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The Many Faces of Resilience and Healing in Contemporary Narratives

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Resilience has become a ubiquitous and contested concept. As a “pervasive idiom of global governance” (Walker and Cooper 144), it has become part of political speeches and everyday conversations, especially as in the midst of the pandemic citizens all around the world were asked to build resilience. This overuse calls for a reassessment of its validity and accuracy as a working concept, as well as a deeper study on the nuanced implications it holds, especially in regard to related notions such as vulnerability, precarity or the ethics of care. Moreover, as Fraile-Marcos has evinced, “the alignment of the discourse of resilience and neoliberal ideology” demands a critical approach (4-6).

Nowadays, resilience is studied by researchers from disciplines apparently as diverse as physics, ecology, disaster research, psychology, neuroscience, genetics, sociology, business, cultural studies, medical humanities, or literature, resulting in varied approaches and definitions. In psychology resilience “refers to positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity” (Herrman et al. 259); ecology also provided an early definition, as the ability of a system to “absorb changes ... and still persist” (Holling 17); whilst in business studies resilient individuals and organizations have been said to “possess three characteristics: a staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise” (Coutu 4), expanding on what psychologists, geneticists, and even Holocaust studies have concluded over the years. Yet the concept has also been contested and redefined in many of these fields (e.g. Manyena, Ungar).

The present thematic issue hopes to make an intervention in the nascent field of resilience studies by bringing together perspectives from the Humanities and the Social Sciences. It aims to explore the rich meanings of resilience and its representation in varied narrative forms that imagine resilience as a paradigm through which to apprehend contemporary reality and subjectivity.

In addition to considering narrative as maybe the “major cultural and cognitive scheme through which notions of resilience are currently generated” (Basseler 25), this proposal highlights the agency of narratives in pondering and achieving forms of resilience. Probing Bamberg’s assertion that “actual events are not that relevant; and more relevant is what they stand for, i.e., how they connect with other events and how they differentiate ourselves as special and unique (or as everyday and mundane)” (4), all of which is achieved through narration, this thematic issue draws on literary representations of ‘narrative therapy’ to underline the importance of stories of resistance and resilience for not only capturing but also developing people’s abilities and capacities to face difficulties. Particular attention will therefore be paid to narration as witnessing and testifying, and its potential to create resilient individuals and communities while engaging current social and environmental concerns.

Keywords: resilience, healing, vulnerability, ethics of care, narrative therapy.

We welcome 500-word abstracts in English that address (but are not limited to) the following topics:

- Literary analyses of resilience narratives that draw on theoretical approaches and conceptualizations of trauma, vulnerability, precarity, well-being, the good life, happiness, and healing.
- Narrative articulations of resilience vis-à-vis abrupt change and crisis, as seen from different perspectives: ecology, climate change, psychology, gender, decolonization, post-humanism, post-anthropocentrism, etc.
- The potential agency of resilience narratives: therapeutic, didactic, epistemological, ontological, cultural, political, ethical.
- Delineating an aesthetics of resilience: thematic and formal narrative features.
- Narrating resilience across genres.

Please send abstracts for articles to the following addresses: anafra@usal.es and usvlwlit@savba.sk by **July 31, 2022**.

You will be notified of the acceptance of your abstract by September 15, 2022.

Deadline for the final text (in English): January 31, 2023.

Publication: June 2023.

Article length: 27 000 – 36 000 characters.

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