

Toward A European Dream: Literary and Cultural Resources of Resilience in Encounters with Crises

Somaye Rezaei

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

somaye.rezaei@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

Abstract:

The volume *Europe's Crises and Cultural Resources of Resilience: Conceptual Explorations and Literary Negotiations* edited by Polland et al. explores European crises and the resources required and/or utilized in encounters with them. Although the contributions to the volume vary in quality and depth, the book is a significant contribution to the emerging literature in the study of 'resilience.' With an interdisciplinary approach, the book illustrates the relevance of literature and culture in critical historical and socio-political situations.

Auf dem Weg zu einem europäischen Traum: Literarische und kulturelle Ressourcen in Begegnungen mit Krisen

German Abstract:

Der von Polland et. al. herausgebrachte Band *Europe's Crises and Cultural Resources of Resilience: Conceptual Explorations and Literary Negotiations* befasst sich mit europäischen Krisen und den Ressourcen, die für ihre Bewältigung benötigt und/oder genutzt werden. Obwohl die Beiträge zum Band in Qualität und Tiefe variieren, ist das Buch ein bedeutender Beitrag der neuartigen ‚Resilienz‘-Forschung. Mit einem interdisziplinären Ansatz verdeutlicht es die Relevanz von Literatur und Kultur in krisenhaften historischen und gesellschaftspolitischen Situationen.

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Somaye Rezaei

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

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Europe has faced several crises in the last decade that have profoundly influenced European culture and society. Especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the calls for collaborative practices to overcome these unprecedented difficulties have increased. This volume on “Europe's Crises and Cultural Resources of Resilience,” could not have appeared at a better (or a more crisis-driven) time. The book “aims to explore [...] interwoven European narratives and understand them as cultural techniques and strategies for the productive handling of manifold crisis experiences” (p. 2). This ambitious goal is fulfilled through wide-ranging contributions from German, Italian, and Portuguese scholars written in English and German. The works were initially presented at an eponymous conference held in Rome in 2018. The conference and the subsequent book publication were sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) with funds from the German Federal Foreign Office.

The volume begins with an introduction written collaboratively by Michael Basseler, Imke Polland and Ansgar Nünning, in which the editors define the concept of crisis and offer an overview of the book. The book has three main sections. The first one, “Resources of Resilience: Transdisciplinary and Trans-European Perspectives,” brings together different perspectives from cultural studies, narratology, literary studies, economics, and political science to put forth an interdisciplinary approach for dealing with crises and discussing resources of resilience. Basseler's article on “Cultures of Resilience and Culture as (a Resource of) Resilience” is the centerpiece of the volume which provides a historical overview of resilience scholarship. Basseler also suggests ten conceptual and methodological considerations for future scholarly approaches in dealings with resilience (p. 23-28). One of the most noteworthy considerations is

the reflection on the potential of resilience thinking in literary studies for dealing with “a variety of very different yet structurally similar contemporary phenomena and social symptoms” (p. 26). Vera Nünning’s article on “(European) Narrative as a Cultural Resource of Resilience” draws attention to the parasocial potential of fictional narratives to facilitate real-life intercultural encounters. She concludes by maintaining that European narratives “can highlight and transmit common values which lie beneath visible cultural differences” (p. 49). Sandro M. Moraldo’s “Identitätspanik vs. Resilienz: Ein Versuch über das transkulturelle Zusammenleben in einer komplexen Wirklichkeit” deals with the so called ‘refugee crisis’ and the use of water-based metaphors such as tsunami, wave, etc. for describing the movement of asylum seekers in a negative light. He proposes “interdependence” (*Verflechtung*) as a resilience concept and comments that promoting fact-based dialogue in the public space and civil society can function as a long-term strategy for building trust between self and the ‘other’ (p. 66-67). These articles along with the other contributions of this section provide the terminological and conceptual frameworks for the rest of the volume.

The second part, on the literary resources of resilience, examines several European novels and memoirs. Paul Calzoni’s contribution, “A Resilient ‘European Peace Project’: Robert Menasse’s *The European Courier* and *The Capital*,” argues that the “economical and judicial capital of Menasse’s ‘European utopia’ [Brussels] is described in its multiculturalism and hospitality toward tourists and employees of the European Commission” (p. 138). Calzoni’s article highlights memory as a resource of resilience for Europe, especially in remembering Auschwitz as its ethical capital. Alexandra Lopes considers remembering and translation as cultural resources of resilience by discussing Hanif Kureishi’s biographical novel. She contends that biography, as a translational genre, can become the ultimate act of resilience that makes the renewal of self “in different geographies and temporalities” possible (p. 151).

The third section, “Imaginative Spaces and European Entangled (Hi-)stories” starts with Peter Hanenberg’s article “Meaning, Relevance, Secondary: Exploring Translation as a Cultural Resource for Europe and Beyond,” which sets the stage for the rest of articles in this section. Hanenberg emphasizes translation as “a resource of making sense of the world far beyond its application to language” (p. 219). He clarifies that translation works as an activating resource for values and perspectives which are otherwise restricted to national traditions in order to deal with “the challenges of diversity and complexity” (p. 226). Andrea D’Onofrio considers the role

of historical memory and the culture of remembering (*Kultur des Erinnerns*) in making the past understandable and using it as a way of meaning making and community building. Cecilia Molesini discusses ‘*Ostalgie*’ [nostalgia for the GDR], a concept utilized by East Germans, along with other means of resilience, to bridge their past experience in GDR with their present lives in the unified Germany. The last article in the volume by Beatrice Occhini presents (un)translatability in the works of Austrian Writer Uljana Wolf as a literary system of resilience in poetic language (p. 330).

One of the most productive aspects of the volume is the successful reframing of migration and dislocation as resources of resilience. In this vein, it can be argued that the volume recognizes migration as an act of “translatedness” (p. 142) along with translatability as a resource for transferring traditions as well constructing new meanings – resources that are often neglected. Additionally, several contributors to the volume highlight the role of memory and culture(s) of remembering as a specifically significant European practice for constructing the ‘peace project.’ Thus, the European dream of democratization and solidarity is pursued by identifying possible resilience practices.

The editors consider crises “as productive moments for reconceptualisation, rethinking, and creative transpositions” (p. 9), a perspective that this volume takes by framing the challenges of crises as thresholds for reconstructing the structures of socio-cultural interactions in a new light. In the end, it must be pointed out that the contributions of the volume vary in depth and quality and the resources of resilience discussed by some authors might not be the best viable options. However, considering the current developments and the increasing calls for solidarity and Europe-wide cooperation in order to navigate the Corona pandemic, the significance of studying resilience, even the less practical approaches, is felt more than ever. There is no doubt that continued scholarship in the field, possibly building off of this book, is needed to further elaborate on the concept and identify new resources of resilience.