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Decolonising resilience: reading Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* in Central Eurasia

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Abstract *In dominant Eurocentric policy imaginaries, a resilient community is able to self-govern and to autonomously manage risk through becoming more adaptive and responsive to potential threats, mitigating harms and maintaining societal equilibrium; 'bouncing back' rapidly to normal conditions. This paper seeks to move the discussion forward, suggesting alternative framings for the conceptualisation of community practices and understandings as part of the project of decolonising approaches to Central Eurasia. In drawing upon recent works addressing resilience via Édouard Glissant's Poetics of Relation, it highlights alternative understandings of resilience which are less subject-centred and more dependent upon becoming with others in relation. Crucial to these practices of relationality is the recognition of opacity - the acceptance that uncertainty and unknowability are integral to life processes and provide a vital invitation or opportunity to experiment and adapt through improvisation rather than mechanically responding to feedback effects in ways which close off alternative possibilities for change.*

Introduction

As the editors of this special issue note, our contemporary world of relational entanglement is increasingly captured in discourses of complexity and of the Anthropocene as an epoch in which human activity and nature are mutually imbricated within problems of catastrophic climate change. In this moment, new approaches to governance are evolving with the intention of enabling communities to become resilient. This means, in the parlance of the European Commission, that they are capable of 'bouncing back' and adapting in the face of shocks and disturbances (European Commission 2019; Tocci 2020). The introduction stresses the importance of grasping community resilience as a relational process rather than as some form of fixed goal or fixed set of organizational capacities. The editors suggest that, in the Central Eurasian region, community relations can often draw upon traditions of solidarity and philosophy of good neighbourliness, 'reflected in the enduring notions of *'hamsoya'* (united in shadows); *'wahdat al wujud'* (unity of beings); *'hamdardi'* and *'ham-dili'* (compassionateness, kindness and forgiving)' which go beyond Western (and neoliberal) conceptions of individual autonomy and responsabilisation (Korosteleva and Petrova forthcoming, Introduction to this special issue).

These practices and understandings provide opportunities to present community resilience in a different register to that found in mainstream EU policy approaches, which tend to be replicated for 'Eastern neighbours' to

adhere to. The papers in this collection suggest that connections can be drawn across a range of beliefs and practices which stress community in terms of a *processual becoming-with* rather than in binary Western or Eurocentric framings of the individual rational choice-making subject, which is to be 'nudged' into more communal and sustainable outcomes (Thaler and Sunstein 2009). This paper seeks to underline the importance of charting these distinctions, thus highlighting the importance of non-Eurocentric readings of resilience for developing decolonising approaches to Central Eurasia and challenging the central assumptions of the dominant policy-framings of resilience.

These assumptions are, firstly, that the status quo is the norm, which should be maintained or 'bounced back' to in the face of potential or actual disruption, imagining the future as merely the linear extension of the present. Secondly, there is the assumption that the autonomous choice-making individual is the political model for rationalist decision-making and adaptive behaviour scaled up to the community, regional or state-levels. Thus, community resilience is established upon the basis of an informed, 'empowered' and active citizenry, alert to changing circumstances and able to adapt in order to sustain communities as stable organisational entities. Both of these assumptions concur ontologically with a modernist framing of a world that is made available to be known and ordered by the human as subject: community resilience is thereby an exercise in knowledge and control to reorder or reattain order. It is precisely these aspects that are challenged in this paper, taking the call to decolonise IR approaches to Central Eurasia beyond the empirical recognition that the region does 'not necessarily follow the patterns of development, agency, and state behavior paved by the European experience' (Dadabaev and Heathershaw 2020, 12).

This paper is organized in three main sections. Firstly, the problematic of resilience is set out as presented in the gap between Eurocentric assumptions of community resilience and those located beyond the parameters of the modernist imaginary. Crucial here is the importance of alternative conceptions of relation, such as those forwarded by the Caribbean author Édouard Glissant, who is influential for a number of alternative approaches to resilience in the register of Black, Queer and Decolonial understandings.

In the framing of this special issue, these alternative perspectives of relational processes, of community, and of resilience provide important and relevant insights into how one should approach these questions without imposing the governance mindset of international policy-makers to cases 'that do not necessarily fit within narratives centred on state power and/or socialization according to Western norms' (Dadabaev and Heathershaw 2020, 3; see also Lottholz et al 2020). Pursuant to this, the second section follows the lead of Kara Keeling in *Queer Times, Black Futures* (2019), who considers approaches to resilience which hold the future open in contradistinction to the closure of 'bounce back' approaches associated with homeostatic modulation and Deleuzian 'Societies of Control'. This framing helps at getting to the heart of what is at stake in contemporary discussions of resilience as the governance of complexity and contingency. Keeling importantly argues that Glissant's work could be a template for approaches which seek to keep the future open in a non-deterministic way.

In the third section, I engage with An Yountae's *The Decolonial Abyss: Mysticism and Cosmopolitics from the Ruins* (2017) which speaks directly to resilience and community construction from the perspectives of non-Eurocentric understandings, tracing the spiritual and political attempts to grasp uncertainty as positive and enabling from Neoplatonic thought through to the work of Glissant. Yountae challenges the Eurocentric tendency to see the abyss (the unknowability of the outside/other) as facilitating the growth of world history/the subject (as per Hegel and Žižek) and reads Fanon and Glissant as enabling us to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016) of contingency, opacity and unknowability. Drawing from the positive and enabling readings of Glissant provided by Keeling and Yountae, the conclusion summarizes how it is possible to carve out alternative framings of community resilience which move beyond Eurocentric or 'neoliberal' formulations. Firstly, these alternative approaches seek to hold the future open temporally and spatially, through the understanding of *community resilience as a process of becoming-with*. Secondly, the individual is no longer centred in these processes of *becoming-with*, which inculcate a collective ethos of experimentation, as opposed to a responsabilized subject suborned to a modernist imaginary of empowerment and self-growth.

Resilience

One difficulty that Eurocentric approaches to resilience face is the question of how to address community cohesion and community development in a context where risks and threats are not known in advance. In a world of complexity, a world of relational entanglement, the capacity to be responsive to feedback effects is at a premium (Rist et al 2014). Resilience approaches that focus on 'bouncing back' tend to assume the goal as stability, taking the world as it is, as a status quo or a given. From this position of fixity in time and space, resilient communities are then imagined to require 'empowerment' or 'capacity-building' so that they are able to sense and respond to changes through quick decision-making, coping through maintaining stability and system functioning. The aim being to minimize the disruption of disasters or conflict and to 'bounce-back' to normal as rapidly as possible. In this framing, the speed of reaction is vital, the faster that problem signs or ('early warning') signals are recognized, evasive or preventive measures can be taken (UNEP 2015). Thus, the more effective resilience systems of detection are, the more perfect the capacities for response and recognition, and the more ingrained or automatic feedback responses can become. External aid is thereby often less about telling communities what to do but how to 'be'; how to organize or institutionalize mechanisms that enable them to see, recognize or register changes which may be indicative of threats or problems (World Bank 2017).

The goal for resilience would be a community which faced little to no disruption, with the development of adaptive measures making the response to feedback increasingly 'real time'. In this framing, transparency and automatic responses are key aspirations as signs and signals of change are rapidly interpreted and reacted to. If stability is the goal, then the automated and stabilising approach of resilience would operate in ontological terms of homeostatic regulation, the regime of cybernetic governance, as a fixed or

pre-given goal. But what if resilience, as crisis or threat response, cannot be automated or ingrained in community responsivity? What if problems or disturbances emerge in ways which do not automatically trigger warning signals and alarms? What if returning to 'normal' is not the solution but actually part of the problem? What if community resilience requires a different or more experimental approach? What if resilience requires us to be more open to the world rather than seeking to react and respond in a negative or protective manner?

The approach to community resilience found in the thought and practice of those working outside the assumptions informing institutional and NGO/INGO policy doctrines can provide alternative possibilities. These possibilities are important as they indicate opportunities for rethinking resilience beyond the limitations of the modernist ontology at the heart of Eurocentric approaches (see also Chandler et al 2020). There have been alternative voices, or a minoritarian trend of thinking within the West, which have disputed the assumptions at play in hegemonic policy circles. The need to open up resilience frameworks was perhaps most presciently and cogently argued by the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, with his conceptualisation of 'metastability' rather than 'stability' – disputing the cybernetic imaginary that societies should be seen as fixed and needing to modulate around the equilibrium (2017). Simondon's reason was that life should be grasped ontologically as fluid and dynamic rather than existing in fixed relations which can be made knowable and transparent. A conception of metastability understands relations as unpredictable, as always in flux, and thereby never fully graspable, always 'coming-into-being' (Simondon 2017, 169). There is thus nothing mystical in understanding life as in relation, as in flux and not fixed, as 'metastable' rather than structured around the goal of stability. As Korosteleva and Petrova highlight in their Introduction to this special issue, the policy goal of equilibrium is problematised when we consider resilience as a process of complex adaptation (see also Orsini et al 2020). As Simondon notes, the Western ontology of stability and fixed relations reduces life to a mechanistic rather than living existence:

...stable equilibrium, in which all potential would be actualized, would correspond to the death of any possibility of further transformation; whereas living systems, those which precisely manifest the greatest spontaneity of organization, are systems of metastable equilibrium; the discovery of a structure is ... not the destruction of potentials; the system continues to live and evolve; it is not degraded by the emergence of structure; it remains under tension and capable of modifying itself. (2017, 177)

A similar framing can be seen in C. S. Hollings' highlighting of resilience in ecological systems, in which he outlined his understanding of resilience in relation to the 'adaptive cycle' (1973). Here resilience depends on system openness and adaptability: too much certainty in the reproduction of fixed ways of working and understanding easily leads to system failure. Importantly, for Hollings and his associates, 'ecological resilience' was distinguished from 'engineering resilience', where structures 'bounce back' from stresses, as it presumes the existence of multiple potential stable states or regimes, rather than only one (Gunderson 2000; see also Grove 2018; Wakefield 2020). A similar call for resilience approaches to move away from the focus on maintaining order and certainty was made by Nassim Taleb in

his call for 'antifragility'; in recognition that uncertainty – the complexity of relational entanglements – forces us to be open to the world, whereas modernist frameworks which imagine certainty are necessarily fragile – more vulnerable to unforeseen side effects or changes (2013). We could read a similar understanding in the late Ulrich Beck's assertions of 'world risk society' and the recognition that unintended side effects or 'externalities' often were of more consequence than intended consequences (2009). Uncertainty, assumptions of the inability to know and to automatically respond are crucial to more open framings of resilience which, following Donna Haraway's edict, seek to 'stay with the trouble' (2016).

These are still minority positions and understandings when it comes to the export of policy approaches to Central Eurasia. The reason may be the difficulty of European policy elites in seeing beyond institutional policy needs of uniformity and stabilisation (Bickerton 2015). The basis of contemporary hierarchies, reproduced in policy prescriptions and guidelines, particularly in relation to the EU's eastern 'neighbours', is that the scientific workings and technical expertise of the EU is something to be exported and emulated (Chandler 2010). Understanding life as dynamic and agential, complex and differentiating, calls into question the ontological assumptions underpinning EU managerial expertise. For contemporary Western policy advocates, policy is something to be centralized and regulated from above, something to be benchmarked and box-ticked. It is all too easy to think about resilience as a way of bringing together and merging policy requirements, from defence to social welfare, providing universal frameworks for scaling up 'capacities' and 'empowering' communities. It is also all too easy to consider any other non-equilibrium approaches as non-scientific, speculative or mystical (Thacker 2010), perhaps falling back on traditional Sufi or other monist understandings which allegedly fail to recognize the centrality of the human/nature divide (Shahi 2019).

In an attempt to broaden the discussion in this special issue beyond a potentially essentializing discussion of the merits and drawbacks of the universalist approaches of international policy advocacy and traditional understandings of Central Eurasian community practices and beliefs (see discussion in Lottholz et al 2020), this paper seeks to draw upon other non-Eurocentric framings and understandings of resilience. It seeks to highlight that the assumption, that relations within communities and of communities to the world should be open rather than fixed, does not imply that there is some sort of life force or non-human transcendental or immanent agency at work. *There is nothing 'backward' or traditional about understanding resilience as a processual becoming in a world of flux and change.* In fact, if communities are to have a future framed in terms of resilience, then it is clear that dominant policy discourses are required to change, regardless of the immediate difficulties policy providers may face. A relational rather than a rationalist ontology offers an alternative conceptualisation, that there can be no goal of self-regulating finality or of resilience as simple adaptation to the status quo. Policy assumptions of transparency, the desire for rapidity and the automation of response, can be construed not as goals but actually as barriers to communities' self-realisation. It is for this reason that non-Eurocentric approaches can be usefully approached for those seeking alternatives to the constrictions of current policy advocacy.

Édouard Glissant intimates what is at stake in a decolonial approach to resilience in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), in which he lays out an alternative approach to highlight the limits of 'reductionism' in much Western thinking of relation. Thus, he argues that Einstein's theory of Relativity does not take a relational ontology far enough and thereby 'is not purely relative' (Glissant 1997, 134). Key is the fact that, for Einstein, '[t]he universe has a 'sense' that is neither chance nor necessity', this provides "guarantees' [both of] the interactive dynamics of the universe and of our knowledge of it' (Glissant 1997, 134). Thereby: 'Just as Relativity in the end postulated a Harmony to the universe, cultural relativism (Relativity's timid and faltering reflection) viewed and organised the world through a global transparency that was, in the last analysis, reductive.' (Glissant 1997, 135) Thus, for Glissant, there are two 'tendencies' or ontological approaches of understanding relational becoming.

The first approach is the colonial one, appealing to scientific, evolutionary, or underlying cybernetic laws and rationalities of 'interactive life' that 'has become increasingly based on attempts to imagine or to prove a 'creation of the world' (the Big Bang), which has always been the 'basis' of the scientific project' (Glissant 1997, 136–137), enabling a Darwinian evolutionary telos of progress. Despite claims often to the contrary, 'The idea of God is there. And the notion of legitimacy reemerges. A science of conquerors who scorn or fear limits; a science of conquest.' (Glissant 1997, 137) The second approach to relation, on the contrary, tends in:

...the other direction, which is not one, distances itself entirely from the thought of conquest; it is an experimental meditation (a follow-through) of the process of relation, at work in reality, among the elements (whether primary or not) that weave its combinations... This 'orientation' then leads to following through whatever is dynamic, the relational, the chaotic – anything fluid and various and moreover uncertain (that is, ungraspable) yet fundamental in every instance and quite likely full of instances of invariance. (Glissant 1997, 137)

Glissant (1997, 142) therefore advocates an alternative approach to knowledge, of *poetics*, challenging universal, generalising or transcendent totalities in its focus on ever 'more stringent demands for specificity.' His approach is a practical one, in which the subject is no longer an observer of relations but always *practically worlding itself* in a concrete embedded and embodied way. This focus upon contextual specificity in practices of 'worlding' or 'becoming' necessarily implies what he calls 'the right to opacity' (1997, 190). The right to opacity would imply that community resilience could be thought via an alternative set of assumptions. For example, that transparency and automated feedback are not as important as the assumptions of indeterminacy, invisibility and lack of knowledge (see also Pugh and Chandler 2021).

The 'right to opacity' is vital to keep communities open to changes which cannot be predicted beforehand and to which there is no necessarily fixed or 'one size fits all' response which can be automated. As Glissant states (1997, 190–191), the notion of 'opacity' highlights 'an irreducible singularity': 'The opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence.' This approach then may view

communities as themselves changing in the ways they see the world and respond to it, allowing for the growth and development of communities as they 'world themselves' in an open set of responsivities rather than closed ones. In such a framing, relations of openness come prior to any closure of a homogenous, fixed or determined identity as the 'norm'. Relations make a resilient community; one based upon the free play of difference, rather than assuming any *a priori* subject. Autonomy is thus a process of becoming-with others but without assuming unity over difference. This is particularly important for the diverse and interlocking communities of Central Eurasia, as Christian Reus-Smit highlights (2018). In fact, it is difference that enables communities to develop and sustain themselves in the face of shocks and setbacks, and which multiply and enable capacities to respond to feedback effects.

As Tiffany Lethabo King notes, in her reading of Glissant, this establishes a 'poetic politics', which can 'conceptualize a kind of 'uncharted' surroundings that are continually made, remade, or unmade' (2019, 8). The key point about Glissant's conception of 'opacity', shared by her use of the 'black shoal', is that this slows and disrupts assumptions of regularity and linearity in dominant Western or Eurocentric approaches, and 'enables other modes of thinking' that 'opens up other kinds of potentialities, materialities and forms' (2019, 8). Rather than the fixed and automated reflexes of Eurocentric forms of resilience thinking or romantic and essentialising imaginaries of traditional communities as similarly fixed with ingrained learnt responses rooted in land and tradition, the notions of opacity and irreducibility enable conceptions of communities of relations which are not bound to the constraints of 'bouncing back' with its assumptions of flat differentiated space and sequential linear time of modernity.

Thus, the contraposition of non-Eurocentric and hegemonic policy approaches demonstrates different understandings or ontologies at play. For dominant Western policy framings, maintaining stability is key, whereas for other community understandings, autonomy and freedom are highlighted through opacity. In the latter case, it is relations not entities which are fundamental and therefore relational openness; communities are thereby in or amongst a world of flux and flows rather than above or separate to a fixed world of things or essences. Community practices generate greater knowledge of relation rather than responding to feedback effects as if in a world of fixed, regular, and repetitive laws of causation. What is required is a culture of openness to the world and not one of closure. Thus, regional forms of resilience can take numerous forms expressing their specific modes of creativity and openness to change, based upon valuing opacity and freedom. Western policies of resilience, understood as automated adaptation to the world, close off and are antithetical to such non-Eurocentric regional understandings.

Poetics and futural openness

In order to think through the logic and implications of non-Eurocentric understandings of community resilience, especially via the methodological framework of poetics (highlighted in studies of regional approaches in this special issue), this section draws upon a close reading of Kara Keeling's 2019 study *Queer Times, Black Futures*, which works with Glissant's key conceptual

framings to move beyond the ontological constraints of dominant approaches. Rethinking the shibboleths of linear time and the fetishized understanding of the autonomous subject means that community resilience can be understood and developed in ways which are distinct from the policy doctrines rolled out by the EU and other institutional bodies. Important to note here is an understanding of temporality that does not assume the linear framing of 'bouncing back' to the equilibrium or status quo, nor the subject capable of knowing the world in transparent ways and responding through rational choice to maintain order. Keeling associates an alternative framing with Queer and Black approaches to temporality which are seen to disrupt linear causal understandings and, in so doing, to hold the future open (see also Rao 2020). Chance, disorder and disruption are seen as part of the world, both human and nonhuman, providing capacities for change that should be enabled rather than closed off, avoided or ignored. She argues that 'None of us survive as such; indeed, perhaps, freedom requires we give way to other things.' (2019, ix) This is posited in contradistinction to 'bounce back' understandings that seek to modulate around an equilibrium, using the sorts of algorithmic technology presciently engaged in Deleuze's 'Postscript on Societies of Control' (2019, 12; see also Deleuze 1995)

Rather than dominant resilience approaches of automated rationalist techniques of reaction to changes and disturbances in terms of returning to the status quo, 'holding uncertainty open, critical theory, poetry, dance, literature, philosophy, music, and other creative sonic phenomena can continue to feed thought' and communal imaginaries (2019, 15). For Keeling, 'Queer temporality' refuses the linear form of modulation around the norm and is 'violent, material, and excessive to the management and control of sociability ... 'queer' remains an active and energetic reservoir for connection, affiliation, and experimentation' (2019, 18–19). In fine, an alternative reading of resilience emerges through inverting the relation between world and community resilience proffered in Eurocentric framings that prioritize stability. Resilience understood as futural openness prioritizes disruption over order in the sense of understanding that the uncertain, the uncontrollable and the unknown can be liberatory rather than oppressive or problematic. This is why, for Keeling, Glissant's conception of 'opacity' is central for a 'politicized cultural strategy' invested in 'Black Futures' and 'queer temporality, which resists the Eurocentric or Western 'requirement for transparency' (2019, 31):

Glissant argues it is important for marginalized groups to 'insist' upon remaining opaque to the terms, languages, and logics of dominant groups. Insisting upon opacity acknowledges the co-existence of systems of signification and valuation alongside, yet inaccessible to dominant ones. Within this context, 'unaccountability' marks a refusal to be bound to dominant standards of measure, recognition, and evaluation. (2019, 46)

Opacity, the capacity to hold the world without transparency, without assimilating newness and difference to what exists and is known, without reducing signs and signals of change to pre-set patterns and meanings nor individual entities to categories of comparison, commensuration and equivalence, enables another world to come into being (*ibid.*). More than just a practice of open relationality to the world, 'the right to opacity' also challenges the requirements of external policy advocacy, seeking to monitor and

benchmark community 'development' or 'capacity-building' (see, for example, Korosteleva and Flockhart 2020). This understanding - that the strict separation between human and nature or knowing subject and transparent object, limits alternative possibilities of becoming resilient - offers opportunities for communities to resist and to refuse the universalizing metrics of EU guidance and regulatory control.

This inversion of problem and norm via the understanding of the importance of disruption in thinking creatively/poetically, is derived from Black and Queer experiences of the constraints of the norm, thereby opening up a problematic through which these ideas and practices can be seen as having a broader impact on how resilience is understood today. One notable example is the governmental responses to the COVID-19 crisis throughout 2020, in which popular pressure has resisted attempts to 'bounce back' and 'return to normal' and has highlighted that the disruption has created a wide range of alternative possibilities. These range from how we think human relations to animals (Kothari et al 2020), the problems of dependence on cheap labour and zero contracts, the prevalence of race and gender inequality of outcomes, the health implications of housing inequalities and the underfunding of the health service (Horton 2020), to the need to rethink environmental impacts of current working practices. 'Normal' will, and should, never be seen the same way as it was before the crisis (Chandler et al 2020). This framework of thinking fits well with the late Ulrich Beck's understanding of 'emancipatory catastrophism', where crises enable new relational entanglements to become visible and spur governance interventions in response to new understandings and awareness of how issues are interconnected (Beck 2015).

This opening up of alternative futural possibilities, diverging from linear expectations and predictions based upon the past, could be construed as a 'queer temporality', one that brings into question the Eurocentric assumption of a linear time of 'progress', where instability is merely a temporary pause on the journey of 'lessons learned' as life continues upon its predetermined path. Rather than one line of linearity, breaks and disruptions open up the possibilities of 'alternative worlds' that cannot be imagined and their courses plotted beforehand. Thinking along these lines begins to open up opportunities that can be understood to exist in the present but that are unseen or require disruptions to become actualized. For Glissant, this understanding of the present as always open rather than a closed or predetermined moment in a linear chain, was largely shaped by the Caribbean experience of the displacement of transatlantic slavery and colonial domination (Drabinski 2019). This creates a relationship to time and space which breaks with the fixed understandings of community, often imagined in Western policy doctrines of resilience, disrupting the fixed positionality of the subject at the centre of the world. This experience of dislocation is also one of profound interconnection, as Keeling writes:

Homeless is our home. We carry the abyss that Édouard Glissant characterized so well. For Glissant, the Middle Passage of the transatlantic slave trade and the formation of 'the new world' mark an apocalyptic catastrophe. We are forged in its wake. With specific reference to those who can be identified as Caribbean, Glissant explains: 'The abyss is also a projection of and a perspective into the unknown... This is why we stay with

poetry ... We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone.' (2019, 54)

Open in and to the world, alternative framings of resilience thereby understand themselves as always in *the middle of processes of inter-relation* rather than standing opposed to or external to them. Similar understandings can also be seen as central to some of the community belief systems in the Central Eurasian region (see for example, Green 2012; also Nurulla-Khodzhaeva in this special issue). Governing and responding in a manner of being open to and within the world of necessity becomes more experimental and spontaneous or improvisational. Without the props of certainty and of linear causality, where there are assumptions that the same actions produce the same outcomes, independently of time and space, it is necessary that responses are iterative or recursive (2019, 55). It is this break that Beck described as 'metamorphosis', a 'change in the conditions and understandings of change' (2015, 76) which 'challenges the way of being in the world, thinking about the world and imagining and doing politics' (2015, 78). In this framing, even disasters can be 'emancipatory', bringing new relations into being. Beck uses the example of Hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans and the Louisiana coast in 2005:

Until Hurricane Katrina, flooding had not been positioned as an issue of environmental justice – despite the existence of a substantial body of research documenting inequalities and vulnerability to flooding. It took the reflection both in publics and in academia on the devastating but highly uneven 'racial floods' of Hurricane Katrina to bring back the strong 'Anthropocene' of slavery, institutionalized racism, and connect it to vulnerability and floods. (2015, 80)

Understanding community resilience in a world of relational entanglement, for Beck, could be emancipatory as 'a new normative horizon' emerges (2015, 80), a political horizon that is set by the world of unknown effects and side effects of relational interaction. However, it is important to understand that it is not the disaster itself that makes a difference but the attitude towards it, the pre-existing dispositions that can enable disruptions to have positive impact by making the most of the break in linear temporal assumptions that 'normal' should be 'bounced back' to as a goal.

Black, Queer and Decolonial sensibilities are often central to thinking and developing alternative approaches to resilience as there is less at stake in assumptions that modulating around the 'norm' is desirable. The connection between disruption and the problem of institutionalized racism was, in fact, already made nearly 100 years prior to Beck, by the American sociologist, author and activist W. E. B. Du Bois. As Keeling points out, in his short story 'The Comet', Du Bois argued that a natural disaster would be necessary to shake America out of its racial 'normality'. As Keeling states: 'In Du Bois's story, a natural disaster precipitates a temporary suspension of the terms through which present reality congeals, thereby creating the conditions under which a Black man and a white woman might acknowledge a shared humanity.' (2019, 62) What this approach to the abnormal, the unthought or the (previously) impossible tells us, by inverting the 'normal' and the abnormal or disruptive, is that community resilience built upon assumptions of fixity and linear

continuation can be counterproductive: problematically closed in terms of existing injustices and inequalities as much as to the effects of larger social and environmental interactions.

The world becomes stranger and more uncertain, but this opacity acts as an invitation to experimentation and improvisation without linear assumptions. Giving way to things, being responsive to the world, is not a matter of reaction and defensiveness, of protecting the status quo, but of being open to the other, to alterity and to the unknown. How communities can do this in order to be sensitive to feedback effects, i.e. to the changing world around them, is thus not through mechanized responses but rather through poetics, through feelings and emotion, through ways of honing 'capacities to be affected' (2019, xii; see also Latour 2004). Paying attention to differences and changes means becoming focused more upon the unknown rather than the known, can thereby enable creativity beyond community 'common sense', structured around past habits and modes of being. Keeling, draws upon Afrofuturist jazz musician Sun Ra to argue that uncertain or unknown disruptive forces can be grasped as 'poetry from the future' or invitations to think the world differently:

Sun Ra points toward the ways that whatever escapes or resists recognition, whatever escapes meaning and valuation within our community crafted structures of valuation and signification, exists as an impossible possibility within our shared reality (however that reality is described theoretically) and therefore threatens to unsettle, if not destroy, the common sense on which that reality relies for its coherence. (2019, 62)

Poetics is thereby an approach to alterity that seeks to use this in a way that can disrupt habitual responses and perceptions. Keeling argues that in contemporary thinking about the crisis of modernist structures of thought, with its binary and reductionist separations between human and nature and thought and being, oriented around the imaginary of linear time and the autonomous, self-determining rational subject, contemporary Western thinking is increasingly drawn to the radical tradition of thinking from the outside of Black thought. She argues that the work of Simondon and other continental thinkers, in challenging Eurocentric subject-centred approaches, in their emphasis on relation rather than the fixity of essences and entities, very much chimes with concepts developed in Black diasporic thought, traditions and practices (2019, 70). For Glissant, Caribbean or Black diasporic thinking and practices lacked the fixed rootedness of Western or Eurocentric conceptions of time and space as the trauma, violence and uncertainty of the Middle Passage, chattel slavery and coloniality removed pre-existing grounds of community and imposed the necessity of being and becoming with others through improvisation and new shared ways of being.

Thus, community lives and livelihoods can be grasped as lived 'in the break' from groundings of certainty (Moten 2003) and the structured binaries of a modernist ontology. This tradition of radical and experimental thought, shaped by violence and uncertainty and the lack of possibility of secure subjecthood, Glissant understood as one of 'abyss', of working from and within radical rupture (2019, 78–79). In terms of approaches to the Central Asian region, it is important to note that the understanding of 'Blackness' as an approach, which differs radically from the Eurocentric subject-centred

tradition, is not one fixed upon epidermalized divisions: “Blackness” itself becomes mobile once it is understood in terms of its characteristic cultural form of repetition, rather than as a set of essential qualities of Black people.’ (2019, 160–161) Blackness is articulated as a ‘kind of ‘sensibility’, rather than as a property of any particular body or group’ (2019, 161). ‘Abyssal’ sensibilities, key to alternative approaches to resilience, are not grounded in any linear understandings of the future but as Keeling argues:

As I have been suggesting throughout this book, rather than conceptualizing ‘the Black’s’ lack of perceptible future as a problem to be solved or a crisis to be addressed, or a cause for pessimism or optimism, it might be understood as one of the crucial operations of what we might here grasp as the cut of Black existence: it might cleave an opening in the present order of meaning and being through which another structure, another world, perhaps might be ‘preciously assembled’. (2019, 174)

Therefore, a poetics of relation is understood to open up alternative possibilities for community resilience based upon understanding relation as something not fixed and potentially automatic, but as something fluid and never fully graspable (2019, 196). Keeling argues that such poetics is necessarily speculative, for it not only ‘acknowledges the dense entanglement of matter(s)’, but also ‘thrives on surprises and accidents’ (2019, 199). We can see here, then, a clear alternative formulation of community resilience as a story of affirmative change and adaptation, but one that does not centre itself around fixed understandings of time and space. Discussion within Keeling’s work of ‘futures’ should therefore not be conflated with a modernist or linear framing and could more precisely be grasped as ‘futural’ imaginaries which hold potentiality open, extending the possibilities of abyssal or speculative thought and practice, open to the world.

Decolonial relationality

Reading An Yountae’s *The Decolonial Abyss: Mysticism and Cosmopolitanism from the Ruins* in conjunction with Keeling’s work enables us to consider alternative conceptualisations of community resilience potentially grounded in a struggle for existence, which is abyssal or non-ontological, lacking the modernist grounding assumptions of the a priori subject and world as knowable object. Yountae draws from a Black diasporic literature, particularly Martinican thinkers Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant, to articulate what he sees as ‘the double work of the abyss that dissolves the self and opens up possibility’ (2017, 5). He is very clear that the purpose is to question the understanding of resilience as ‘bouncing back’ to a pre-existing line of progress in a linear narrative centred around a modernist ontology of the pre-given subject, be this the individual, the community, the region or the state. The central question posed is how the disruption or crisis, considered above, may serve as an opening to alternative conceptions of self and world that can be meaningfully conceptualized without restoring a modernist ontology of subject and linear time:

What kind of future does this crack open? Or does it open a future at all? For the universalizing accounts of dialectical becoming might certainly open a future, but a future perhaps all too familiar to us: one that does not break from the genealogy of the old

Christian cosmopolitan world order that keeps reproducing itself each time with a different name: modernity, capitalism, liberal democracy, postmodernity, globalization, and so forth. (2017, 5)

Yountae argues that the telos of progress, the process of learning from errors that marks the transcendental subject of European philosophy, does not hold the future open but is a 'totalitarian' closing of the imagination (2017, 5; see also Moten 2018). He clarifies that the abyss, understood as a world lacking fixity and causal determinacy should not be conflated with the void, lacking values and capacities for affect (2017, 9). The indeterminacy of the abyss has enabled a long philosophical tradition from Neoplatonism to today, which has remained sceptical of foundationalist thought and operated from the margins of modernist frameworks, often seen as irrational or mystical. However, in our contemporary context, abyssal thought has been mainly associated with the resilience and resistance of colonized subjects in a struggle to articulate new frameworks of meaning and possibility, beyond the 'normal' world of trauma, loss, hierarchy and exclusion.

Thus, as noted above, two ontological framings of resilience emerge. These could be read in terms of a 'colonial' or hegemonic form, which could be grasped in terms of 'the Hegelian journey of dialectical becoming, characterized by the enigmatic resilience of the [rational] subject who reconstructs itself despite constant failures' and a 'decolonial form' epitomized by the work of Édouard Glissant (2017, 23). For Glissant, poetics rather than rationalism works to reconstruct the self and to overcome the traumatic loss of epistemological certainty; the abyss itself is the 'groundless ground' that enables the self's relational becoming (2017, 24). Poetics as a practice enables a subject to be conditioned by alterity, this is precisely because the self-understanding of the subject is that it lacks self-sufficient grounds, any form of essence contained with itself, and is therefore necessarily conditioned by the other. If we think back to the reference to Ulrich Beck in the previous section, this can be seen in his understanding of the other as setting the emancipatory 'new normative horizon' (2015, 80), rather than having pre-set goals or behaving in an arbitrary way.

It can easily be argued that the experience of existential loss, of a dissolution of grounding frameworks of meaning and traditional certainties share much with our contemporary moment of the Anthropocene and climate catastrophe. Contemporary discussions of resilience are, in fact, framed by the loss of traditional policy certainties and an awareness that contemporary entanglements put to question hierarchical assumptions of power and agency (Chandler 2014). In this context, the concept of the abyss – an awareness that the world is one of contingency and indeterminacy – enables a reconceptualization of the modern subject. In fact, alternative approaches to resilience argue that this reconceptualization of the subject is necessary for the development of community resilience. As Yountae states:

The self who is undone in the encounter with the abyss, that is the pre-abyssal self, lives with a misguided consciousness. Without having faced or embraced the vertiginous depths beneath the precarious ground of its being, this self views itself as coherent and independent. I am here referring to the self who operates in clearly demarcated binaries and boundaries... Conversely the new self... understands its nature not as an

immutable substance but as multiple, fragmented, and always-in-becoming... a creolized self that finds its truth in the never-ending, pluri-singular acts of becoming in relation to the other; [moving] from the self living with a teleological cosmology to a self who understands the end as a new beginning. (2017, 14–15)

The 'creolized' Self is distinct as an individual, a unique and particular social and historical product, but it also lacks any conception of coherent or defining essence, which can somehow become a transcendental marker, placing them in a hierarchical or subordinate relation to others. This 'fragmented', fluid conception of the subject can be seen to have developed in response to the exclusion of racial and colonial constructions of the subject, which universalize (overrepresent) the Eurocentric conception of 'Man' as rational and autonomous (Wynter 2003). As Fanon argued, for the colonial subject there could be no conception of transcendence or linear growth through the abyss of colonial enslavement and subordination (2017, 77, 99; see also Fanon 1986, 112, 219). The abyss of indeterminacy and loss is not a mystical experience, but an ongoing social and political reality for Black diasporic thought. The traumatic experience of loss of chattel slavery and the Middle Passage is the 'paradoxical temporality' drawn out by Glissant, in that the dislocation, deportation and mass deaths of transatlantic slavery removed people from their past attachments and identities, loss was metaphysical as well as physical (2017, 88).

In the destructive reduction of people to 'flesh' and their 'reinscription' as chattel properties without human 'selves' (Spillers 2017), in the hold of the slave ship, the slave auction, and the plantation, out of these 'groundless grounds' – the 'demonic grounds' of Katherine McKittrick (2006) – an alternative or abyssal subject can be understood to have emerged. Yountae argues, 'Glissant finds in the gaping depth of the colonial abyss a womb that gives birth to a new world, a new people whose mode of being find expression in relation and becoming rather than the static terms of essence and being' (2017, 89). The colonial abyss is then the 'groundless ground' on which those denied selfhood and later full admittance to social equality struggled to find coherence and meaning in ways other than those of the 'normal' denied them by racialized exclusion.

Yountae, in his stress upon the historical weight of living after 'the end of the world', living in the concrete circumstances of loss of certainty and foundational groundings, makes clear the difference between the abyssal thinking of Glissant and apparently similar attempts to go beyond a modernist ontology in Continental philosophy, such as those of Gilles Deleuze. The historical weight of traumatic loss and the oppressive denial of rights and privileges (seen as normal) do not enable an experience of abyssal contingency and uncertainty as liberating the self: there can be no joyful 'lines of flight' for nomadic subjects able to pick and choose identities and to travel and 'transgress' borders and boundaries (2017, 105; see also Leong 2016; Jackson 2015). For Yountae:

The undeveloped trop of relation in Deleuze (Braidotti) and Hegel (Zizek) becomes, in Glissant, the very material with which he transposes the void of loss, the painful middle of fragmented history. We could say that one important difference between the boundless freedom of nomadic ontology and creolized freedom lies in relation. The creolized self and her freedom are conditioned – and enabled – by relation. A limitless horizon of being

opens up in the inexhaustible mystery of the other – and in the illimitable webs of solidarity with unknown others. (2017, 117)

The horizon is ‘limitless’ because the practice of relation is other-directed, rather than oriented around a modernist ontology of the interest-bearing individual subject seen as existing prior to and independently of relation. The important point to note, in terms of this special issue and to the broader project of decolonising approaches to the Central Eurasian region, is that relation is a product of practice rooted in social and historical circumstances. Queer, Black and Decolonial futural practices, or any other forms of non-modernist speculative thought, cannot be chosen or picked up as an alternative set of governmental practices to be turned into policy briefs for community capacity-building and resilience. At the same time, it is possible that much can be learned from alternative understandings, alternative cosmologies and alternative ontologies of community resilience, especially in our contemporary moment. This is pressingly apparent when firstly, traditional understandings of the resilient subject as autonomous and self-reliant are increasingly questioned and, secondly, when ‘bouncing back’ to ‘normal’ or continuing existing trajectories of ‘progress’ are seen to be problematic and contributory factors in the problems that communities are facing.

Conclusion

For the architects of adaptive governance, community resilience is essential to finding new ways of coping in a world that is threatened by climate tipping points. This paper has highlighted the limits of Eurocentric understandings of resilience where communities, imagined to be ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’, are encouraged to practice reactive adaptation in order to ‘bounce back’ to their normal development trajectories. Resilience is thereby understood as the capacity to be aware of and responsive to feedbacks, acting rapidly in recognition of potential threats and opportunities. It would hardly be novel to flag up how this ‘neoliberal’ framing threatens to naturalize or romanticize community strategies for coping at the edge of crisis, promoting self-responsibility as ‘self-determination’ and ‘empowerment’ (Chandler and Reid 2016). This paper has attempted to move beyond the critique of resilience policy prescriptions to engage with a growing attention to alternative possibilities for rethinking community resilience. These alternative possibilities are suggested through the concrete historical experience of Black diasporic thought and practice and are indicative of a much broader range of non-Western understandings and experiences beyond the limits of Eurocentric or Western approaches.

Central to the argument forwarded here has been the analysis of non-Eurocentric approaches which challenge and seek to move beyond two assumptions central to dominant policy-framings of resilience. Firstly, the assumption of linear temporality, with its telos of ‘development’ or ‘progress’ as a fixed trajectory which needs to be restored. Whereas neoliberal approaches seek to ‘bounce back’ to preserve the status quo, alternative approaches take more seriously the contingency and unknowability of our contemporary condition. These alternatives suggest that automating feedback responses cannot work when addressing novel threats and conditions, while

also expressing a desire to open rather than close possibilities provided by disruptions, enabling the 'normal' conditions to be rethought, rather than reinforced, and thereby opening up alternative futural imaginaries. Secondly, assumptions of the autonomous and self-governing subject – whether at the level of the individual or the community – have been challenged on the basis that a world of contingency and uncertainty implies the need for a radical openness to the world, decentring the modernist subject and understanding the self as continually in the process of construction through communities of relation, becoming-with others.

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