Chapter 17
Narratives and Metaphors Inspired by the COVID–19 Trauma

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ABSTRACT

The process of the COVID-19 pandemic has produced various social convulsions in our environment. Among these consequences is the development of an abundant literary and paraliterary production. Much of this production stimulated by the pandemic adopts a narrative form (micro-narratives, tales, personal testimonies): it consists of short narratives by non-professional writers included in recent books or on the internet. Based on a sample of this type of text in Spanish, the authors have carried out a study of various aspects of this creative activity, mainly metaphors that convey thematic motifs such as the war against the virus and the home as a complex, ambiguous symbol.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at contributing to the study of the effects of COVID-19 through the analysis of a corpus of short narratives published in recent books or available on the internet. Within a socio-narrative theoretical approach, we understand that the narratives of all sorts that circulate in a society reflect some realities and at the same time contribute to the construction of the social representations of those realities. The corpus we have chosen is large and varied: confinement diaries, testimonies of health professionals, children´s literature and micro-narratives. We have valued especially the narrative dimension of all these texts and have analyzed the discursive procedures of metaphorization in order to examine the semantic representations of a military type (the war against the virus) and the home (either valued positively as a

refuge or negatively as a prison), as well as the dramatic scenes lived in hospitals (through the testimony of health professionals).

BACKGROUND. EPIDEMICS AND THEIR EFFECTS

The epidemic that begun in China in 2019 and quickly extended throughout the world has been an attention call for the world´s population and has served as proof that epidemics tend to be global and can easily become pandemics. The world is a small place that cannot easily slow down the dissemination of such phenomena, in spite of the fact that social mentalities still think of it in terms of a geography separated by political or administrative borders.

A few years back, economists theorized about the butterfly effect to explain how any change in the order of things produced in the most remote place on earth could affect the economy of the companies and countries farthest removed from where the allegorical fly of that insect was happening.

Another field in which *globalization* has imposed itself as an undeniable reality is climate change, at least for scientists and citizens who do not agree with negationist theories. More and more, the planet is seen as an organism that functions through the complex and delicate equilibrium of its parts, where the deforestation of the Amazon forest, for instance, is related to polar ice melting, recurrent drought in large parts of the world, and the harshness and frequency of meteorological phenomena that are very damaging to human life …

Many people are not ready to renounce the advantages of technological civilization in their daily lives, although they do not dare deny the successive and progressive evidence of this change. This is more so when the silent and practical negationists are the elderly, and even more if they belong to the privileged classes that perceive the risk as removed in time and the probability of being affected in their lives as low.

Young generations -even teenagers- have raised with more energy the banner of creating awareness about this change, which has produced a generational gap or divide in the sociology of many countries.

What is curious is that with the pandemic the roles have been reversed regarding COVID-19 since from the beginning it has been perceived that the elderly are the most vulnerable people -which is very likely- while the young are almost exempt from the risk of infection or the consequences of infection would be weak in them -which is questionable. In general terms, we can affirm that at least in the West the social practices of young people have created problems of new pandemic outbreaks because of group contact or even massive contact when the recommendations of the health administration have not been followed. It is a *practical* negationism similar to that of climate change, although in a different generation, and its effect is a similar but opposite generational gap (Salvador, 2020).

Be that as it may, one of the effects of the pandemic has been the fear sensation it creates because of the social uncertainty produced by the swinging opinions of scientists during a phenomenon little known until then: a new and highly unpredictable virus that could mutate easily, as proven by successive strains.

One of the first reactions of the representatives of health management (WHO, ministries of health in European countries like Spain and also in Latin America) has been reducing social mobility through house lockdowns (and later perimetral lockdowns that included cities, regions or countries). These measures provoked in many social groups a feeling of isolation that increased the sensation of loneliness. These feelings of loneliness and isolation have had a negative impact on many aspects (neuroses because of lack of physical and affective contact, depressions, conflicts of family cohabitation, hysterical need to

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