

I. Polland, M. Basseler, A. Nünning and S. M. Moraldo (eds.).

Europe's Crises and Cultural Resources of Resilience.

Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2020, 332 pp.

(Reviewed by Anna Tabouratzidis, *Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen*, Germany)

Crisis has, again, become a buzzword which pops up in headlines of major news outlets across the globe, covers the screens of our small and large digital devices wherever we go and is being reiterated multiple times a day by news anchors and talk show hosts. Or, rather, it has been with us for what seems like decades now. The current pandemic has not only caused a global health but also several economic, social, environmental, and cultural crises. In an edited volume published in 2020 with Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier entitled *Europe's Crises and Cultural Resources of Resilience*, Imke Polland, Michael Basseler, Ansgar Nünning, Sandro Moraldo and their contributors tackle the questions of which resources of resilience the current European crises have brought to the fore and what potential the concept of resilience holds as a transdisciplinary research field.

Over 332 pages, the 19 contributions in both English and German, which are divided into three sections (I. Resources of Resilience: Transdisciplinary and Trans-European Perspectives; II. Literary Resources of Resilience; III. Imaginative Spaces and European Entangled (Hi)Stories), grapple with the cultural resources of resilience Europeans and Europe have at their disposal to cope with the several crises at hand. Each article considers a specific aspect, an organizing principle, or a literary or artistic form that either functions as a cultural resource of resilience or sheds light on the scope of the predicaments which trigger creative forms of resilience. The combination of theoretical considerations coupled with illustrative analyses of European literary texts and explorations of transnational imaginative spaces demonstrates the diversity and richness of the buzzword 'resilience' as well as the manifold ways of theorizing and reading it – within the European context and beyond.

In their "Introduction: Europe's Crises and Cultural Resources of Resilience", Basseler, Polland, and Nünning set the volume's aim: "to explore these interwoven

European narratives and understand them as cultural techniques and strategies for the productive handling of manifold crisis experiences” (2020: 2). Overall, most articles rely on an inclusive definition of resilience, like the one provided by the Stockholm Resilience Center as “the capacity of a system, be it an individual, a forest, a city or an economy, to deal with change and continue to develop” (2015: n.p.). Michael Basseler’s discussion of the emerging but fuzzy concept of resilience within the study of culture lays an important groundwork on which the other contributions build. He introduces, among other things, the notion of resilience *as* a fiction, and cultural productions like the novel as fictions *about* resilience (2020: 25). The first section thus provides discussions of terminological and conceptual differences of resilience across disciplines and plays them out by examining the diverse dilemmas Europe has been facing: an erosion of values and common frames of reference (V. Nünning), the refugee crisis as experienced and mediated in and beyond Germany and Italy (S.M. Moraldo), faltering financial institutions and the resulting economic consequences as experienced in Portugal (A.M. Abrantes), and, finally, democracy (O. Malatesta) and Europe (F. Farina) in crisis. Ana Abrantes summarizes the value of narratives as a cultural resource of resilience as follows: “But what makes these works in image and word resources of a reflexive resilience is that they offer both the opportunity to reflect and interpret what has been experienced and to think further about possible alternatives, about counterfactual realities that might be realized under different circumstances” (2020: 88).¹

Narratives form the central object of study in the second section, which provides case studies of the European predicament in form of or negotiated in literary and cultural productions and asks in how far these can function as cultural resources of resilience. Raul Calzoni’s reading of Robert Menasse’s *Die Hauptstadt* (2017; trans. into English as *The Capital* by J. Bulloch) focuses on the historical, social, and political dimensions of the European peace project (i.e. the EU) and the need for new forms of democracy which counter nationalistic sentiments within Europe to ensure a (re)constitution of a unified Europe. Calzoni and the following contributor, Eleonora Ravizza, agree that fear of foreignness or otherness – in the former’s analysis embodied by (mainly) Syrian refugees,

¹ „Was aber diese Werke in Bild und Wort zu Ressourcen einer reflexiven Resilienz macht (vgl. Bonß 2016) ist, dass sie sowohl zur Widerspiegelung und Deutung des Erlebten Anlass bieten als auch zum Weiterdenken möglicher Alternativen, über kontrafaktische Realitäten, die sich unter anderen Umständen eventuell verwirklichen könnten“ (translated into English by the reviewer).

in the latter's figuring as immigrants of Caribbean descent – and undisguised xenophobia destabilize democratic structures and the very utopian foundations of a unified Europe. However, Ravizza insists that literature or narratives in general can fuel resilience building (2020: 157), which she shows with the help of British-Barbadian author George Lemming's *The Emigrants* (1954). Ravizza's and Angela Locatelli's subsequent essay converge in their understanding of literature as offering "unique tools to convey resilient thinking" (2020: 167). Through her examination of two contemporary works of realism, Julian Barnes' *Pulse* (2020: 2011) and Chris Cleave's *Incendiary* (2005), Locatelli arrives at the conclusion "that literature can be an effective [and affective, I might add] instrument of sanity and resilience in troubled times, gives its provocative power of articulating polyphonic perspectives and of highlighting the complexities of historical conjunctures through a special use of language" (2020: 180).

The narration of complex social and political aspects of crises takes center stage in Friedrich von Borries' novel *1WTC* (2011), examined by Lorenzo Licciardi with particular emphasis on the mechanisms of adaptation and plans of resistance or subversion deployed by the characters as tactics of resilience. Licciardi abstracts this observation to a meta-level and concludes that literature finds itself in an area of tension – between resistance and adaptation. Circling back to Basseler's essay from section I and adding a third layer to his conceptualization of resilience, the novel, Licciardi argues, is not only a fiction *about* resilience and resilience *is* not only a fiction, but fiction is also a *form* of resilience (2020: 195).

Peter Hanenberg's contribution on translation as a key cultural resource for Europe and beyond opens the third section of the edited volume. His essay focuses on 'secondarity', a concept which denotes "that European culture is consequently built upon the shoulders of precursors whose heritage is 'seasoned' by their successors. [...] Or in other words, the precursory culture is projected, carried out, and denied in the successive culture" (2020: 223). Building on this concept, Hanenberg explores the long chain of cultural precursors and successors who have (been) translated and transformed over time and space into a contemporary Europe – a Europe no longer built on Greco-Roman ancestors or origins but informed by a network of cultures culminating in "an ever-new 'secondarity'" (2020: 227). Although the title of the following article has raised hopes for a discussion of the concept of a culture of resilience (*Resilienzkultur*), the reader will be disappointed to find that Andrea D'Onofrio deals primarily with the historical development of Europe and a common culture of remembrance (*Erinnerungskultur*) and less with implications for a resilient Europe of the future.

Even though Vera Herold also works with (post)memory, she investigates how far music can foster (cultural) resilience as demonstrated in the case of *Lissabonner Deutsche* (2020: 255) and explores the relationship and mutual entanglement of resilience and vulnerability. To her, resilience is not only the acceptance of and adaptation to shocks and their consequences but also the resistance against and fight for change (2020: 265). In her essay on the feeling of shock and disruption experienced by East Germans in the process of unification, Cecilia Molesini puts her finger on the janus-facedness of the concept of resilience: on the one hand, it has been identified as the ability of bouncing back to a state prior to a shock or disturbance but, on the other, also as the capability of an individual, community, or system to adapt to changes and new circumstances “without having to dissociate themselves from their former beliefs and practices” (2020: 313). Molesini thus emphasizes the reactive and defensive nature of resilience but also points towards the ever more resilient being of individuals and communities which have faced and overcome cultural shocks in the past, which are aspects central to the various approaches to resilience provided in the articles.

The broad range of theoretical considerations and cultural products examined in *Europe's Crises and Cultural Resources of Resilience* make for a fascinating and compelling read. It is the diversity of texts and approaches that contributes to the understanding of Europe's crises and of resilience as a potential transdisciplinary research field that the volume would like to emphasize. It certainly meets its goals of identifying and assessing emerging approaches, showcasing creative responses to trans-European challenges which foster resilience, and charting new roads for scholarly research. The varied considerations of the concept of resilience add to its understanding as a travelling concept (*sensu* Mieke Bal) and its theorization on an individual, communal, systems- and state-level provide a perfect entry point for anyone interested in resources of cultural resilience in and beyond the European context. Even though resilience is examined from various perspectives, resource and Europe remain undertheorized and elusive concepts hardly defined within the contributions. Europe, at times, is even being used interchangeably with the European Union, without making the necessary distinction between Europe as a geographical space and Europe as a community of shared values, a union of states, and a political actor.

REFERENCES

Bal, Mieke

2002 *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Stockholm Resilience Center.

2015 "What is Resilience? An Introduction to a Popular Yet Often Misunderstood Concept." <https://stockholmresilience.org/research/research-news/2015-02-19-what-is-resilience.html>, accessed November 2020

ANNA TABOURATZIDIS

English Department

Justus-Liebig-University Giessen

Otto-Behaghel-Str. 10 B, 35394 Giessen, Germany.

ORCID code: orcid.org/0000-0001-6253-1083