two cases of risk and resilience vary, with finance involving wealthy actors and intangible risks that are entirely social, while disasters especially affect poorer actors and are entangled with nature. However, in both cases there are similar issues of accountability.

¹³ Nelson, Sara Holiday (2014) “Resilience and the neoliberal counter-revolution: From ecologies of control to production of the common.” *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, 2(1), 1–17, p. 15; Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri (2009) *Commonwealth*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.

¹⁴ I have developed this argument with regard to benchmarking and to disaster risk (discussed below) in Porter, Tony (2015) “Global Benchmarking Networks: The Cases of Disaster Risk and Supply Chains,” *Review of International Studies*, 41(5), pp. 865-86.

¹⁵ Cutter, Susan L. (2016) “Commentary: Resilience to What? Resilience for Whom?” *The Geographical Journal*, 182(2) June, pp. 110–113; Cretney, Raven (2014) “Resilience for whom? Emerging critical geographies of socio-ecological resilience”. *Geography Compass*, 8, 627–640.

¹⁶ See for instance Porter, Tony and Karsten Ronit, eds., (2010) *The Challenges of Global Business Authority: Democratic Renewal, Stalemate, or Decay?* Albany: SUNY Press.

Global Finance¹⁷

Global finance is increasingly about the management and distribution of risks, as for instance in the multi-trillion dollar market for derivatives in which increasingly complex and differentiated risks are traded (for instance the risk that an interest rate will have gone up at a particular date in the future can be transferred from one person to another for a price. Risks can bring large rewards, for instance in the firms that profit from trading derivatives, but they can also be destructive, such as when poorly managed risks cause a firm to go bankrupt. The global financial crisis that began in 2007 highlighted the problem of “systemic risks”, which threatened the global economy with collapse.

Key applications of the concept of resilience in the response to the 2007 crisis include the strengthening of capital adequacy standards and the use of “stress testing” for banks. These are highly technical governance instruments that are coordinated globally through relatively informal committees of regulators, such as the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision and the Financial Stability Board. In finance there is a recurrent tendency for individual actors, such as traders or managers of firms, to take big risks which are concealed and pushed off to other actors or a future time, and then reap big rewards for themselves. These hidden risks can accumulate and result in crisis. The regulation and standard setting aim to promote resilience in two ways. First, they require banks to hold a sufficiently large cushion of capital so that the bank can sustain its operations through crises and not collapse or have to turn to governments and taxpayers for bailouts. Second, they require those benefitting from risks (bank shareholders and executives) to also bear the costs. This permits the continued globalization of finance, with the acceptance of the likelihood of future crises, but makes banks and the global financial system as a whole more resilient. This is an alternative to restricting the global financial system to try to eliminate crises. There is much debate about the effectiveness of this strategy, and evaluating it depends crucially on a mix of technical details about the appropriate levels of capital that are required, and the mechanisms of participation, accountability and transparency that can result in either an effective or ineffective set of rules.

Disaster risk reduction¹⁸

At the global level a significant change in the management of natural disasters was a shift towards the concept of disaster risk reduction and resilience during the UN’s International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990-99). The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) grew out of this decade. Previously the emphasis had been on emergency responses to “acts of god” that were seen as outside of human control. The new emphasis on disaster risk

¹⁷ For a recent discussion of these issues see Porter, Tony, ed. (2014) *Transnational Financial Regulation after the Crisis*. London: RIPE/Routledge.

¹⁸ As noted above, I have written about this most recently in Porter, Tony (2015) “Global Benchmarking Networks: The Cases of Disaster Risk and Supply Chains,” *Review of International Studies*, 41(5), pp. 865-86.

reduction emphasized the socially constructed and preventable character of disasters (for instance how poorly constructed villages get located in flood plains or earthquake zones). Resilience is a key aspect of this.

Much like finance, a key challenge in disaster risk reduction is the reluctance of those with the responsibility and capacity to decide to manage risk to do so, since the consequences can be borne by others in the future. In this case this can include local officials who prefer to conceal or ignore risks rather than to invest governmental resources in mitigating them. This can extend to private actors (such as construction firms) that may lobby governments for weak regulations. A key function of global standards for disaster risk reduction such as those developed and promoted by the UNISDR is to hold governments accountable to reaching targets for disaster risk reduction. However much resilience requires changes in behaviour of citizens, such as the planting by farmers of disaster-resistant crops. There is an extensive system of consultation and public benchmarking that is designed to mobilize citizens and involve them in transforming their own activities and holding their governments accountable.

Conclusion

The above two examples of resilience in transnational governance both illustrate the importance of the presence or absence of democratic elements in forms of governance associated with resilience. The effectiveness, distributional consequences, costs, and benefits of resilience vary depending on who gets to participate, whether there is accountability for those with power, and how transparent the processes are to all those affected by them. Even though financial and natural disasters are quite different, the role played by resilience in responding to them is similar. The quality of bank capital standards can help control the negative aspects of crises or exacerbate them if they are ineffective and undemocratic, as is the case also with disaster risk reduction. Resilience is a form of governance, and it matters whether it has democratic features or not.

'Resilience' in the Climate Refugee Politics

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Introduction

'The liberal biopolitics of climate refugees has increasingly been replaced by a resilience discourse of climate-induced migration'.
(Methmann & Oels, 2015, p. 58)

'The idea of migration as adaptation comes from the mould of the discourse of resilience and reproduces the latter's economized and neoliberal character.'
(Bettini, 2017, p. 36)

The critical studies on climate refugees argue that the Western-industrialized countries and international financial institutions introduced the notion 'resilience' to govern the climate-induced displacement in a way that the displaced people do not enter into the national borders of the Western-industrialized countries as climate refugees (Methmann & Oels, 2015, p. 58). This short paper investigates how the concept 'resilience' has been described in the literature of climate refugee, why it is criticized, and what alternative forms of resilience can be offered to deal with climate refugees. This paper finds that the way resilience is practiced for dealing with climate refugees, is status quo biased for strengthening the security of the national borders to restrict cross-border migration and for implementing many construction projects which ultimately do not address the issue of climate change as well as climate refugees. This paper also finds that two alternative forms of resilience can be practiced for addressing the climate refugees: (i) to open the national borders, and (ii) to initiate a political- economic system in which countries and buy and sell their lands for sheltering climate refugees.

Climate Refugees

At the *international and national levels*, no international organization, conference, or jurisdiction has classified climate refugees as one of the recognized categories of refugees. Therefore, there is no legal definition or agreed framework for defining the climate refugees. Frank Biermann and Ingrid Boas (2009)- Professor of Environmental Policy at the University of Amsterdam and Professor of Climate Governance at Wageningen University – prescribed that climate refugees can be defined as:

people who have to leave their habitats, immediately or in near future, because of sudden or gradual alteration in their natural environment related to at least one of three impacts of climate change: sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and drought and water scarcity. (Biermann and Boas, 2009, pp.67)

For Biermann and Boas (2009), the people can be internally displaced people (IDPs), or they can also cross their national borders for taking shelter in a foreign country. However, Bonnie Docherty and Tyler Giannini (2009), two distinguished lecturers at Harvard Law School, disagree with the definition above. For them, ‘refugees’ must cross national borders and for which IDP’s are not refugees, and climate change and its effects should not restrict only into three categories: sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and drought and water scarcity (Docherty and Giannini, 2009, pp. 367-372). For Docherty and Giannini (2009), the displaced person should fulfil the following requirements to be a climate refugee:

- a. The migration must be forced migration
 - b. Their relocation can be temporary or permanent
 - c. They must move across national borders
 - d. The cause of migration must be consistent with the disruption of climate change
 - e. Sudden or gradual environmental disruption, and
 - f. A ‘more likely than not’ standard for human contribution to the disruption
- (Docherty and Giannini, 2009, p. 372)

Drawing from the above mentioned two sets of analyses, this paper considers climate refugees both: IDPs and cross border migration who have been displaced by all kinds of the effects of climate change.

Resilience and Climate Refugees: A Critical Look

The proponent of the resilient concept, the ecologist Crawford S. Holling (1973), described resilience as a social or ecological system that can absorb changes and still can persist (Holling, 1973, p. 27). The existing literature on resilience describes it through three different approaches: (i) engineering resilience or resilience as maintenance, (ii) ecological resilience or resilience as adaptation, and (iii) socio-ecological or transformative resilience. The engineering resilience or resilience as maintenance is described as risk management or crisis management tool against unpredictable and unprecedented risk/ crisis (Methmann & Oels, 2015, p. 54; Walker & Cooper, 2011, p. 144, pp. 151-152). The ecological resilience or resilience as adaptation is described as the capacity to adapt and to thrive in the face of challenge (Methmann & Oels, 2015, p. 54; Walker & Cooper, 2011, p. 144). Bourbeau (2013) described socio-ecological or transformative resilience as ‘being robust to disturbance but also on the opportunities that emerge regarding self-reorganizations, recombination and the emergence of new trajectories (Bourbeau, 2013, p. 8).

The critical literature of climate refugees views that the West understands the issue of climate refugee as a threat to their national security and this can be described by resilience as maintenance. The West climate-induced migration as a disruptive migration from the Global South which can challenge their authority over immigration policies and ‘rules of entry’ into

their borders by undermining the existing immigration policies and ‘rules of entry’ (Smith, 2007, p. 621). For this reason, the West strongly opposes to entitle the climate-induced migrants as refugees to prevent the migrants from entering into the countries of the West (Hartmann, 2010, pp. 238-242). In this way, not recognizing climate refugees and preventing them from cross border migration is practiced by the West as threat management or crisis management tool.

The issue of climate refugee in the light of resilience as adaptation stemmed from the notion of Polluter Pays Principle (PPP). Both the Western and Eastern philosophy introduced the concept of Polluter Pays Principle (PPP) to punish the polluter, who caused damages to the environment, with some financial penalties as compensation for the loss. By advancing the PPP, the Small Island Countries demanded that the high carbon emitters must provide economic compensation to the victims of the Small Island Countries and low-lying developing countries who have been suffering from sea level rise and submerging lands that subsequently create climate refugees (INC, 1991). The high carbon emitters and other developed nations agreed on the Article 4(4) of the UNFCCC (1992) to give funds to the climate change resilience projects in developing countries through the international financial organizations, particularly through the World Bank (the UNFCCC, 1992, article 4). The funded projects include (i) construction of private raised houses with the ground floor above the sea water; building seawalls and embankments to protect sea-level rise and river bank erosion, (ii) implementing coastal forestation projects because the forests can deter the severity of cyclones, (iii) planting saline-tolerant crops which will reduce food scarcity caused by saline intrusion into arable lands, and (iv) assisting technological support for introducing green economy and reducing carbon emission (Huq, 2011, pp. 56-69; Karim & Mimura, 2008, p. 498; Martin, 2010, p. 403; Rai et al, 2014, pp. 527-543; The World Bank, 2006, pp. 14-24). The main argument behind these funded projects is that the projects would be able to deter the severe effects of climate change and therefore, no climate refugees will be created (Bettini, & Gioli, 2015, p. 2; Huq, 2011, pp. 56-69; Karim & Mimura, 2008, p. 498; Martin, 2010, p. 403; the World Bank, 2006, pp. 14-24).

The transformative resilience assumes that the term climate refugees is a misnomer because these displaced people are not a ‘forced displacement by climate change’. Methmann & Oels (2015) stated that the migration is a conscious decision made by the people of climate-affected areas who are pretty much capable of improving their livelihoods through migrating to another place and through training themselves as the skilled labourer (Methmann & Oels, 2015, p. 60). The World Bank provides funds to the resilience projects in climate-affected countries which teach the entrepreneurial abilities and technical skills to the climate victims as these people can participate in the global labour market as a skilled labourer (The World Bank, 2010, pp. 130-131; Methmann & Oels, 2015, p. 60).

However, the above-mentioned practices of resilience for dealing with climate refugees are short-sighted. For example, training climate-refugees as skilled workers cannot be a solution to the climate refugee problem because the number of climate refugees is millions whereas there

is no labour shortage to such an extent in the global labour market. The donor funded adaptation projects are also criticized because (a) the construction of private raised houses with the ground floor above the sea water is so expensive that no government and international organizations agree to fund it, (b) polders and embankments (under construction) are severely damaged by increased attacks of cyclones, coastal flooding and sea level rise, (c) the coastal afforestation project is not working because most of the plants have been washed away/destroyed by the frequent attacks of cyclones and flood, (d) the saline concentration in the land has increased so much that the saline-tolerant crop cannot survive (Rawlani & Sovacool, 2011, p. 860; Stojanov, p. 75-76). Moreover, most of the funds of the projects are given as loans but not compensation as PPP demanded, and for the loan recipient countries have to pay back the loans with interests. In addition, the resilience as maintenance is typically anti-cross border migration which restricts people within national borders- no matter whether the country goes under water.

Alternative Forms of Resilience: “Global Resilience”

The way resilience is practiced for dealing with climate refugees, or climate-induced migration is status quo biased for strengthening the security of national borders to restrict cross-border migration. However, climate change and its impacts are border neutral and for which the restrictive border security and immigration policies are misfits with the challenges of handling climate refugees or climate-induced migration.

An alternative form of ‘global economic resilience’ is found from the speech of the former President of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed. He prescribed that his country, the Maldives could use its billion-dollar annual tourist revenue for buying new homeland abroad for relocating its climate refugees to the foreign land (Ramesh, November 10, 2008, para. 7). However, the existing political-economic condition of the world does not allow a country purchase lands abroad for relocating people.

The 2012 Nansen Initiative can be considered another alternative form of resilience for handling climate change because the Initiative allows opening the national borders of its member countries to give shelters to the displaced people who are uprooted by natural disasters and the impacts of climate change (The Nansen Initiative, 2015, pp. 16-33; McAdam, 2016, p. 1520). However, no practice of this Initiative has been reported yet.

The aforementioned alternative forms of resilience can be the most potential global-resilience to give protection to the climate-refugees.

Note: This paper is a part of the literature review of my doctoral thesis: *From Climate Refugees to Climate-induced Displacement: The Role of a Transnational Actor Network in Redefining Bangladeshi Climate Victims*.

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Rethinking Affective Resilience in the Ordinary Crisis of Precarious Work

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When thought in relation to work, the concepts of both crisis and resilience usefully draw to the fore several key factors supporting the spread and normalization of precarity as a condition of employment. More specifically, precarious work exemplifies a seemingly banal quotidian crisis that is both endured and obscured through a demand for affective resilience in the form of positive thinking and feeling. At the same time, recent organization among precarious workers also provides a basis for rethinking how we might characterize resilience in terms of affect as a ground on which emerging collectivities might be built even in the face of crisis. Such reworking, however, also challenges commonly held assumptions about which kinds of feelings can act as politically motivating forces, and which are markers of apathy or disengagement.

Precarious work is both directly and indirectly tied to a range of widely reported crisis points, including: urban housing crises and generalized mortgage and rent unaffordability,¹⁹ growing class inequality,²⁰ minimum wage activism,²¹ and even increasing methamphetamine and opioid addiction.²² These various yet related phenomena reflect the common sense understanding that crisis indicates a time of difficulty. Yet, the assumption of crisis as time-bound is not borne out in the ongoing unfolding of these intersecting crises, which, in America, are often traced to Alan Greenspan's admission of fault in 2008,²³ but which can also be tracked much more diffusely to various moments of corporate and economic restructuring, a range of government policy decisions, the rise of the debt economy, the dismantling of the gold standard, or to the very emergence of capitalism itself. The persistence of crisis in capitalism—as evidenced in the difficulty in establishing origin or end points around any particular crisis within

¹⁹ A Canadian example in this regard is Vancouver, B.C. in which an increasing portion of employment is precarious (see for instance: <http://thetyee.ca/News/2014/08/30/Precarious-Jobs-Inequality/>) and housing is notoriously scarce and expensive, whether for purchase or rent (see, for one account: http://www.megaphonemagazine.com/don_t_look_back and <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/michael-stewart/2016/03/we-tried-to-escape-vancouvers-housing-nightmare-vancouver-fo/>) Notably, this account focuses on unavailable and unaffordable housing while leaving less-remarked upon the author's status as a freelance [i.e. precarious] worker.)

²⁰ See <http://inequality.org/> for more information.

²¹ See <http://fightfor15.org/> or <http://www.raisetheminimumwage.com/> for more information.

²² Dylan Matthews in *The Washington Post* describes working mothers who are functional meth addicts, using the drug to manage the demands of their various responsibilities, including the multiple low-wage service jobs required to make ends meet. See his article here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/08/15/heres-what-breaking-bad-gets-right-and-wrong-about-the-meth-business/> and another article profiling meth use among suburban families here: <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865580620/Mothers-on-meth-New-book-highlights-family-struggles-in-the-suburbs.html?pg=all>

²³ The *New York Times* quotes Alan Greenspan's famous admission, "I have found a flaw": <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/24/business/economy/24panel.html>

it—suggests that Eric Cazdyn is correct in declaring that, “crisis is not what happens when capitalism goes wrong, but when it goes right” (2). Though precarious work is often experienced as difficult, bordering on unlivable, for those subject to its terms,²⁴ it mirrors what Cazdyn terms “the new chronic” of capitalism (13). Its emergence is less easily tied to a particular set of conditions, but rather reflects the persistent goal of capitalism to increase profit through the exploitation of labour. In other words, precarious work often seems too normal—particularly when we take capitalism to be inevitable—to be cast as a crisis.²⁵

A second temporal dynamic also works to normalize precarious work. Theorists Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulous argue that precarity constitutes a form of exploitation largely expressed through time. Due to low wages, unpredictable schedules, and the expansion of work into non-labour time (see also Lewchuk *et al*), precarity exploits the continuum of a worker’s life by trapping them in perpetual uncertainty. A precarious worker cannot get ahead or make progress towards a long-term goal; yet she also cannot stop or refuse her conditions. Instead, precarious workers can only struggle in a present in which social supports are largely absent. Precarity is thus often experienced as an impasse: without dependable support systems or the time to formulate an alternative plan, the best a precarious worker can do is manage the conditions of their exploitation. In this way, precarity becomes what Lauren Berlant calls an ordinary crisis (9), a problem of management and endurance, rather than overcoming.

If resilience describes “a system’s capacity to retain its basic function and structure in the face of disturbance” (Walker and Salt 2006), then the expectation that precarious workers adapt to the ordinary crisis conditions of their work constitutes a demand for a kind of resilience. This expectation often extends beyond the capacity to perform the tasks required by one’s job to include *how* a worker is obligated to complete such tasks. Precarious work often intersects with a demand for affective labour, which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, among others, describe as the work of producing and manipulating affects, or embodied and mental states, such as ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, enthusiasm, or passion (108). For example, as Paul Myerscough reports in the *London Review of Books*, the U.K. fast food chain Pret A Manger itemizes the “Pret Behaviours” that must be embodied by staff, expecting that an employee “creates a sense of fun,” is “genuinely friendly,” and “never gives up.” The company also details seventeen qualities they “Don’t Want to See,” including moodiness, bad-temper, or being “just here for the money.”²⁶ Resilience among precarious workers is often demanded in the form of an

²⁴ There are many accounts available describing the experience of living according to the terms of precarious work. One of the most detailed is Linda Tirado’s, which started as a blog post in which she explains what it is like to live in poverty. An extract from her book based on that post, *Hand to Mouth*, is available here: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/sep/21/linda-tirado-poverty-hand-to-mouth-extract?CMP=EMCNEWEML661912>

²⁵ Neilson and Rossiter (2008) make the argument that precarious work has always been fundamental to capitalist organization and related forms of governance.

²⁶ In a subsequent article in the *New Republic* detailing the affective labor policies of Pret a Manger, Timothy Noah notes that after the publication of Myerscough’s article, these lists of behaviours were removed from Pret a Manger’s website.

attitude or orientation, a capacity for positive feeling, or the provision of the proverbial “service with a smile.” Crucially, at its intersection with precarity, affective labour asks that workers produce positive affect from a subject position that does not guarantee their own futurity. As Myerscough muses in detailing the demands made of Pret workers,

... it’s difficult to believe that there isn’t something demoralising, for Pret workers... not only in having their energies siphoned off by customers, but also in having to sustain the tension between the performance of relentless enthusiasm at work and the experience of straitened material circumstances outside it.

In these working conditions, the smiling demeanor of the precarious employee functions not only to cultivate good feeling in customers, but also to disguise the tenuousness inherent to the precarious work behind it. In this way corporations with affective labour policies, whether explicit or implicit, require their workers to internalize the burden of their own precarity—to render it an ordinary crisis—through the performance of affective resilience.

This last point draws the notion of affective resilience into conversation with recent critical accounts of resilience. For example, paralleling some of Cazdyn’s arguments, in their book *Resilient Life*, Brad Evans and Julian Reid critique resilience discourse for the way it enlists subjects in liberal narratives that assume both human vulnerability and crisis conditions to be unavoidable and universal. Likewise, as I have demonstrated, the demand for resilient affects among precarious workers normalizes the crisis conditions of such labour. However, Evans and Reid go on to refuse resilience, instead pushing for imagination, poetry, and critical pedagogy as pathways to new imaginaries beyond mere endurance or survival. Putting aside this exclusionary view of political possibility, Evans and Reid’s refusal of resilience risks ignoring both the experience of its imposition—misrecognizing resilience as a stance deliberately taken up or naively celebrated—and the possibility for a politics emerging from within resilience and its basis in ordinary crisis.

Precarious affective labour not only highlights the demand placed on some workers for a particular performance of resilience, but is also instructive in gesturing towards a potential politics emerging from this experience. In Wayne Lewchuk *et al*’s account of the lived experience of precarious workers, stress and anxiety seep out alongside and despite perceived resilience (8). These negative feelings challenge the positive affective façade hiding the demands made of precarious affective workers and have, in some cases, formed the basis for mutual recognition and collectivity. As just one example among many movements claiming precarity as their central mandate, the Fight for \$15 campaign began among frustrated fast food workers in the United States and gained momentum in part on the basis of shared bad feelings among those

asked to perform resilience in offering service with a smile while struggling to survive.²⁷ As such, the affective qualities Evans and Reid see as fundamental to the reproduction of apolitical, complacent subjects living in fear of their own pending catastrophe—anxiety, fatigue, or despair (92, 177, 148)—may also be the basis on which new solidarities are forming, solidarities that seek to challenge the precarious underpinnings of the status quo, the affective front the precarious are forced to maintain in the face of this status quo, and the livability of its chronic condition of futurelessness. In the context of experiences of crisis entering into the everyday lives of many, reworking resilience as a capacity that can be fostered alongside or through frustration, stress, or a generalized sense of anxiety about one’s survival in the world, recognizes a necessity to forge new expectations and understandings of political agency and to find value and possibility in a range of affective orientations towards present conditions.

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“Resilient” Social Workers: A New Spirit in Human Services, or a New Form of Governmentality?

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Resilience is broadly conceived of as an adaptive response to hardship, crisis, adversity, and other forms of risk. In social work it has been positioned as a strength-based approach to working with “at-risk” populations and marginalized communities. In recent years, however, it has also become popular among social work practitioners and students as a coping or preparedness strategy in a profession where burnout has become common (Beddoe et al., 2013; Grant & Kinman, 2013; Crowder & Sears, 2017). To engage in a critical analysis of the expanding use of resilience in social work, this paper presents a preliminary examination of three interconnected aspects. First, we introduce how the concept of resilience has been adopted, accommodated, and debated in social work. This introduction also gives a broader context in which to understand how the discourses on “resilient” social workers are constructed and operated, which is the focus of the second section. In the last section, we reflect on what this new trend means for social workers, and for social work as a social justice-oriented profession.

“Resilience” in Social Work

In spite of its own contested and shifting discourses, in recent years “resilience” has become a keyword in the academic literature of social work across many countries, including Canada, the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and, even, China (Garret, 2015). Resilience is viewed as a shift to an “asset model” from the previous “deficit model”, and social work’s adoption of it has been heavily influenced by (social) psychology, in which resilience is variously referred to “the capacity of people to recover from trauma, to cope with high levels of stress or to demonstrate competence and coping despite continuous or cumulative adversity” (Bottrell, 2009, p.323). In social work practice, and specifically in interventions, resilience is an approach to identify risk, vulnerability, and protective factors when working with vulnerable or marginalized individuals, families, and communities (Aranda & Hart, 2015). With an emphasis on service users’ own strength, agency, and ability to cope, social workers’ roles are primarily supportive and empowering, and facilitate the individual’s adaptation and transformation. In this way social problems may be *preemptively* managed through managing risks: for example, “delinquent” or “at-risk” youth may be facilitated to become “independent”, and thus to “join and re-join the mainstream” (Garret, 2015, p.2).

Over time the “resilience talk” – largely non-critical – in social work has evolved from emphasizing resilience as an individual *attribute* into recognizing it as a *process* of adaptation that is also structured by the external social world (Lenette et al., 2013). In the past couple of years, however, more critical discussions of the increasingly prominent use of this concept in

social work have started to emerge, especially against the background of the recent wave of welfare retrenchments or “austerity” as a global trend (Garret, 2015). The major criticisms have focused on the politics of resilience discourses and the concept’s “operational” or practical consequences for disadvantaged individuals and groups.

At a discursive level resilience not only is operated as a *normative* expectation about individuals in the context of adversity; it is also assumed to be a positive quality that can triumph over adversity (Bottrell, 2009; Canavan, 2008; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). In practice, however, individuals’ capacities to “positively” adapt despite adversity, and the effects of their adaptation are always mediated by socioeconomic inequalities (Bottrell, 2009). Such challenges have also made visible at least two major limits of this concept: its lack of attention to the “materiality of the adversities and disadvantages” faced by marginalized people, and the power imbalance embedded in the dominant definition, in which the “marginal” perspectives are little considered (Bottrell, 2009, p.326). Accordingly, some alternative approaches, such as “collective resilience” and “resourcefulness”, were advocated to counteract the misplaced emphasis of the dominant resilience approach on risk management at an individual level rather than on capacity building at community and societal levels, or, on how to “beat the odds” through individual actions rather than “change the odds” through social transformation (Bottrell, 2009; Canavan, 2008; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013).

“Resilient” Social Workers

In many Western welfare states, including Canada, social work has become an increasingly stressful profession for two major reasons. The first reason in part relates to its nature, a profession that includes many sub-areas (e.g., child protection and medical social work) that are both professionally demanding and emotionally challenging. The second reason is more about the broader neoliberal welfare restructuring that has occurred since the 1980s, and that has, arguably, moved to a new stage of “austerity” – the continuing welfare retrenchments under a moralized umbrella – since the 2007-08 global financial crisis (Clarke & Newman, 2012). The consequences of welfare restructuring (by, for instance, cutting back welfare provisions and adopting “managerialism”, a business model, to manage human services) are that social workers now constantly struggle to do more with less, and with the discrepancy between their identity as social-justice-oriented workers or “helpers” and the constraints on their ability to help (e.g., Baine et al. 2014; Charlesworth et al. 2015; Lloyd et al. 2002).

The literature has documented various challenges to social workers in their daily practices, such as stress, burnout, and secondary trauma. Although some adversities are partly inherent in social work practice, others are the direct result of work demands (e.g., heavy workload, time pressures, multiple roles, and fragmented tasks) and the organization of the work environment, including insufficient resources to address “client” needs, devaluation of advocacy work, and lack of support from both supervisors and co-workers (Beddoe et al., 2013; Lloyd et

al., 2002; McCann et al., 2013). One of the results is that many social workers consider leaving the field, and some ultimately do (Beddoe et al., 2013, Lloyd et al., 2002), which has prompted exploration into how social workers can manage these “risks”.

The eroded welfare system and an increasingly stressful profession make it not a complete surprise that the resilience approach is finally extended to social workers themselves. It is expected to help prevent social workers burning out, to maintain their ability to practise effectively, and to improve their “readiness to manage self and emotions in the turbulent workplace” (Beddoe et al., 2013, p. 100; Lloyd et al., 2002; McCann et al., 2013). Unlike the version applied to disadvantaged individuals, social workers’ resilience is presented as a matter of their professional competence or performance, to which optimism, emotional competence, confidence, and professional commitment are viewed as key (Beddoe et al., 2013; Collins, 2007; Gran & Kinman, 2013; Lloyd et al., 2002; McFadden et al., 2014). In social work education, accordingly, resilience is not only a subject of teaching and learning but also a criteria used for screening “ideal” social work students (Beddoe et al., 2013). Yet the co-existence of dichotomous sets of keywords – such as “competence”, “commitment”, and “self-fulfillment” versus “burnout”, “stress”, and “managerial control” – also raises questions about the paradoxes embedded in the resilience approach (Aranda & Hart, 2015). In other words, is the resilience approach a response to some of the consequences of neoliberalism in the profession, or is it simply part of the reinvigorated neoliberal discourses?

Roll-with-it Neoliberalism?

There is no doubt that “resilience”, originally an ecological term, has now entered the political vocabulary, and risen as a concept laden with values, assumptions, and ideological expectations (Garrett, 2015; Joseph, 2013). In social work practice resilience emphasizes individuals’ – that is, service users and social workers’ – responsibility, adaptability, and preparedness in the context of adversity (Joseph, 2013). By failing to problematize and address the structural forces – such as uneven distribution of resources and neoliberal welfare restructuring – that have generated the risks, shocks and turbulence in individuals’ daily lives and work, however, the approach not only naturalizes the inevitability of such adversities; it also promotes self-reliance at an inordinate cost to those who are least capable of successful “adaptation”. In this sense, the invisibility of the state in the resilience discourses is no coincidence, and is, rather, consistent with the neoliberal trend of downloading responsibility onto individuals.

Imported into the “common sense” of social work as a profession, furthermore, resilience also complies with neoliberalism’s normative way of mobilizing social agents, and thus qualifies as a form of governmentality (Garrett, 2015; Joseph, 2013). In the name of professional identity or obligation, individual social workers’ responsibility for coping, competence, and success is not only moralized but also normalized. While “resilience” dominates the profession’s rhetorical

apparatus, however, its ideological roots and its relationship with neoliberalism are ignored (Garrett, 2015). It demands “acquiescence, not resistance”, privileges the status quo, and silences the discourses and practices of social justice (Bottrell, 2009; Neocleous, 2013, p.7, cited in Garrett, 2015, p.12). Social workers’ efforts—in such forms as active self-exploitation—to pursue “resilience” by absorbing the effects of neoliberal restructuring on human services may *de facto* help stabilize the neoliberal system itself (Baines et al., 2014).

In conclusion, attending to the disconnect between the resilience claim and what this concept is actually doing in social work helps reveal its nature as “roll-with-it” neoliberalism; that is, it is an attempt “to re-enchant the profession and discursively infuse it with a new ‘spirit’” in the context of neoliberal capitalism (Garrett, 2014, p. 503). We contend that using this “pseudo-scientific” concept in human services is regressive, and that encouraging the resilience of social workers in a resource-constrained context should be understood as a form of governmentality aiming to stabilize the eroded neoliberal welfare system. Without critically engaging with the politics of resilience and associated power (including power inequalities) and cost (both personal and social), a highly positive agent-centric notion of resilience “can be subject to political and ideological exploitation in that regressive changes in society, including social security and support systems, may be justified by narratives highlighting the attitudes of individuals” (Biermann, Hillmer-Pegram, Knapp, & Hum, 2016; Dagdeviren, Donoghue, & Promberger, 2016, p.17).

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Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition

The Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition was created in January 1998 following the designation of globalization and the human condition as a strategic area of research by the Senate of McMaster University. Subsequently, it was approved as an official research center by the University Planning Committee. The Institute brings together a group of approximately 30 scholars from both the social sciences and humanities. Its mandate includes the following responsibilities:

- a facilitator of research and interdisciplinary discussion with the view to building an intellectual community focused on globalization issues.
- a centre for dialogue between the university and the community on globalization issues
- a promoter and administrator of new graduate programming

In January 2002, the Institute also became the host for a Major Collaborative Research Initiatives Project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada where a group of over 40 researchers from across Canada and abroad are examining the relationships between globalization and autonomy.

The WORKING PAPER SERIES...

...circulates papers by members of the Institute as well as other faculty members and invited graduate students at McMaster University working on the theme of globalization. Scholars invited by the Institute to present lectures at McMaster will also be invited to contribute to the series.

Objectives:

- To foster dialogue and awareness of research among scholars at McMaster and elsewhere whose work focuses upon globalization, its impact on economic, social, political and cultural relations, and the response of individuals, groups and societies to these impacts. Given the complexity of the globalization phenomenon and the diverse reactions to it, it is helpful to focus upon these issues from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.
- To assist scholars at McMaster and elsewhere to clarify and refine their research on globalization in preparation for eventual publication.

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