

Thinking about Resilience Introduction

Suzan Meryem Rosita, Dieter Reinisch

Pembroke College, Oxford (<suzan.kalayci@pmb.ox.ac.uk>)

European University Institute (<dieter.reinisch@eui.eu>)

The politics of mourning, victimhood and martyrdom are central to the self-images of Armenia and Ireland, and yet in the context of this special issue resilience emerges as a powerful metaphor that was previously absent from contemporary narratives of Armenian and Irish nationhood. The readings on resilience offered in this volume differ greatly in methodological focus and theoretical context, but all offer a critical view on how resilience is performed and imagined in Armenia and Ireland around the hundred-year mark. They show that resilience, much like vulnerability, is indeed “part of resistance” (Butler 2016, 26). This dual vision can replace our previous conclusions about resilience with a more nuanced understanding of what it means *to resist* in our world – in the past, present and future.

The ten essays, responses and artistic interventions in this issue show that the notion of resilience can provide us with a unique way to explore and read Armenian and Irish history, alongside and in connection with each other. In the centennial landscape we survey, resilience comes in many forms and occurs in a variety of situations and historical moments: in the conjuncture of combined and uneven development on the one hand, and dreams of independence on the other (Carlo Maria Pellizzi and Aldo Ferrari); in the margins as well as at centre stage in Great War national politics (Marc Levene); in surviving archival documents chronicling the birth of modern human rights law and activism (Patrick Walsh); in diplomatic reports from Armenia by Irish emissaries commenting on Armenia’s trajectory as a peripheral republic of the Soviet Union (Maurice J. Casey); in the form of counter-memories of the “generations after” who struggle to find their voices and identities in a post-colonial global context and post-traumatic nation-building discourse around the hundred year mark (Sevan Beukian and Rebecca Graff-McRae); in literary works (drama and novels) and films that make us painfully aware of the limits of our own language and imagination (Claudia Parra and Donatella Abbate Badin); and in contemporary artistic interventions and per-

formances (Mkrtich Tonoyan and Phelim McConigly) that add yet another imaginative layer to the silence that is necessarily always part of conversations about war and violence.

Despite the promising, and often original, uses of resilience in the contributions to our issue, the notion has a troublesome and complicated history (Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady 2012). Resilience is widely used in the language of neoliberalism, national security and defence, and it has served as a form of rhetorical shock absorber when “climate change, the War on Terror, and economic crises affect livelihoods around the world, and disproportionately those of the poorest” (Bracke 2016, 58-59). Talk of resilience in order to survive, bounce back and recover quickly from adverse circumstances and situational exigencies contributes to an understanding that to be resilient is to merely survive. Such discourses of survival and self-mastery are culturally and politically charged, as a public poster from the Louisiana Justice Institute seen on a mural in Belfast shows:

Stop calling me
Resilient.
Because every time you say
'Oh, they're resilient'
that means you can
do something else to me.
I am not resilient.¹

We challenge these common conceptions of resilience and argue that an alternative perception of this concept is crucial to understanding how the people of Armenia and Ireland mobilize (and in the past have mobilized) resilience for the purposes of asserting their existence, claiming the rights to memory and equality, and resisting police violence, security and military actions. The concept of resilience, we find, illuminates our present moment and resonates with the recent political and social debates surrounding fundamental questions about political representation and personal freedom spurred by the 2018 Armenian velvet revolution and Ireland's historic referendum ending the country's ban on abortion.

¹ The appearance of the term “resilient” on a mural in a Loyalist-dominated area of West-Belfast in place of a former paramilitary UDA mural reflects the manifold uses of “resilience” in Ireland by actors from all corner of the political spectrum, victims and perpetrators alike. While the essays in this issue focus on the resilience of the weak, the use of the same term in the context of the right-wing, white supremacist UDA reflects also its manipulative power; <<https://extramuralactivity.com/2015/10/12/i-am-not-resilient/>> (last accessed on 05/2018).

Resilience also turned out to be an appropriate theme for the process of editing this collected volume. The process was far from easy and we thank Fiorenzo Fantaccini for encouraging us to pursue the project and for providing hands-on support and invaluable advice. We also thank the dedicated staff at *Studi irlandesi*, and especially Arianna Antonielli, for doing such a great job editing and producing this issue, and all anonymous referees. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Hrachya Vardanian, whose artistic work has inspired us to think about Armenia and Ireland as having convergent yet connected histories.

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