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Governing Through Failure and Denial: The New Resilience Agenda

Resilience has spread so quickly through policy making that it has taken on the appearance of a new paradigm for intervention and problem solving. Given the rapid proliferation of usage in a variety of contexts, a precise definition of the term is now impossible. The World Bank talks of resilience in terms of 'people's ability to recover from negative shocks while retaining or improving their functioning'.[1] In a slightly broader sense it can be understood as 'the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, adapt, and quickly recover from stresses and shocks such as drought, violence, conflict or natural disaster'.[2] This definition by the European Commission applies the idea to international development and emergency support and it is to this area that the article mainly relates. Looking at the arguments of the EU, World Bank, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and other international actors, it suggests that the notions of failure and denial capture two important ways in which the dominant narrative on resilience applies itself to the international domain. It looks at the opportunities and possibilities resilience offers human agents and suggests that these come at the price of being able to influence the bigger picture.

A review of the academic literature can reveal two broad attitudes to resilience. One understanding sees resilience as a radical new approach that opens up new ways of thinking and understanding. If not wholly positive about what these developments might represent, this view does tend to emphasise a view of resilience as opportunity and possibility. A more negative view of resilience, by contrast, emphasises the way it restricts our opportunities to act and creates compliant subjects who fit the conditions created by neoliberal capitalism. This latter view is the dominant one among the critical scholars who, applying Foucault, tend to coalesce around the view that resilience is a form of neoliberal governmentality producing neoliberal subjects.[3]

The first approach is not so straightforward however. There is a dominant approach to resilience that starts from the ecology literature and emphasises systemic adaptation. This view takes a positive view of resilience as offering opportunity for reflexive and adaptive behaviour. However, this is founded upon a rather negative picture of the world as uncertain and unpredictable. Critics would also argue that the mainstream resilience literature represents a rather technical and apolitical approach that obscures the power relations behind complex system dynamics and depoliticises the social context within which adaptive behaviour occurs.[4] However, there is also a

[1] World Bank, *Building Resilience: Integrating Climate and Disaster Risk into Development. Lessons from World Bank Group Experience* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2014), 80.
[2] European Commission *EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises*, (Brussels: European Commission, 2012), 1.

[3] Melinda Cooper and Jeremy Walker 'Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation', *Security Dialogue,* 14, no. 2 (2011): 143–60;
Mark Duffield, 'How did we Become Unprepared? Emergency and Resilience in an Uncertain World', British Academy Review, 21 (2013): 55-58; Brad Evans and Julian Reed, *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), Jonathan Joseph, 'Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach', *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, 1, no. 1, (2013): 38-52; Mareile Kaufmann, 'Emergent Self-organisation in Emergencies: Resilience Rationales in Interconnected Societies', *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses* 1, no. 1 (203): 53–68; Chris Zebrowski, 'The Nature of Resilience', *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses* 1, no. 3: 159–173.
[4] Maureen Biermann, Kevin Hillmer-Pegram, Corrine Noel Knapp and Richard E. Hum,

more critical understanding of resilience that recognises how tying resilience to a more political logic does not mean it is 'intuitively neoliberal', that it might challenge neoliberal logics, may 'unblock institutional stalemates and unleash unknown human potentialities'.[5] Critics of resilience perhaps too readily tie resilience to an unproblematic neoliberal meta-narrative and over-look its radical potential within other logics of governing.[6]

The first approach can be seen as operating under conditions of complexity and human adaptability, with various opportunities for human creativity. The second approach is more negative and sees these as being limited and constrained by resilience and its associated practices. This view sees resilience as part of a broader network of governmentality, often of a neoliberal character. The emphasis is more on the conditions, context, and perhaps the structures that enable and constrain activities. Rather than representing something radically new, this view tends to see resilience as consistent with (or modifying) existing methods of (neoliberal) governance. It is this approach that fits with the themes of failure and denial. However, a critical reading of the governance context within which resilience operates does not necessarily mean that resilience does not offer some positive opportunities. The argument of the article is that resilience thinking does indeed offer human agents certain possibilities, but this tends to be confined to the subjective realm of the everyday and offers this precisely in order to deny that we can be effective agents in the wider world.

Failure and denial are two very apt ways of describing the focus of this form of international intervention. Failure refers to two aspects of the 'bigger picture'. First it relates to a set of ontological assumptions that tends to be understood through arguments about complex systems and wicked problems. Resilience thinking sees this in terms of a world of unpredictable events and uncertain outcomes. It suggests that we have very little control over these complex systemic failures and that consequently, faced with risk and uncertainty, we must govern ourselves through learning appropriate strategies of survival through adaptation. Second, resilience thinking links this general condition to failures of intervention, regulation and control. It rejects the established liberal framework of intervention whereby states and other institutions and organisations attempt to control and regulate their environment or to provide comprehensive security and protection. These perceived failures are used to justify governance through denial. In the case of international interventions, our inability control the wider environment or global context, with its crises and uncertainties coupled with a record of failed international interventions and patchy statebuilding is used to reinforce a strategy of adaptation that shifts responsibility (to adapt) on to poorer states, communities and individuals who have to learn how to better cope with their risks and insecurity.

Denial takes on a new dimension in recent strategy by going beyond what Chandler in 2006 called 'Empire in denial' where statebuilding and forms of regulation were pursued by Western states and international organisations through strategies that denied the power being wielded.[7] The international community now goes further in denying that it has either the ability or the obligation to intervene and that its best role is to encourage (and monitor) responsible local agency. This does not mean outright rejection of previous approaches. This article argues that governance through failure and denial might be actually more effective in securing compliance to international norms, forcing states and local populations to adapt their behaviour in the face of problems that the

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'Approaching a Critical Turn? A Content Analysis of the Politics of Resilience in Key Bodies of Resilience Literature', *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, online (2015), 2-3.

[5] Jessica Schmidt, 'Intuitively Neoliberal? Towards a Critical Understanding of Resilience Governance', *European Journal of International Relations*, 21, no. 2 (2015): 402-406.

2015, 208.

[6] Olaf Corry 'From Defense to Resilience: Environmental Security beyond Neo-liberalism', *International Political Sociology* 8 (2014), 256–274, 257.

[7] David Chandler, *Empire in Denial* (London: Pluto, 2006), 1.

international community either cannot, or does not want to deal with itself. Instead failure and denial are used to normalise the retreat from certain global and domestic obligations, while reinforcing the need for a certain type of governance in the face of significant shocks and threats which according to the UNDP, 'appear to have become the norm, rather than the exception'.[8]

To map this out, we start by making the case for the second approach which sees resilience in relation to governmentality. We then look at how resilience fits into the governance approach by examining its philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world and the way that we act. This leads to an examination of what resilience has to offer, accepting the view that it does add something extra to contemporary forms of governance. While suggesting that resilience derives its meaning from surrounding discourse and practices, it does offer modifications to these through its focus on knowledge, the social and the human. In acknowledging this, the article accepts the view of the first approach that resilience encourages human potential, but suggests that this is constrained by its position within a broadly neoliberal logic of governing. The argument is developed through the themes of governance through failure and governance through denial while the final section develops this in the context of global governance and international interventions.

Resilience as governmentality

While the idea of resilience has a number of origins, the ecology literature is most relevant to a focus on international intervention and such issues as natural disasters humanitarian intervention and development in particular. The ecological literature begins to challenge the model favoured by classical physics that emphasises the need to return to a state of equilibrium following a disturbance[9]. Instead it explores the ability of a system to reorganise itself in the face of shocks and stresses. So whereas engineering resilience is focussed on the return to one stable state or equilibrium, ecological resilience looks at how systems might reorganise and indeed change their states. Disturbance is seen in relation to its ability to change a system and thereby alter behaviour. Ecological resilience therefore looks at the movement from one form of stability to another and even raises the possibility of multiple states and continuous transformation.[10]

Applying resilience to societies means placing emphasis on such things as social and system complexity, functional diversity, different emergent states, and nonlinear ways of behaving.[11] Complex systems are in constant motion with no one stable state, and subject to multiple externally imposed crises and shocks. While resilience has become associated with the ability to withstand shocks and to 'bounce back' recent emphasis has highlighted the need to evolve and adapt to a constantly changing environment. It is suggested that notions of complexity and adaptation may well lead to a denial of the possibility of effective intervention to control the situation. While the ecology literature looks at external shocks such as global environmental change, a focus on societal forms of resilience would include such things as pandemics, economic shocks, terrorist threats and various other security challenges. The developing notion of *societal resilience* examines the complex

[8] UNDP *Towards Human Resilience: Sustaining MDG Progress in an Age of Economic Uncertainty*, (New York: UNDP, 2011), 1.

[9] C. S. Holling, 'Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems', *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 4 (1973): 1-23.

[10] Lance Gunderson, C. S. Holling, L. Pritchard, and G. D. Peterson 'Resilience' in Harold A Mooney and Josep G Canadell (eds.) in *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change Volume 2, The Earth System: Biological and Ecological Dimensions of Global Environmental Change*: (Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE) Publication, 2002): 530–531, 530.

[11] Ibid.

interactions between ecological and social systems[12], their resource systems and organisations, and the societal awareness of these through reflexive understanding. In both cases, the resilience discourse works to focus attention on the uncontrollability of these problems and the need to work out how to operate in a world of increasing vulnerability and insecurity. Indeed resilience works to deny the possibility of securing ourselves and to instead create a sense of the need to continually adapt to threats and dangers that are beyond our control. It shifts attention from the liberal aspiration to influence planetary life and insure ourselves against its dangers to the neoliberal belief in the necessity of risk as a private good.[13]

Advocates of societal resilience argue that the adaptive capacity of social systems depends on the nature of their institutions and their ability to absorb external shocks.[14] Examining how institutions deal with external crises and their capacity to absorb shocks helps explain why resilience is attractive to policy makers. Focusing on institutions is important in engaging notions of reflexivity and responsiveness. Berkes, Colding and Folke go on to say that crises can actually play a constructive role in resource management because they force us to consider issues of learning, adapting and renewal.[15] This constitutes the positive element that we identified within the mainstream literature (or first approach). Such arguments can be found in a wide range of policy documents and strategy papers. For example, the British think tank Demos argues that resilience should be seen not only as the ability of a society or community to 'bounce back', but as a positive process of learning and adaptation.[16] Meanwhile the World Resources Institute defines resilience as 'the capacity of a system to tolerate shocks or disturbances and recover' and argues that this depends on the ability of people to 'adapt to changing conditions through learning, planning, or reorganization'.[17] Like Berkes, Colding and Folke it even suggests that resilience should be understood as the capacity to thrive in the face of challenge.[18]

Although resilience approaches appear to be systemic in their arguments, in the social field this often works more as a framing device to justify certain approaches to governance. Scholars of this perspective argue that systemic change and uncertainty leads to the question of how governance arrangements can best cope with and adapt to ever changing conditions.[19] It is accepted that the world has always been complex, but complex systems are now mediated through new levels of interconnectedness, flows of information, multiple layers of decision-making and new pressures on policy makers. In addition decision-making is perceived to be increasingly fragmented, badly coordinated and unable to deal with the speed of technical and ecological change.[20] While one way of analysing this relationship would be to look at the deep rooted changes in the nature of complex

[12] W. N. Adger 'Social and Ecological Resilience: Are they Related?', *Progress in Human Geography,* 24, no. 3 (2000):347-364; B. Walker, C. S. Holling, S. R. Carpenter, and A. Kinzig, 'Resilience, Adaptability and Transformability in Social–Ecological Systems, *Ecology and Society* 9, no. 2 (2004).

[13] Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life,* 41-2.

[14] Fikret Berkes, John Colding, and Carl Folke, 'Introduction' in Fikret Berkes, John Colding, and Carl Folke (eds.) *Navigating Social-ecological Systems: Building Resilience for Complexity and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 1-29.

[15] Ibid., 20.

[16] Charlie Edwards, *Resilient Nation* (London: Demos 2009), 10.

[17] World Resources Institute in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, and World Bank (2008) *World Resources 2008: Roots of Resilience Growing the Wealth of the Poor* (Washington, DC: World Resources Institute, 2008), 27.

[18] Ibid., ix.

[19] Andreas Duit, Victor Galaz, Katarina Eckerberg and Jonas Ebbesson, 'Governance, Complexity, and Resilience. Introduction', *Global Environmental Change - Human and Policy Dimensions,* 20 (2010): 363–68, 364.

[20] Ibid., 363.

systems and try to explain how this influences governance, this article instead takes what we described as the second approach which connects resilience to changes in governance while asking what resilience thinking might presuppose about the wider world. To focus this way round is to start with strategies of governmentality, rather than with theories of things like complexity. It also better allows us to pay attention to the themes of failure and denial since these are now given a clear strategic character.

To make this argument requires us to see resilience primarily as a tool of governance that operates in a certain way as defined by Foucauldian governmentality. That is to say, it forms part of a governmentality strategy that operates from a distance[21] by shaping expectations conducting conduct and measuring compliance with a set of international practices and norms. Governmentality assumes a liberal character insofar as it seeks to limit direct forms of governance by appealing to the governed to govern themselves in the most appropriate ways.[22] This becomes embedded in a set of normative assumptions about individual conduct and responsible behaviour. Applying this to a study of resilience means looking at how a resilience strategy works 'from a distance'[23] by appealing to responsible behaviour and self-reliance, in particular by placing emphasis on strategies of learning, awareness and adaptability in the context of possible crises, risks and insecurities. As a means of governance, we can examine how it might shift responsibility away from states and institutions and on to populations and communities. Governmentality draws attention to the way resilience goes beyond a reactive approach that teaches us how to 'bounce back' but is, in O'Malley's[24] view, a new way of creating adaptable subjects capable of responding to and even taking advantage of situations of radical uncertainty.

From a governmentality perspective, it can be seen why a resilience-based approach should place such emphasis on things like individual preparedness, information sharing, informed decision-making, understanding our roles and responsibilities, showing adaptability to our situation and being able to 'bounce back' if things go wrong. These fit with neoliberal approaches that put emphasis on us as having the freedom but also the responsibility that comes with governing ourselves in appropriate ways. Resilience, seen in relation to governance, is about encouraging active citizenship where people, rather than being dependent on the state, take responsibility for (if not necessarily control of) their own well-being. In particular, this relates to the risk and security aspects of governance and it operates through an appeal for preparedness, awareness and reflexive monitoring of our situation and our ability to respond. This is based on the assumption that there is little that we can do about the bigger picture and that we must instead focus on how to adapt to the complexities and uncertainties of a world we can no longer control or predict. It encourages assertive and enterprising activity at the micro level, while denying the possibility to intervene at the macro level of the system. As liberalism abandons its universalistic aspirations insecurity becomes the 'principal design for governmental reasoning'.[25]

At one level, therefore, this works through a process of denial. It rejects those liberal or modernist understandings of state and society with their rationalist, top-down views of the role of the state, government, science and planning. Some theorists see this in terms of modernist versus postmodernist approaches. This is particularly relevant to disasters and overseas interventions.

[21] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 108.
[22] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 319.
[23] Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, 'Governing Economic Life', *Economy and Society*, 19, no. 1 (1990): 1 – 31, 9.
[24] Pat O'Malley 'Resilient Subjects: Uncertainty, Warfare and Liberalism', *Economy and Society,* 39, no. 4 (2010): 488 – 509.

[25] Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life,* 64.

Duffield[26] sees the modernist approach as reliant upon scientific prediction and large-scale managerial response to geo-physical processes that seek to contain or minimise their impacts. This has given way to the view that modernist approaches have left us constantly exposed and unprepared. Disasters are now regarded as internal to societies and that accepting their immanence means learning how to adapt in order to survive. This is seen as a post-security situation where attempts to protect or secure are sure to lead to failure and may well do more harm than good.

Instead of seeing a world that is amenable to human understanding, intervention and control we find an approach that blurs boundaries, as Chandler[27] notes, between subject and object, culture and environment, agent and structure and public and private. As the next section shall argue, this view is based on a series of ontological assumptions characteristic of contemporary society and its associated theories and approaches to governance. However, rather than undermining the idea of governance, these arguments simultaneously deny that we can adequately grasp the complexities of the world through established liberal frameworks of understanding and intervention, while reinforcing the more neoliberal idea that we have to learn how to manage these complexities as they affect us at the micro level of everyday conduct.

The philosophical assumptions of resilience

Policy makers and those promoting the resilience discourse are not particularly interested in philosophical discussions about such things as complexity, subjectivity or the post-human and an extended account of such things will not be found by looking at policy papers. Nevertheless, explicit or not, resilience finds its place within a broader discourse of governance because of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin it. These are consistent with the assumptions of contemporary forms of governance and they help render the world governable in certain ways. Before one can govern, one has to see the world in a particular way and make various ontological assumptions about its nature and the types of activities that take place within it. There are also epistemological questions about the nature and status of the knowledge we acquire and whether this knowledge is useful in relation to certain social practices. The idea of resilience fits comfortably with the prevailing ontological and epistemological commitments of most contemporary practices of governance.

A survey of the most influential arguments in contemporary social theory tends to find a similar set of ontological commitments[28], although we might note in what we termed the first approach to resilience, both a negative view of the wider world and a positive view of human adaptability and choice making. In contrast to the rather nihilistic stance of earlier postmodern approaches, more recent ideas, certainly among the mainstream, usually develop a more positive slant in terms of human decision-making. These arguments are not that dissimilar from some of the claims made about globalisation, most notably in the work of Anthony Giddens (although contrast Beck[29]). Rather than being a process that we can control, globalisation is seen as something that we have to learn from and adapt to. If we make the right choices, we can prosper. Behind the first approach to resilience lies a similar but slightly different ontological picture with the world seen as being beyond us, not so much because of some inherent characteristic of modernity working its way

[26] Duffield, 'How did we Become Unprepared?', 55.
[27] David Chandler, *Resilience: The Governance of Complexity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 50.
[28] Jonathan Joseph, *The Social in the Global: Social Theory, Governmentality and Global Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
[29] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992).

through[30], but due to the inherent complexity of all social-ecological systems. This approach lacks the idea of progress or development as might be found in sociological approaches to modernity, and is more pragmatic or realist insofar as it takes the social world as it finds it rather than viewing it according to some general liberal or Enlightenment norms.

In terms of resilience thinking, the notion of complexity has the most obvious ontological implications. It is not necessarily the case that work on resilience is particularly influenced by complexity theory and other recent theoretical trends. However, resilience thinkers often embrace similar ontological assumptions, more often than not portraying the world as increasingly complex but also contingent, fluid and messy. It tends to reject the idea that there are stable and enduring social relations or steady states. As the earlier ecology literature blended with more sociological approaches to examine socio-ecological systems, focus was on continuous change and disturbance. For Folke[31] this issue is no longer one of robustness or capacity to absorb disturbance but to examine dynamic adaptive interplay. Applied to societies, these arguments question the view that there are stable social roles, identities and functions as well as suggesting a move away from collective identities and actions based around such things as class or nation-state. These are said to have given way to complex networks of actors, each with their own individual trajectories. As Folke puts it, these networks 'serve as the web that seems to tie together the adaptive governance system.[32] Our social engagements have no necessity to them but are the coming together of diverse elements that blend together with our own particular narratives. And in order to survive the uncertainties of complex systems, people have to show their own initiative as active and reflexive agents capable of adaptive behaviour.

Resilience is appealing as a policy tool because it urges a turn to ourselves and suggests a need for people to show initiative, enterprise and adaptability. In a more general sense, resilience is significant because it refocuses on subjectivity. It is possible to give this a positive spin – as Schmidt says, 'agency resurfaces in terms of making (constant) change on inner life through learning from exposure to the contingencies of ontological complexity'.[33] However, this occurs in a paradoxical sense because this more active conception of the subject is founded on a passive conception of its relation to the wider social condition. Indeed, the ontological assumptions behind resilience might be said to be fatalistic. Resilience discourse is usually found arguing that the complex and uncertain nature of systems and macro-level processes means that there is little we can do in the face of catastrophic threats. But it is precisely for this reason that individuals, communities and governments need to become more proactive. As an important USAID document states, since we cannot do much to stop shocks from happening, we must increase adaptive capacity in order to respond quickly and effectively to new circumstances.[34] Hence resilience fits with a philosophy that urges us to turn from a concern with the outside world to a concern with our own subjectivity, our adaptability, our reflexive understanding, our own risk assessments, our knowledge acquisition and, above all else, our responsible decision-making. Although we started with ontological assumptions about the bigger social world, we arrive at a view by which the best way to govern society is through a greater awareness of our own behaviour. Indeed, a major claim here is that the way resilience works, certainly in Anglo-Saxon approaches, is to move fairly swiftly from thinking about the dynamics of systems by denying that we can control or regulate them. If indeed systems are beyond

[30] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).
[31] Carl Folke 'Resilience: The Emergence of Perspective for Social-ecological Systems Analysis' *Global Environmental Change*, 16, no. 253 267 (2006): 253-267, 259
[32] Ibid., 267.
[33] Schmidt, 'Intuitively Neoliberal?', 402-406.
2015: 404
[34] USAID, *Building Resilience to Recurrent Crises: USAID Policy and Program Guidance*, (Washington DC: USAID, 2013), 1.

our control or even, perhaps, our understanding, then the focus should shift to the individual and the importance of self-reliance, adaptability and preparedness. Because of this move away from the idea that we can regulate or intervene effectively in the wider world to the view that consequently we must self-regulate and adapt our own behaviour, this position will be called governance by denial.

Writers on resilience often embrace the conceptual vagueness and malleability of the idea as if this better able to 'grasp the ambivalent character of boundary objects'.[35] Ontological denial that the 'real world' has a coherence or grasp-ability is combined with epistemological denial that we can have any trust in our knowledge of this world. Ontologically, the world is no longer regarded as amenable to effective intervention, nor can we assert that this world has a clear structure, underlying causes, mechanisms or actors. Resilience fits with a now dominant philosophy that portrays the world as one that is beyond our control and also beyond our comprehension. Traditional methods of analysis are no longer regarded adequate to understand this world in all its new found fuzziness. A combination of epistemological uncertainty, ontological contingency and relativism and ontological-epistemic fuzziness means that despite resilience thinking claiming its origins in systems theory, we are left unable, as a critic of recent trends in complexity thinking notes, to provide for any serious critique of broader or systemic challenge.[36]

While this hinders the possibility of both social science and critical thinking, it actually has enhanced usefulness for contemporary governance and contributes to the instrumentalisation of different techniques of analysis. The paradox of contemporary understandings of the world is that the more uncertain we are of the bigger (global) picture, the more we must rely on the small detail of the little picture. Resilience-thinking fits with the return of the everyday. It turns from the grand projects of social engineering and universal rights to take a much more pragmatist view of social life. Resilience, certainly in the mainstream form of the first approach, resigns us to the view that the increasingly complex bigger picture is beyond both control and comprehension, that the human-centred project of modernity is an illusion and that we must instead pay attention to our (uncertain) place within the system. Rather than trying to change the world, we have to learn how to adapt our behaviour. The less certain we are of the wider world, the more we need detailed knowledge of the micro-level in order to better understand what we need to do in order to survive. The fuzziness of the macro world reinforces the detailed micro picture of our individual interactions. This is why resilience, while seeming to reject a number of significant liberal assumptions or to consider large scale liberal interventions as failures, should still be understood through a governance paradigm that the next section will understand as neoliberal governmentality.

The distinctiveness of resilience: knowledge, the social and the human

We have noted how the literature on resilience divides into two approaches. The first sees is as a radical new approach that opens up new ways of thinking and understanding. In this section we reject this overall position, but agree that resilience does offer something distinctive as an approach to governance. The second approach to resilience sees it in this wider context of governance, usually as part of a broader network of (neoliberal) governmentality. Emphasis is usually placed on the way this form of governance constrains activities – captured rather well by the negative themes

[35] Fridolin Simon Brand and Kurt Jax, 'Focusing the Meaning(s) of Resilience: Resilience as a Descriptive Concept and a Boundary Object', *Ecology and Society,* 12, no. 1 (2007): 23.
[36] Kai Koddenbrock, 'Strategies of Critique in International Relations: From Foucault and Latour Towards Marx', *European Journal of International Relations*, 21, no. 2 (2015): 243–266.
, 247.

of failure and denial. However, critics among the critics have rightly argued that this 'self-evidently neoliberal framing' of resilience fails to adequately engage with resilience discourses' claims that adaptation presents 'a positive agenda and an empowering promise'.[37]

This section addresses these concerns by showing the difference resilience makes, particularly in relation to our understanding of the social and the human. In adopting the second position, it rejects the idea that resilience represents a fundamental shift in ways of thinking about and acting in the world and instead sees its arguments as consistent with existing methods of governance. It argues that these are predominantly neoliberal, but not exclusively so. However, in modifying and calibrating contemporary forms of governmentality, resilience thinking does offer something different. As the table below outlines, resilience collects together new ideas about knowledge, society and the human. This section runs these through a governmentality framework by relating them to governance though failure and governance through denial – as indicated in the following table.

	Governance through failure	Governance through denial
Knowledge	Failure of modernist understanding	Denial of realist claims about the knowability of the world 'out there'
		Denial of intelligibility of natural and social processes, causes, etc
		Uncertainty about scientific claims and practices
	Failure to understand complexity and deep uncertainty	Pragmatist approach to knowledge. 'Best fit' or 'good enough' solutions to knowledge problems
The social	Failure of rationalist planning	Denial of enduring social relations
	Failure of alternative social projects	Denial of social roles and identities
	Failure to prevent catastrophic events and crises	Denial that people and societies can be secured or protected
	Embedded, messy, social context	Pragmatist, 'best fit' solutions to social problems. Governance through the local, the everyday and hybrid solutions
	Failure of established liberal frameworks as well as limits of neoliberal alternatives	
The human	Historical failure of	Denial that large scale

[37] Schmidt, 'Intuitively Neoliberal', 404.

	intervention to improve human security	intervention can effectively solve human problems
	Failure of individual autonomy	Governance through human capacities
	Essential human vulnerability	

The first approach to resilience would emphasise just how radical a change in thinking the resilience approach represents. This is often presented in the mainstream literature, but the critical approach of Chandler also embraces this view, presenting resilience as something akin to an epistemic shift, to use a more structuralist Foucauldian notion. For Chandler, resilience is linked to the emergence of complexity and is a direct challenge to the Enlightenment understanding of knowable laws and the autonomy of the thinking subject.[38]

By contrast, the view of this article is that resilience is neither a radically new episteme in and of itself, nor part of a fundamental change in thinking about governance through complexity. Rather, it represents a challenging reflection on liberal governance from within existing practices and discourses. In taking the second approach of resilience as governmentality, it can be viewed as a critical reflection on key elements of the liberal framework of governance, but is not in itself a new way of doing things. Indeed, resilience has little substance of its own outside of the already existing discourse and practices within which it is situated. Within these it operates as a critical and reflexive element rather than as a radical alternative understanding. Indeed, when we step outside of philosophical discussions about complexity and turn instead to policy documents on resilience, it is often difficult to see whether resilience really does radically change either our knowledge or our practices.

However, it is useful to distinguish between resilience as a set of practices and techniques and resilience as a means of framing issues of governance in particular ways. If we look at resilience only in terms of practices and techniques then it is easy to come to the conclusion that it is simply a rebranding of existing practices, albeit ones that are being scaled back in an austere period of denial. The real contribution of resilience at present is its way of framing questions of governance and in this sense it does offer something different from business as usual. In particular, most policy papers, particularly those dealing with ecological systems, natural disasters and climate change, are now framed by a pervading fatalism that changes our way of thinking about complex problems. Critical scholars of resilience like David Chandler are certainly right that this reflects a significant shift in thinking, away from some key concerns of those liberal frameworks that believe that strong intervention and planning can somehow control our situation. This should be qualified insofar as this problematisation of some key components of liberalism is not so radically new if considered in the context of what has been going on *within* Anglo-Saxon countries where neoliberal interventions have substantially questioned many core liberal assumptions about the relationship between state, market, society and individual.

However, in the international sphere this does come across as a significant retreat from the grand scale ambitions of liberal intervention and statebuilding projects. Instead, resilience offers new suggestions for practice based on a recognition of some of the failures of liberal intervention and the universal values and beliefs that support it. As a form of knowledge this critique works through belief in the failure of modernist understanding to deal with and confront the principle of radical uncertainty. Consequently knowledge works on the basis of our perceived vulnerability and unpreparedness in the face of emergent and unforeseen threats. As Duffield[39] notes, resilience

[38] Chandler, *Resilience*, 30.
[39] Duffield, 'How did we Become Unprepared?', 56.

thinking has been able to colonise a neoliberal turn in social policy by presenting the idea of disaster absorbed within or internal to society as a state of permanent emergency. We might qualify this argument slightly in suggesting that this is the case in the 'advanced liberal societies' where governance makes use of a permanent sense of *threat* or potential crisis as opposed to the situation in poorer societies where resilient populations must deal with the effects of *shocks* that are all too real.

In this uncertain age, knowledge takes a more pragmatic form, looking for 'best fit' or 'good enough' solutions to complex or 'wicked' problems. This knowledge is realist in the political sense of achieving certain ends or goals, but anti-realist in the scientific or philosophical sense of believing that the world is ordered in a certain way and is open to investigation.[40] Hence the knowledge claims underpinning resilience tend to undermine the scientific belief in intelligible natural and social processes, underlying causes and identifiable mechanisms. It fits in with current doubts toward scientific claims and practices. The ability to present disasters as internal to society is premised on a denial of our ability to comprehend anything beyond. More pragmatic forms of governance are premised on our perceived failure to understand complexity and deep uncertainty.

The second distinctive feature of the resilience approach is its attitude towards the social. Again this adds something different to existing strategies of governance, but it modifies and re-calibrates existing techniques rather than representing a more significant epistemic shift. It recognises human activity to be embedded within a social context and it looks for ways of drawing on societal resources in order to strengthen our ability to face challenges. As a strategy of governmentality it works by placing emphasis on the need for people themselves to address their resilience strategies in order to make themselves less vulnerable and prone to hardship.

This view of humans as socially embedded represents a partial rejection of the idea that we are autonomous, rational, calculating individuals. Instead, resilience highlights our essential vulnerability through the messy social relations and entanglements we find ourselves in. This turn to the social is somewhat impoverished however, premised on a rejection of classical sociological views in favour of contemporary arguments about the networked, fluid and contingent character of social relations. This view of the social is based on the denial that such social relations have an enduring character, that they have a hierarchy or order, or that the people within these relations can have stable social roles and identities. It deems past attempts at ordering social life to be failures. It rejects alternative social projects and questions top-down state intervention to regulate social life. As noted, resilience fits with the questioning of rationalist planning and large-scale intervention in favour of pragmatist, 'best fit' solutions that recognise the messy, everyday character of social life.

Indeed, such a view is not at all inconsistent with neoliberal governmentality which has always, as Dean[41] among others has noted, maintained a view of individual freedom as socially constructed within complex social and institutional frameworks. This networked understanding of the social modifies and develops existing views about social capital and other capacities. According to these views, social capital reflects social networks and formal and informal rules and norms that mediate our interactions with one another as well as with our environment. For some resilience advocates we can add 'adaptive capacity' as a form of capital that reflects our ability to experiment, learn and adopt novel solutions in the face of severe challenges.[42] Again, this is premised on the belief that we cannot protect ourselves against catastrophic events and crises and that governance through

[40] Roy Bhaskar *A Realist Theory of Science*, (Hassocks and New Jersey: Harvester 1978), 22.
[41] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, (London: Sage, 1999), 157.
[42] Abel, N., D. H. M. Cumming, and J. M. Anderies, 'Collapse and Reorganization in Social-ecological Systems: Questions, Some Ideas, and Policy Implications, *Ecology and Society* 11, no. 1 (2006): 17-41: 19.

failure instead encourages us to be resourceful in the face of adversity by making full use of social (and adaptive) resources and networks.

As Chandler rightly notes,[43] this represents a shift from a subject-centred to a relational understanding of our problems that raises questions about individual autonomy by emphasizing connectedness and social embeddedness. This can be found in strategy papers for international interventions such as a recent DFID approach paper from the UK which argues that resilience needs to be contextualised and understood in relation to a social group, socio-economic or political system, environmental context or institution.[44] The mix of social, institutional and human capacities, as well as the tensions these entail, is neatly captured in the following passage from another DFID paper:

> *Resilience* refers to the ability to absorb and recover from hazard impacts. For many analysts it is the opposite of vulnerability (and thus much the same as capacity), though others make the useful distinction between capacities as attributes of individuals and households, and resilience which also includes a favourable institutional environment. From this latter perspective, resilience is the coming together of such capacities with the social, institutional and informational resources that enable their effective use.[45]

The mix of institutional capacities and the capacities and attributes of individuals constitutes an important issue in how to understand international interventions with the normal emphasis being on the need to build institutional capacities. Recent discussions of resilience offer something different – indeed they perhaps represent a belief that institutional capacity approaches have failed in their objectives. Hence, there is a turn to building *human* capacities, with resilience strategies placing more emphasis on building resilient individuals and communities rather than institutions. To do this, certain human qualities are invoked. These human qualities are considered beyond both the institutional approach and the logic of economic markets insofar as they do not conform to the normally assumed model of rational-calculative behaviour. Some arguments, like Mark Bevir's[46] make the point that a new wave of governance has become less market-oriented by promoting new networks and alliances. Resilience can be said to be a part of this new mix of practices or variegated governance, some elements of which appear to be more aware of the limits of markets and rational-calculation. Olaf Corry makes a similar point that resilience can appear in multiple discourses of governance which compete with one another, rather than forming a fully constituted regime.[47] These arguments are not incorrect, but this does not necessarily mean that we are heading towards a richer understanding of the social and the human.

Bevir is right that recent governance approaches shift away from purely neoclassical economics to more emphasis on networks and connections. But ultimately the market is promoted *through* such networks just as it is in the more established notion of social capital that tries (and has perhaps failed) to fill the gaps in market rationality by introducing a more social element. Likewise, the human turn has already been anticipated in work such as Amartya Sen's which makes a direct appeal to individual human capacities as the basis for a new logic of development.[48] While seemingly critical of mainstream thinking, such arguments remain consistent with neoliberal and

[43] Chandler *Resilience*, 11.
[44] DFID, *Defining Disaster Resilience: A DFID Approach Paper,* (London: Department for International Development, 2011), 8.
[45] DFID, *Disaster Risk Reduction: A Development Concern. A Scoping Study on Links Between Disaster Risk Reduction, Poverty and Development*, (London: Department for International Development, 2004), 16.
[46] Mark Bevir, *A Theory of Governance*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 162.
[47] Corry 'From Defense to Resilience', 257.
[48] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

market-based technologies of governance insofar as they shift focus from the bigger picture to the micro level and promote a view of humans as innovative, enterprising and risk-taking.

It may be possible that through actual human struggles, a richer understanding of social and the human might be achieved. However, the dominant understandings at the international level are those put forward by the main international organisations and actors, rather than the grassroots. They thus represent more of a critical reflection on the failures of institution building, rather than an alternative to market logic. Resilience does encourage a more social or human way of thinking though its focus on reflexive awareness of our embedded social context. But while there might be some potential in interpreting this in such a way as to emphasise human qualities such as empathy, solidarity, togetherness and understanding, the resilience policy-making literature interprets the human through the lens of governance and therefore according to such things as our capacity to learn, reflect and adapt.

According to the first approach to resilience, we must accept the ways of the word and find freedom elsewhere – in the everyday life choices we make, or in the subjective realm of our inner life. According to the second approach, this constitutes a form of governmentality that does perhaps govern through a certain idea of the social and the human, but denies the true possibilities that human agency might realise. Obviously there is something intangibly human about resilience and our desire to survive and overcome adversity. But thus far, the potential appeal to human empowerment that resilience might offer[49] does not appear to materialise in the realm of global governance.

Global governing through failure and denial

We have set out a theory of governance through denial based on the futility of trying to influence the wider world while paying more intensive regard to our individual conduct and social interaction. This fits with the second approach to resilience outlined at the start of this article as resilience as governmentality, usually of an embedded neoliberal character.[50] This places emphasis not on the enabling role of resilience practices, but on the limiting and constraining effects of resilience as (part of) a strategy of governance. Understood as governmentality, this ties in with the notion of governing from a distance. Although this can be explored in relation to domestic policy making, this section seeks to outline this connection to governmentality in relation to international interventions. By focusing on interventions, this section begins very much with the idea of governing through failure. Indeed global governance is full of failures with the notions of failed states, poor governance and weak capacities now joined by the idea of failed liberal internationalism. Indeed, global governance increasingly operates through a belief in the historical failure of intervention. In this sense it is part of the human security turn, but brings with it something of a critique, or at least a denial of the effectiveness of liberal universalism, combining with arguments in current statebuilding, peacekeeping and development strategy which start to pay some lip-service to the local or which are forced to react pragmatically. Resilience's ability to colonise the global governance discourse is dependent on this perceived failure of past intervention and the irony is that this past failure helps rejuvenate governance through denial, allowing international actors to step back and transfer responsibility to local populations and states.

Global governmentality, like domestic forms, works from a distance through invoking private and civil society actors. It governs through the market and the competences of the private sector and

[49] Schmidt, 'Intuitively Neoliberal?', 408.
[50] Joseph, 'Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism

increasingly sees its role as one of facilitation. It lowers expectations of what international organisations and Western governments will do directly, claiming to have learned from past failures by refocusing on local capacities. The structural aspects of failure are evident in some of the wider literature in this field and can be mentioned briefly as issues for further examination. Hybridity, according to Richmond, refers to a tense, conflictual and ultimately accommodating process of peace configurations worked out across a range of different actors, contexts and normative frameworks.[51] The hybridity literature rightly emphasises how this arises as a result of local agency challenging dominant frameworks of intervention. However, the context for this is to be found in structural failings, perhaps better accounted for through the idea of decoupling.[52] This occurs when the general convergence or diffusion of (liberal) norms and institutions is decoupled from local practice. In both cases, hybridity and decoupling may actually be necessary in order to overcome evident structural failures through embracing certain local or everyday norms and practices. As far as this impacts on forms of governance, it does indeed imply structurally produced chinks and glitches, agential challenges and logics that might disrupt neoliberal rule.[53]

Once this is recognised, resilience may build on this, by shifting the focus away from external interventions and on to local agents.[54] However, as noted, resilience, as currently understood, does this mainly by emphasising the ideas of responsibility, self-awareness and self-regulation in response to crises and uncertainties. It remains committed to the capacity-building approach of existing interventions but modifies this by recognising the failings of liberal peace and statebuilding approaches and emphasising a more practical and flexible understanding of particular challenges. Implicit is a critique of centralised, anticipated planning though a belief that governance is context-bound and that society is in constant flux. Recognising the failure of past interventions while embracing resilience as a way of dealing with ongoing failure both enables and enhances a more varied approach to governance. As Haldrup and Rosén argue, these kind of approaches retain focus on capacity development, but place more emphasis on practical experience and flexible understanding, claiming learning by doing, and addressing challenges as they emerge.[55] For the international actors it is governance by denial insofar as it claims not to be a form of direct involvement, working instead through more distant processes of 'hands off facilitation'.[56] By contrast, 'hands on' intervention is deemed to be a failure, so much so that 'do no harm' now appears as liberal internationalism's guiding principle for peacebuilding and development.

As discussed above, focus on the human modifies recent failures of institutional capacity building approaches of liberal statebuilding and development strategy. Haldrup and Rosén draw this out through an examination of the UNDP in Kosova, Afghanistan and elsewhere. They note a change in vocabulary from capacity building to 'capacity development' which means focusing on existing endogenous capabilities of people and communities, and using coaching and mentoring programmes try to develop these. This appeals to the existing discourse of local ownership and bottom-up approaches while moving away from large scale institution building – 'making whatever structures do exist resilient through propping up the individual capacities of the people running

[51] Oliver P. Richmond 'The Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace: Negative or Positive?', *Cooperation and Conflict* 50, no.1 (2015)**:** 50-68

[52] Ryan Goodman and Derek Jinks 'Incomplete Internalization and Compliance with Human Rights Law', E*uropean Journal of International Law* 19, no. 4 (2008): 725–748.

[53] Corry, 'From Defenese to Resilience', 262.

[54] For the challenges this presents see Philippe Bourbeau, 'Resilience and International Politics: Premises, Debates, Agenda', *International Studies Review*, 17, no.3 (2015): 374-395.

[55]Søren Vester Haldrup and Frederik Rosén, 'Developing Resilience: A Retreat from Grand Planning', *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, 1, no. 2 (2013): 130-145. 142.

[56] Ibid., 143

them'.[57] A 'coaching approach' replaces large scale planning with a more pragmatic approach that works with what already exists in a more flexible way which responds to challenges as they emerge. It is evident in resilience approaches that emphasises practical experience and learning by doing.[58] The resilient subject is no longer conceived of as a passive victim to be saved, but is now understood as an active agent, capable of achieving self-transformation.[59] This can be presented in a positive way as enabling local initiative and building upon local capacities.

An attempt to reconcile the capacity development or 'coaching' approach of resilience with the more established institution / capacity building approach is particularly noticeable in a recent World Bank Development Report which argues for both a predictable institutional framework and the greater promotion of flexibility in order to best promote resilience and make the most of opportunities.[60] The report continues the discourse of uncertainty:

> As the world changes, new opportunities and possibilities, as well as risks and complications, continually arise. Rejecting or ignoring change can lead to stagnation and impoverishment. In contrast, embracing change and proactively dealing with risks can open the way to sustained progress. Risk management should therefore be a central concern at all levels of society. By improving resilience, risk management has the potential to bring about a sense of security and the means for people in developing countries and beyond to achieve progress.[61]

Existing solutions are seen as difficult to apply in situations of 'deep' or large uncertainty. It is argued, therefore, that conditions of uncertainty require greater compromises, more consensual solutions, and solutions that reflect the different beliefs and values of various stakeholders.[62] The World Bank approach might be compared to the 'capacity development' approach as identified in Haldrup and Rosén's examination of the UNDP. To put this in the World Bank's words:

> *Choose flexible solutions and build in learning.* To cope with uncertainty and differences in beliefs, values, and sensitivity, policy makers should aim for robust policies that may not be optimal in the most likely future but that lead to acceptable outcomes in a large range of scenarios and that are adaptive and flexible: that is, policies that are easy to revise as new information becomes available. More learning, and an iterative process of monitoring and learning, is needed about how to apply risk management approaches, especially in lower-income environments[63]

As might be expected, the World Bank promotes this as an enterprise model where the key to resilience and prosperity is to promote vibrant enterprise and innovation. Firms are seen as the 'natural vehicles' for exploiting opportunities, and the main basis for individuals' resilience and prosperity.[64] However, the World Bank continues to talk of the need for the state to provide strong institutions as an 'enabling environment' for greater flexibility in the short term and formality in the long run.[65]

So resilience thinking, while offering a different focus on human capacities continues to accept the need for an institutional approach while recognising past failures at such efforts and the

[57] Ibid., 140.
[58] Ibid., 142.
[59] David Chandler, 'Resilience and Human Security: The Post-interventionist Paradigm,' *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 3 (2012): 213– 229, 17.
[60] World Bank, *Building Resilience*, 58.
[61] Ibid., 72.
[62] Ibid., 112.
[63] Ibid., 99.
[64] Ibid., 186.
[65] Ibid., 202.

need for more flexible solutions. One way of arguing this is to stress a multi-level approach to governance through resilience. For example, DFID argues for a multi-level approach to adaptive capacity. Shocks, stress and subsequent transformation are inevitable, but awareness of consequences and potential opportunities is vital:

> The adaptive capacities of actors – individuals, communities, regions, governments, organisations or institutions – are determined by their ability to adjust to a disturbance, moderate potential damage, take advantage of opportunities and cope with the consequences of a transformation. Adaptive capacities allow actors to anticipate, plan, react to, and learn from shocks or stresses.[66]

Where possible this carries responsibility down to the level of communities, citizens and individuals. The Interagency Resilience Working Group – a body comprised of DFID and various specialised agencies and UK INGOs – argues that the key to resilience is flexibility understood as the ability of individuals, households, communities or systems 'to be able to change the way they operate or function to respond to shifts in the context due to a range of political, social, cultural, economic and environmental shocks and stresses'.[67] But given the nature of the international domain and the varying possibilities within various different social contexts, the main aim of international development still lies in responsibilising the appropriate national governments and perhaps regional organisations as the main bodies who should attempt to do this. Global governance and international intervention is somewhat different from the domestic where an array of techniques of 'governing through society' can be deployed. Certainly as far as the UN and international donors are concerned, the state remains the 'entry point'[68] for activities such as peacebuilding which rarely focus on political entities other than states even if the discourse itself presents a more societal, internationalist or normative perspective. It remains to be seen whether the resilience discourse will be strong enough to make any difference to this or whether the focus on human and social qualities (or capacities) will remain as 'societal techniques' ultimately aimed at putting pressure on states to conform to global norms of behaviour.

Conclusion

This conclusion returns to the framing devices of failure and denial. While not elaborated in any great detail in policy documents or strategy papers, the underlying position is clear. The world is seen as a far more dangerous, risky and unpredictable place. This might be down to political factors such as the end of the Cold War, the emergence of new security threats and the 'globalisation' of risks. Or it may be a belated realisation that we are living with complexity and that older, modernist or classical ways of understanding the world – whether practical, scientific or political – are now exposed as failing to deliver. Whatever the reason, there is a common belief that we cannot go on acting in the same way and that rather than attempting to control systems, we have to learn how to adapt to live with them.

In terms of development strategy and forms of international intervention, these ontological and epistemological assumptions about the complexity of the world and the limits of our knowledge have led to a widespread belief that liberal internationalist interventions have failed. These arguments lack elaboration, but act as important framing devices in order to fine tune strategies

[66] DFID, *Defining Disaster Resilience*, 8.
[67] Interagency Resilience Working Group, *The Characteristics of Resilience Building. A Discussion Paper.* (2012), 7. Accessed February 2, 2015. http://community.eldis.org/DRR**.**
[68] Oliver P. Richmond, *Failed Statebuilding: Intervention and the Dynamics of Peace Formation*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 107.

of governance through invoking social and human qualities (or capacities). The rise of resilience as a new strategy reflects this belief and the need to turn away from grand projects that seek control of systems to a more pragmatic belief in the need to adapt human and social behaviour. Seen through a governmentality lens, this reflects a devolution of responsibilities. Domestically states and governments deny that they can regulate and control systems and instead shift responsibility on to individuals and communities. Internationally the most powerful states and international organisations deny that they either have the power or responsibility to solve problems of development and humanitarian and disaster response, claiming instead to be intervening to help poorer states and communities to enhance their own resilience capacities. It is on this basis that resilience supports a governance turn towards the subject, the social and the human.

Rather than reflecting a withdrawal from intervention, this instead represents a developing form governance that operates 'from a distance' by means of responsibilisation, in order that poorer people and countries should now take upon themselves the burden of being resilient, while their efforts – and often failures – to do this are subject to careful monitoring and evaluation. Hence the failure of interventions is used, not to reject intervention as such, but to reject a certain type of intervention and to justify a certain type of governing. This works through denial and transference of responsibility, attempting to reach right down to the social and human dimensions even if a focus on states and institutional capacity remains in play. As the more positive view of resilience notes, it does indeed offer human agents certain possibilities. But this tends to be confined to the subjective realm of the everyday and this operates precisely in order to tighten a form of governance that works through the denial that we can be effective agents in the wider world.