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Introduction: From Crisis to Critique

Maria Boletsi, Janna Houwen, and Liesbeth Minnaard

In recent years, *crisis* has been an omnipresent term in global geopolitics and probably the most common qualifier for several sociopolitical, humanitarian, local and global challenges and developments, from the 2008 global financial crisis to the ongoing environmental crisis. In the Mediterranean, particularly, the term has accompanied and framed several acute situations the region had to face. The so-called refugee or migrant crisis that has been unraveling since 2015,¹ the European debt crisis and its impact on Southern European countries (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Cyprus), political crises in Turkey, the revolutions of the “Arab Spring” and their aftermath, the decades-old yet still acute Palestinian question, are all events and

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situations brought under the rubric of this term. This widespread mobilization of *crisis* often works to legitimize repressive politics that involves military interventions, states of emergency, securitization of borders, anti-immigration policies, the curtailing of human or civic rights, biopolitical control, or austerity measures. Crisis rhetoric also fuels xenophobic and racist attitudes, disaster narratives or problematic modes of representation that engage in a show of human misery. The term's banalization and oversaturation can also lead to passivity and compromised agency, especially in contexts where crisis comes to be seen as a society's chronic state, an immobilizing condition that constitutes the "new normal." This normalization of crisis, as many have argued, is becoming the rule rather than the exception. The concept *crisis*, Giorgio Agamben said in an interview in 2013, has become the "motto of modern politics" and "part of normality in any segment of social life" (2013, n.pag.).

Certainly, the idea of crisis as a framework for understanding the present or even history is not new. Reinhart Koselleck, for example, in his well-known genealogy of the concept *crisis* in European modernity,² argues that since the second half of the eighteenth century *crisis* becomes "a structural signature" of (Western) modernity and the main concept for conceptualizing history itself (2006, 372). Historically, the term *crisis* has assumed various and often conflicting meanings: in ancient Greek, the word (*κρίσις* / *krisis*) was used in the domains of politics, law, medicine, and theology, where it signified "choices between stark alternatives—right or wrong, salvation or damnation, life or death" (358).³ In the classical Greek context, the term was used both for an "objective crisis" (understood as a decisive point "that would tip the scales," specifically in politics) and for "subjective critique": a judgment in the sense of "criticism" but also in the juridical meaning of "trial," "legal decision," and "ultimately 'court'" (359). In the medical context, *crisis* referred both to the "observable [medical] condition," that is, the illness, and "the judgment (*judicium*) about the course of the illness," that is, the diagnosis that would determine "whether the patient will live or die" (360). When the Bible was translated in Greek, the juridical meaning of *crisis* was transferred to the theological sphere: with God as the "judge of his people," crisis as judgment became invested with a "promise of salvation" but also with "apocalyptic expectations" in the inevitable "Final Judgment" (*Τελική Κρίσις* / *Telikē Krisis*) (359). Crisis, then, assumes very diverse meanings: it can denote choice, decision, the power to distinguish or separate, judgment, critique, or diagnosis; and it can signal a turning point in history or

a moment of truth for a society, but also a chronic condition without a clear prospect of resolution.

The double meaning of crisis as an objective condition and a subjective judgment is particularly important for understanding the workings of recent mobilizations of *crisis* in the Mediterranean and beyond. The two meanings become regularly fused in public and political rhetoric: instead of a subjective judgment or speech act that shapes the reality it names, *crisis* is regularly used as a constative description of an objective state. As such, it often serves to validate repressive policies that are adopted without much debate. According to the New Keywords Collective, “a situation of ‘crisis,’ after all, appears to demand immediate responses that cannot afford the more prolonged temporalities of democratic debate and deliberative processes, or so we are told” (2016, 11). Popular crisis rhetoric today thus seems to work against the original meaning of crisis as *choice* or *decision*. “Today crisis,” according to Agamben, “has become an instrument of rule” that “legitimize[s] political and economic decisions that in fact dispossess citizens and deprive them of any possibility of decision” (2013, n.pag.). As Athena Athanasiou aptly puts it, “discourses of crisis become a way to governmentally produce and manage (rather than deter) the crisis. ‘Crisis’ becomes a perennial state of exception that turns into a rule and common sense and thus renders critical thinking and acting redundant, irrational, and ultimately unpatriotic” (Athanasiou in Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 149). Crisis rhetoric thus promotes “a *politics without an alternative*” (Badiou 2007, 4) or the so-called TINA doctrine (There Is No Alternative).⁴

Political choices are of course taken on a regular basis in order to deal with specific crises. But when crisis rhetoric serves a politics of no alternatives, uses of *crisis* tend to cast political decisions as self-evident “choices” between a right versus wrong, legitimate versus illegitimate, or necessary versus catastrophic alternative. Such uses of crisis shrink the space of choice and deter dissent and critique. As Stijn De Cauwer writes in his introduction to the volume *Critical Theory at a Crossroads*, “[r]educing the complexity of a situation to a questionable choice between two options is a much adopted tool for those who want to call something a crisis to impose dubious exceptional measures” (2018, xxiii–xxiv). The authors of the New Keywords Collective also address the anti-democratic undertones of proclamations of crisis in European politics, which serve “particular forms of governmental intervention, usually through the deployment of authoritarian measures” (2016, 11). This contemporary neoliberal

governmentality of crisis, and the forms it has recently taken in different sites around the Mediterranean, forms the main framework in which this volume intervenes.

Given the increased currency of *crisis* in recent years, literature on crisis has turned into a real industry, yet in popular and even in scholarly crisis-texts, crisis is still often taken as a given or a descriptive term for a reality or condition. As a result, most studies of contemporary crises undertake financial and political analyses, often aimed at identifying the causes and/or offering solutions for crisis-management or for the overcoming of a crisis. However, when “[c]risis is posited as an a priori,” Janet Roitman argues in *Anti-Crisis*, “the grounds for knowledge of crisis are neither questioned nor made explicit” (2014, 11). In line with Roitman’s critique, this volume studies contemporary crisis-scapes by approaching crisis as a performative, meaning-making concept rather than an empirically observable phenomenon. Crisis, we argue, works as a *framing* that allows and authorizes certain narratives of the present and versions of futurity while precluding others. In this venture, we converse with, and build on, other recent scholarship on crisis from the fields of anthropology, cultural analysis, literary studies, visual studies, migration studies, philosophy, archeology, and sociology.⁵ The essays in this collection, by focusing on contexts around the Mediterranean, probe different aspects of the current neoliberal governmentality of crisis and show how multiple, co-existing or intersecting frameworks of crisis reconfigure attitudes to past archives; how they form experiences of the present and of current sociopolitical realities; and how they manage our ways of thinking the future. In addition, this book distinguishes itself from the bulk of critical scholarship on crisis due to the focus of many of its essays on the role of literature, cinema, art, and other forms of cultural and artistic production in questioning the logic of the governmentality of crisis, in drawing attention to it as a framework or in triggering crises of representation that enable reconfigurations of this framework or the imagination of alternative narratives and models of living.

Western politics, media, and, to a large extent, academia, have endorsed the term *crisis* for many situations and challenges the Mediterranean has recently been facing, and seem to have found no good alternative to this term. But if crisis today is often “hijacked” by far-right, xenophobic, and anti-democratic agendas that shrink the space of political choice and the imagination of alternative futures, in this volume we ask if there are ways to salvage *crisis* as a concept that can do the work of its cognate—*critique*—and participate in the articulation of alternative languages,

narratives, and modes of representation. Is the term *crisis* too tainted or saturated today or can it be part of the contrarian, critical, or transformative vocabularies of scholars, activists, and artists in attempts to challenge or sidestep pervasive frameworks of crisis in the Mediterranean? Can this concept be involved in attempts to trigger a *crisis of meaning* and *representation* or give rise to new “grammars” of protest and critique? Can crisis also bear the promise of the “otherwise,” that is, engender conceptual, artistic, political, and cultural spaces that narrativize the present differently and imagine a future of multiple alternatives? Can crisis be involved in alternative forms of representation that are better equipped to voice deviant subjectivities and liminal experiences? Or should scholars and artists try to develop what Janet Roitman has called “noncrisis narratives” (2014, 13) that disengage from the matrix of crisis and forge different models of relating to others and fostering communities?

The essays in this volume offer different, sometimes opposed, conceptual solutions to this conundrum, in some cases proposing redefinitions of *crisis* and in others rejecting the concept of crisis altogether and examining alternative vocabularies for noncrisis narratives. The essays thus explore either alternative mobilizations of crisis that undercut the premises of current crisis rhetoric (e.g., exploring crisis as critique, dissent, call for change, reconfiguration of established paradigms, and revolution) or alternatives to crisis rhetoric itself. They trace and test other vocabularies, narrative structures, frames of interpretation, and expressive forms in art, cinema, literature, protest, and social movements across the Mediterranean that seek a reconfiguration of what Jacques Rancière in *The Politics of Aesthetics* and elsewhere calls the “distribution of the sensible” (2006). The volume puts particular emphasis on responses to the declared “refugee crisis,” which can in many ways be seen as paradigmatic for the way neoliberal governmentality today works to manage the movement of bodies and instrumentalizes *crisis* as a means of control and exclusion. But the essays also engage with several other crisis-scapes in the Mediterranean, through which they unravel the multivalence of *crisis* and its intricate relation to *critique*.

CRISIS AND CRITIQUE/CRISIS AS CRITIQUE

In order to compare and (when necessary) reconfigure or deconstruct frameworks of crisis, we need to unpack the concept of crisis itself and its various conflicting meanings and operations in present contexts—a task

some of the essays in this volume undertake. But we also wish to rethink *crisis* together with *critique*: a task that calls for a rethinking of critique itself in its relation to crisis. The link between the two concepts goes beyond their sharing of the same etymological root in the Greek verb *κρίνω* (*krinō*), which meant to “separate,” “choose,” “judge,” or “decide” (Koselleck 2006, 358; Crosthwaite 2011, 1). In the field of literary criticism, Paul de Man in his 1967 essay “Criticism and Crisis” even posed that criticism “necessarily occurs in the mode of crisis,” as literature demystifies received intellectual traditions and interpretive or disciplinary frameworks that critics bring to bear on it (de Man 1971, 18; Crosthwaite 2011, 1).

But if *crisis* as a term has clearly gained currency in public and academic discourses, *critique* as a set of approaches, interpretive styles, and strategies of reading that make up a (multifaceted) academic tradition has come under intense scrutiny in the last two decades. Arguing that critique in that sense has run its course, some scholars have proclaimed that we live in “postcritical” times. Thinkers that subscribe to this postcritical paradigm stress the need to test “intellectual alternatives” to a tradition of critique that they often cast through unwarranted generalizations, by associating it, for example, with “a suspicious hermeneutics,” “chronic negativity,” pessimism, and a reliance on rationalism that underplays the role of affects, emotions, and moods in critical ventures (Anker and Felski 2017, 1, 11).⁶ Viewed as a “genre,” critique is of course internally heterogeneous, with its diverse instances sharing what Ludwig Wittgenstein called “family resemblances” rather than essential features (3–4).⁷ Critique is, however, marked by certain recurring elements. These include the emphasis on defamiliarization and a suspicion toward “common sense” and anything readers or viewers take for granted (Anker and Felski 2017, 3, 8; Culler 2011, 4); a self-reflexive attitude that never exempts the researcher and their position from further critique and scrutiny; and a liking for allegorical, symptomatic readings that sometimes approach literary or artistic forms as reflections of social structures and realities, and especially—in the tradition of critique of ideology—social, racial, or gender inequalities and hierarchies (Anker and Felski 2017, 6, 8). Most importantly perhaps, critique carries a *diagnostic* quality: a connotation it shares with the concept of crisis. Just as crisis in its medical meaning denoted “diagnosis,”⁸ *critique* also engages in symptomatology and aims to offer a diagnosis of the present or of realities, forces, and structures therein. This diagnostic aspect of critique, as well as its relation to the genealogy of crisis, deserves further scrutiny if we are to rethink the task of critique in contemporary frameworks of crisis.

According to Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski in *Critique and Postcritique*, one of the problematic aspects of the diagnostic impulse has to do with the prominent position of an authoritative expert-interpreter who scrutinizes “an object in order to decode certain defects or flaws that are not readily or automatically apparent to a nonspecialist perspective” (2017, 4). This version of the diagnostic impulse, Anker and Felski argue, easily translates into an attitude of “judicious and knowledgeable detachment” by a dispassionate interpreter that seeks to detect “the pathologies of the social body” (4, 5). It also underscores the hierarchical distinction between a (knowledgeable, authoritative) subject and an object, or an interpreter and a patient, whereby only the former can perform an adequate or reliable diagnosis (5).⁹ John Michael adds that critique may have been instrumental in emancipatory projects, especially since the 1970s, but often “this required [scholars] to adopt postures as supposedly knowing subjects, saddled with the necessary but essentially belligerent task of explaining the realities of the world to ... less enlightened audiences”—a stance that often involved a Eurocentric orientation (2017, 253). When it comes to the critical study of frameworks of crisis today, such a version of diagnosis does not only feel outdated, but it also risks emulating precisely those binaries on which crisis rhetoric heavily rests: doctors versus patients or passive versus active subjects. During the Eurozone debt crisis, for example, the crisis-stricken Southern European countries (or so-called PIGS¹⁰) were regularly cast in the media and political speech as patients (or “spoiled children,” Graeber 2011, 229) that do not know any better and need their richer Northern European neighbors to act as doctors (or responsible parents), prescribing austerity measures as a medicine. And in the ongoing “migrant crisis,” migrants are either seen as the “disease” that Europe is called to extricate from its “body,” or cast as passive victims without agency that need to be helped and saved by Europeans (New Keywords Collective 2016, 20; Çelik 2015, 132). We should therefore be alert to critical practices that—wittingly or not—reproduce such metaphors and hierarchies.

But if critique can no longer be conceptualized as “the masterful deciphering of codes or uncovering of preexisting meanings for an audience in need of enlightenment” (Michael 2017, 268), this does not mean that we should give up on the diagnostic rigor of critique altogether. The critical tradition has given rise to a rich and heterogeneous palette of transformative approaches that many critiques of critique, as the ones outlined above, do not do justice to. Intersecting crisis-scapes and the (global) forces that

shape them *demand* symptom-reading and diagnosis. But when setting out to rethink both crisis and critique through the prism of Mediterranean crisis-scapes, we need to shed the authoritative frame of a doctor “reading” a patient (and the accompanying illusions of mastery) and to engage in critical practices of translation. Critique as translation can be understood in line with what Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood propose in their Preface to the volume *Is Critique Secular?*, in which they see translation as an attempt “to map incommensurable world views without seeking to reconcile them” and “to see how these very incommensurable domains constitute, inflect, and even suffuse one another without projecting a broader dialectical unity to which they ultimately tend” (2013, xvi). Engaging with several co-existing, overlapping, or incommensurable frameworks of crisis in the Mediterranean requires such practices of critique as translation that seek interconnections, global patterns of power, and historicization of current crises, but also acknowledge the “epistemic limits” of comparison and “sustain sites of untranslatability” when necessary (xvi).

If in popular rhetoric *crisis* as diagnosis is usually a “judgement of deviation and failure” (Roitman 2014, 13), critiques of crisis often end up reproducing the same judgment. Aiming toward a more agonistic and less cyclical relation between crisis and critique, in this volume we consider different understandings of the diagnostic value of critique. For one such understanding, we may turn to Gilles Deleuze, who in *The Logic of Sense* (1969) saw an intimate link between the diagnostic and the esthetic, and viewed (great) authors as “astonishing diagnosticians or symptomatologists” (Deleuze 1990, 237). Deleuze wrote that “[t]here is always a great deal of art involved in the grouping of symptoms, in the organization of a *table* where a particular symptom is dissociated from another, juxtaposed to a third, and forms the new figure of a disorder or illness” (Deleuze 1990, 237). He saw artists and authors as able to “go further in symptomatology than doctors and clinicians,” precisely “because the work of art gives them new means, perhaps also because they are less concerned about causes” (Deleuze 1967, 13; also qtd in Smith 1997, xvii). Such a take on the diagnostic practice makes it not about identifying symptoms as independently existing facts but rather about rearranging, testing new combinations, and creating configurations that take us away from the illness and from diagnosis as judgment of failure. This approach to symptomatology stresses the creative, transformative, future-oriented, hopeful potential of critique and crisis, or, indeed, of crisis *as* critique.

Frameworks of (chronic) crisis may often entail resignation and compromised agency for people, but they sometimes also trigger what Hendrik Vigh calls an “increased social reflexivity”: a “heightened awareness of the way we interpret the social environment, our perspectives and our horizons” (2008, 19). They force people to constantly test the efficacy of their interpretive strategies and devise alternative frameworks of interpretation—or diagnosis—that produce different narratives of the present. These alternative frameworks and narratives spring from crises of representation that signal, to speak with Janet Roitman, “a dissonance between historical events and representations of those events” (2014, 65). Sensing this dissonance and its affective charge can become an occasion, to use Deleuze’s words again, for “renew[ing] a symptomatological table” (Deleuze 1990, 237) and creating space for alternative models and narratives. Let us not forget that crisis can also mark a turning point and a transformative moment in history. Mobilizing our critical and creative diagnostic impulses is essential for recognizing and seizing those moments as occasions for social and historical change, even when the odds seem to be against that.

CRISIS AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

This volume asks how a rethinking of both crisis and critique could take shape through the prism of contemporary Mediterranean crisis-scapes. In recent years, the Mediterranean as a region has become the epicenter of various declared crises that often dovetail with each other. The imbrication of the financial crisis in Greece with the refugee situation in the country is one example of current “nesting crises” in the region.¹¹ But the Mediterranean has also been the stage of chronic crises that persist up to the present, with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as probably the most striking one. Juxtaposing these “crises” either within the same essay or through the setup of the volume as a whole can help us illuminate and interrogate the global and local power structures and stakes involved in producing and managing these crises, their histories, and the current representational regimes that frame them. Moreover, it enables us to point out the surprising interconnections between new languages of critique, resistance, protest, and futurity emerging from the region. By focusing on the Mediterranean we produce *situated* critical studies while also asserting the paradigmatic value of many of these studies for broader, global processes and trends.

Recent crisis scholarship has drawn much attention to Europe and its declared crises, including the Eurozone crisis, the refugee crisis, the threat of terrorism, Islamophobia, the rise of populism and the alt-right, and states of emergency (Cf. Castells et al. 2017; Bitzenis et al. 2015). Discussions of the above developments are often accompanied by reflections on Europe's purported identity crisis or the crisis of so-called European values. In the common framing of, for instance, the refugee crisis as a European crisis, Europe often poses as a healthy body threatened by the human carriers of a disease/crisis that is external to Europe (New Keywords Collective 2016, 20). To be sure, many studies focusing on Europe and crisis engage in perspicacious critiques of the Eurocentric lens or (neo)colonial and neoliberal agendas involved, for example, in the framing of the "refugee crisis" as a European crisis—a framing that often asserts Europe's innocence (Abbas 2015). One of the most notable endeavors in this direction is the collectively written "Europe / Crisis: New Keywords of 'the Crisis' in and of 'Europe'" by the New Keywords Collective (ed. by Tazzioli and De Genova), which interrogates the nexus of "crisis" and "Europe" from postcolonial and decolonial perspectives. Their work, in the authors' words, responds to "the dire necessity of radically unsettling any self-satisfied European discourse on 'migration' or 'refugees' as de facto human refuse of 'crises' constructed to be strictly 'external' to the presumed safety and stability of 'Europe,' erupting always 'elsewhere'" (2016, 3). Building on such important studies and taking up their call to question and unsettle "Europe," in this volume we challenge Europe's positioning vis-a-vis, among others, the refugee question, but we also propose a shift of the center of gravity from Europe to the Mediterranean.

In recent years the Mediterranean primarily features in the media as a hotbed of multiple crises. Nevertheless, as an imaginary and real geopolitical and cultural space, and as an object of study, the Mediterranean has historically yielded very divergent images. The two probably most popular images of the region are largely opposed to one another: the first, according to Christian Bromberger, is an often idealized Mediterranean "of exchanges, coexistences, harmonious polyphonies," a place where the Occident meets the Orient, marked by confluences that are "incarnated in the port cities and cosmopolitan world-cities" that flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—cities like "Istanbul, Smyrna, Beirut, Alexandria, Algiers, Trieste and Marseilles" (2007, 292). The second is the Mediterranean as a "ring of fire": a place of conflicts, hatred, and lines

of separation, where walls are built and “bridges destroyed”; a place of “religious frontiers,” where one finds “the principal zones of friction and of conflict, where people are cleansed, herded together, exiled, and where interminable dramas are played out” (294–295).¹²

Scholars have played a key role in shaping these (and other) conflicting images of the Mediterranean. In *Mediterranean Crossings* (2008), for example, Iain Chambers “reads” the region as a fluid, hybrid, intercultural space that resists its common framing by European discourses, and eclipses nationalist and exclusionary frameworks and fixed identities. Other scholars question the applicability of concepts like hybridity, métissage, or creolization on Mediterranean societies, arguing, for example, that such concepts are a mismatch with the rigid borders imposed by the three main religions of the Mediterranean (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) (Bromberger 2007, 296–298). Along similar lines, in *The Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant casts the Mediterranean as an imperialist sea that illustrates what he called “continental” (exclusionary, ethnonationalist) thinking as opposed to the Carribean archipelago, which “provides a natural illustration of the thought of Relation” (1997, 34). The Mediterranean for Glissant is “an inner sea surrounded by lands, a sea that concentrates (in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin antiquity and later in the emergence of Islam, imposing the thought of the One),” whereas the Caribbean is “a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc,” “a sea that diffracts” (33).

Although there is surely no true identity of the Mediterranean, the discursive constructions of the region, artificial as they may be, are constitutive of material realities: from attitudes to neighbors and understandings of self and other, to political realities, policies, wars, and publicity campaigns. Recent representations of the Mediterranean in the media mainly stress the region as a zone of conflicts and crises, be it the revolutions in the Arab world, ISIS and the civil war in Syria, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or the financial crises in the European South. Such profiling reproduces the region’s conception as a hotbed of violence and sociopolitical unrest, contrasted with—and thus a possible threat to—(Northern) Europe.

By centering on the Mediterranean, we do not claim a Mediterranean unity or homogeneity. Neither do we assert the “Mediterranean” as an innocent category that is in that sense distinct from “Europe.” It is important to recall that the Mediterranean as an object of study and discursive construct has been anything but free from European (imperialist) agendas. As Michael Herzfeld reminds us, historically, “the idea of a vast Mediterranean culture has frequently served the interests of disdainful

cultural imperialism” (2005, 48). The notion of “Mediterranean unity” thus becomes problematic when we view it as “enmeshed in a global hierarchy of value in which ‘Mediterranean’ comes somewhere between ‘modern’ and ‘primitive’,” or as part of “publicity campaigns designed to exploit lingering exoticism among consumers” (50). As some of the essays in this volume show, the hierarchies and power relations that historically permeate the construct of the Mediterranean continue to shape current frameworks of crisis in the region, supported by representational regimes that are fortified by European media and public discourse.

Taking the above into account, we argue that there is much to be gained from de-centering discussions around recent and ongoing declared crises from Europe to the Mediterranean. By refraining from clear-cut oppositions between “Europe” and “the rest” (North Africa, the Middle East etc.) or, more broadly, between the West and the global South, we set out to explore the intersections of various frameworks of crisis in the region. At the same time, we want to draw attention to this region not only as a “ring of fire” or as a series of transversal crisis-scapes, but also as a space that generates alternatives to dominant European models and representational regimes: a breeding ground for new cultures of protest to anti-democratic modes of governance and processes of securitization; for languages of decolonization and resistance to the neoliberal governmentality of crisis; for radical artistic imaginaries; and for alternative conceptions of community and subjectivity, many of which are shaped through, against, and beyond frameworks of (chronic) crisis.

We thus join other recent studies (Solera 2017; Ianicello 2018) that see the Mediterranean, to use the words of Gianluca Solera, as a “hub of civil resistance” against neoliberal capitalism, a base for “trans-regional grassroots movement” and citizens’ initiatives, and a possible “platform for a new social contract” that “rewrites the relations between institution and citizens” (2017, 94–95). Despite the bitter aftermath of many of the revolutions and uprisings of the “Arab Spring” that swept the Southern Mediterranean, these events have set forth modes of expression and resistance that still reverberate in present artistic and social practices in various and unexpected ways. On the other side of the Mediterranean, from the devastating financial crises in Southern European countries, new, strange, and bold artistic “grammars” are also emerging—such as the cinema of the so-called Greek Weird Wave. These new grammars and artistic idioms often yield radical reconfigurations of archives of the past, new articulations of the experience of the present, and alternative images of the future.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS

Languages of Resistance, Transformation, and Futurity in Mediterranean Crisis-Scapes: From Crisis to Critique includes thirteen contributions by scholars with a background in a wide range of disciplines across the humanities and (to a lesser extent) social sciences. Their case studies involve recent and contemporary literature, visual art, cinema, social and political movements, public rhetoric, media representations of “crises,” and personal and institutional documents from various geopolitical contexts in the Mediterranean, including Greece, Turkey, Italy, Croatia, Spain, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Palestine, Israel, and Syria. The authors engage with these case studies in their situated particularities, in their intersection with other frameworks of crisis, and in their paradigmatic value as examples of (or deviations from) broader structural processes, discourses, representational practices, and artistic trends in the Mediterranean and beyond. Central to many of the contributions are literary, artistic, cultural, and political practices that move beyond crisis as judgment of malfunctioning or failure by articulating alternative, more inclusive conceptions of hospitality, subjectivity, citizenship, and community or exploring new and different understandings of the present and the future, whether these alternatives involve a reconfiguration of the concept of crisis or a leaving behind of the concept altogether.

The following issues and questions are taken up in different ways throughout the volume. First and central to all contributions is a questioning and unpacking of frameworks of crisis in and about the Mediterranean. Considering crisis as a discursive and experiential framing, the authors examine how various and conflicting meanings of crisis intersect, resonate, or clash with each other. Both independently and in productive juxtaposition to each other, the authors address questions such as the following: How do experiences of crisis converge or differ across the Mediterranean and what does their comparison disclose about the conditions that shape the present in each context, for instance in the current formations of “the new poverty” in crisis-ridden regions in Southern Europe? What can we gain by juxtaposing different crisis-frameworks or narratives in the Mediterranean, for example, the “migrant crisis” and the Palestinian question, or narratives of financial crisis from the European South and protests or revolts from the other side of the Mediterranean?

Second, many contributions reflect on the contemporary performativity of *crisis* and trace mobilizations of crisis that project its intertwinement

with different understandings of critique. They ask, for example, what it entails to read crisis as revolution, rupture, revision, or transformation of normative discourses and hegemonic paradigms; and what it means to conceive of crisis as a call for change or even as an occasion for rethinking more traditional understandings of social and political critique and devising new (post-)critical idioms.

Third, *Languages of Resistance, Transformation, and Futurity in Mediterranean Crisis-Scapes* draws attention to spaces of *futurity* that are emerging from contemporary Mediterranean crisis-scapes. It explores how hegemonic grammars or conceptual metaphors can be transformed toward alternative social imaginaries, for example, in the case of institutional nation-branding and populist narratives in austerity-politics in Spain. Which artistic, literary, or other responses to discourses of crisis in the Mediterranean give rise to new vocabularies of resistance and critique, but also new imaginaries, versions of utopianism or creative reconfigurations of the “symptoms” of crises as parts of new languages? These three preoccupations—frameworks of crisis in and about the Mediterranean, the performativity of crisis in relation to critique, and spaces of futurity arising from Mediterranean crisis-scapes—are the main red threads that run through the three parts of this volume.

PART I: Critique and Crisis of Representation contains five contributions that each in their own way revisit contemporary representations and instrumentalizations of crisis and explore the critical potential of thinking and conceptualizing crisis otherwise or disengaging from the term altogether. The contributions by Karen Emmerich, Janna Houwen, and Diego Benegas Loyo and Ipek Çelik Rappas focus on alternative configurations of, or responses to, the “refugee crisis” in forms of protest, a documentary film, and a photographed performance, respectively. The chapters by Begüm Özden Firat and Pablo Valdivia study the operations of language in the shaping of frameworks of crisis and in undercutting those frameworks, by closely examining the complex meanings of an everyday expression (Firat) and of conceptual metaphors (Valdivia).

In Chap. 2, “Dwelling in Noncrisis (Im)possibility: Transmigrant Collective Action in Greece, 2016,” Karen Emmerich studies tactics of (self-)representation in two instances of transmigrant protest staged in northern Greece in 2016, one involving the formation of the news outlet “Refugees.TV” in a settlement in Idomeni and the other the building of a replica of Homs’ clock tower in a camp in northern Greece. The two projects, Emmerich argues, both inhabit and supersede the spaces of

forced immobility created by European tactics of bordering by acting out the very impossibility of certain kinds of action within that context of border securitization. Emmerich treats these two performances of obstruction as instances of “dwelling in (im)possibility”—a modality that also inhabits the contradictory meanings of *stasis* (as both mobility and immobility)—and as examples of the mobile commons at work, while also proposing the mobile commons as a site and model for intellectual efforts that straddle the scholarly and non-scholarly worlds.

Chapter 3, “In the Refugee Machine: The Absence of Crisis and Its Critical (Re-)Production,” reflects on the European “refugee crisis” in terms of a well-oiled machine at work at the Mediterranean borders of Europe. Janna Houwen points out that here a military–industrial–surveillance complex is at work in a smooth manner, devoid of the impending instability, malady, and uncertainty the “refugee crisis” has come to connote. In order to gain an understanding of this contemporary construction that controls migration across the Mediterranean, and to examine the production as well as the fragmentation and repression of subjectivities in Mediterranean border areas, Houwen—drawing from Lazzarato’s machine theory and focusing on Loubeyre’s film *Flow Mechanics*—makes a case for “machine analysis” in this chapter. Only after uncovering the logic of the “refugee machine,” she argues, will it be possible to look for moments of resistance and protest against this lethal machinic system.

Chapter 4, “In Precarity and Prosperity: Refugee Art Going Beyond the Performance of Crisis,” starts out with a critical exploration of refugee related art that drew a lot of media attention, such as works by Ai Weiwei, Banu Cennetoglu’s installation *The List*, and *The Dead are Coming* by art group Center for Political Beauty. While images of refugee deaths and suffering are abundant in artistic as well as mass media representations of the so-called refugee crisis, Diego Benegas Loyo and Ipek Çelik Rappas argue in this chapter that these spectacles never depict the voices and desires of refugees crossing the Mediterranean area, desires that go beyond their “deadly” wish to be in Europe. In order to explore alternative modes of representation, Benegas Loyo and Çelik Rappas turn to refugee art that is less visible in European mass media, particularly focusing on Nela Milic’s *Wedding Bellas*, a performance in which female refugees reflect quotidian expectations and desires that transcend the current discourse of crisis.

In Chap. 5, “Crisis, Common Sense, and Boredom: A Critique of Neoliberal Hegemony in Turkey,” Begüm Özden Fırat traces the prestige and utility of the relatively new Turkish expression *sıkıntı yok* (meaning

literally “no boredom” and figuratively “no problem” or “do not bother”), by pondering the relation between the figural and literal meanings of the expression. Firat reads *skıntı yok* as an instance of a historical articulation of common sense in response to the crisis of (political) culture in Turkey. She proposes to read culture as a ground on which the political economy of the everyday is constructed, and makes a case for a critical analysis of *Skıntı yok*'s “hidden” literal meaning, which lays bare the realities of neoliberalism in Turkey today under the populist hegemony of the governing party, the AKP. Intellectual critique, Firat argues, should pay attention to the “good sensical” nucleus in the expression so as to manufacture a counter-hegemony that challenges neoliberal populist regimes.

The complex relations between language, populist regimes, and crisis are also studied in Chap. 6, “Cultural Narratives of Crisis and Populism in Spain: Metaphors, Nation-branding, and Social Change,” in which Pablo Valdivia delves into the regime of metaphors that shapes populist attitudes in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis in Spain. He asks whether it is possible to develop a transposable theoretical model for analyzing the complex relations between language, socio-political mobilization, and culture. In what ways do conceptual metaphors generate alternative intellectual imaginaries for social renewal? How can social actors use conceptual metaphors to map the mutable nature of our societies and to promote social change? Through three case studies—a novel, a media production, and an institutional document—Valdivia examines how a hegemonic regime of metaphors can be disrupted, transformed, and renewed in the field of policy-making.

The three contributions collected in PART II: Intersecting Crises explore how thinking different narratives of crisis together can help to call dominant discourses and political structures that insist on their separation into question, and to envisage new perspectives on various forms of interconnection between old and new Mediterranean crisis-scapes, as well as between the communities formed within them. Instead of focusing on singular instances or moments of crisis, Olivia Harrison, Liesbeth Minnaard, and Nataša Kovačević in their respective chapters foreground modes of relation and contact, and demonstrate through close analyses of films and literature that historical and current situations dubbed as “crises,” including the socio-political struggles and the questions they produce, intersect in intricate and meaningful ways.

In Chap. 7, “Palestine and the Migrant Question,” Olivia Harrison asks what the ongoing migrant crisis can reveal about the decades-old

Palestinian question, and what Palestine can in turn teach us about the human tragedy that continues to wash up on the shores of former imperial nations. Building on the work of Hannah Arendt and Edward Said, Harrison takes up three recent cinematic and literary texts to investigate the intersection of the Palestinian question and contemporary issues of migration: Mauritian writer Nathacha Appanah's novel *Tropique de la violence* and the documentary films *Brûle la mer*, directed by Maki Berchache and Nathalie Nambot, and *Human Flow* by Ai Weiwei. Arguing against the ubiquitous alarmist discourses of crisis, her close readings of these works make clear that the mass transfer of populations that peaked in 2015 is less a turning point—one of the original meanings of *crisis*—than a new iteration of the decades-old image of migrants as unexpected and unwelcome guests. This chapter places current migrant questions in a long history of displacement that includes the Palestinian question.

Liesbeth Minnaard also addresses the issue of migration, but in relation to contemporary neoliberalism. In Chap. 8, “Lampedusa in Europe; Or Touching Tales of Vulnerability,” Minnaard questions and opposes the currently dominant interpretation of the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa as a problematic and worrisome site at the European margins, and argues that Lampedusa should rather be seen as a heterotopian space at the heart of Europe that is symptomatic for the European Union's faltering neoliberal politics. She elaborates on this idea by analyzing Anders Lustgarten's theater text *Lampedusa* in which, Minnaard contends, the “refugee crisis” and the “social welfare crisis” appear as interrelated frameworks of crisis. She reads *Lampedusa*'s narratives of two individuals struggling with specific situations of “crisis” as “touching tales”—touching in the sense of equally emotionally charged (tales of insecurity, pain, loss, and fear) but also, importantly, touching in the sense of bordering on each other and interconnected in pivotal ways.

Nataša Kovačević's chapter picks up on the issue of touching tales with a discussion of the Francophone novel *Welcome to Paradise* (original *Cannibales*, 1999) by the Moroccan writer Mahi Binebine and the novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* by Moroccan-American writer Laila Lalami, that each imagines spontaneous communities arising among African migrants crossing the Mediterranean in juxtaposition to phantasmatic narratives of death and cannibalism that subvert the idealization of Europe. Kovačević demonstrates how the migrants' ethics of mutual aid, compassion, and hospitality call into question dominant representations of political community in Europe. In Chap. 9, “Alternative Hospitalities on

the Margins of Europe,” she develops a critique of the necropolitical regime of border policing immanent to the existence of the European Union as a political and cultural space. She thereby places the attempts to control “illegal” Mediterranean crossings firmly in the context of the EU’s neocolonial afterlife and transnational connections among former colonizers and the colonized.

The five chapters in the final section of this book, Part III: Alternative Languages and Visions of Futurity, examine cultural objects, archives, grammars, vocabularies, and technologies that challenge dominant frameworks of crisis by testing a variety of alternatives—new types of narratives, imaginative structures, and languages of critique, utopianism, and futurity. In their respective chapters, Megan MacDonald, Dimitris Papanikolaou, Geli Mademli, Jonas Bækgaard, and Maria Boletsi ask how, among other things, practices in filmmaking, visual art, public archives, interactive media technologies, street art, and literary stories are able to resist or subvert systems of power, and, moreover, how their languages of protest or poetics of resistance open up possibilities of thinking crisis otherwise or thinking beyond crisis. This section explores the production of alternative subjectivities and visions of futurity that are emerging from frameworks of crisis in the Mediterranean and beyond.

Part III opens with Chap. 10, “Algeria Time and Water Logic: Image, Archive, Mediterranean Futurity,” in which Megan MacDonald studies contemporary responses to Algeria’s interrelations with France. Works of art produced by visual artists moving between France and Algeria (Abidat, Sedira, Boudjelal, Mrabet, *The Blaze*), contemporary museum shows in France where Algeria is on the agenda (*Mucem*, *La Piscine*, *IMA-Tourcoing*), and language politics set to work in the Algerian protests in 2019, each deal with a complicated and painful past in their own specific way. Yet, MacDonald argues, these practices also offer alternative maritime and Mediterranean passages for the future, dislodge the logic of the migration boat, and allow us to rethink the place and nature of archives. Thinking the movement of boats, Mediterranean archives, and futurity through the logic of the wake, MacDonald envisages ways out of Mediterranean crisis-scapes.

The section continues with Chap. 11, “Greek Weird Wave; Or, On How to Do A Cinema of Biopolitics,” in which Dimitris Papanikolaou marks out a “Cinema of Biopolitics”—a cinema sensitive to forms of resistance, unease, and subversion that reflects on how systems of power manage groups of people as well as the bodies of individuals. In order to speak

about this undoubtedly broad trend in contemporary world cinema, this chapter turns to the example of the so-called Greek Weird Wave. Since 2008, the Greek films in question have been undermining a tradition of cinematic realism and seem to be proposing a new form of capitalist realism; a biopolitical realism. As Papanikolaou demonstrates, these films merge micro-stories of precarity, control, and resistance with subtle references to the macro-histories of exploitation, disinvestment, and revolt. Moreover, they turn their focus on the body, as both a disciplining and desiring machine, but also as a platform for a poetics of resistance.

Geli Mademli asks how new, critical subjectivities can be evoked in times of crisis through the complex nexus of humans, technologies, narratives, material and non-material actors, and, particularly, the process of filming external reality. Her Chap. 12, “Moving Images, Moving Archives: Fracturing the Crisis in Interactive Greek Documentaries,” studies the crisis of representation that the abundance of representations of crisis in Greece has produced. Mademli examines the potential of media technologies in challenging established discourses regarding the Greek political, social, and financial crisis by analyzing the diverse media methodologies, archival practices, and interactive modes of two documentary projects: *The Prism GR 2011* and *The Caravan Project*. Both projects, Mademli explains, aim to capture the onset and evolution of the economic recession in Greece and its impact on social life and everyday politics through micro-narratives of citizens living in the country’s periphery.

Jonas Bækgaard discusses another potential challenge to established ways of representing crisis. In Chap. 13, “Ice-as-Money and Dreams-as-Ice: Christos Ikonomou’s ‘The Blood of the Orange’ and the Critique of Liquidity,” he considers a short story by Ikonomou as such a challenge to dominant ways of understanding the financial crisis. Bækgaard situates the story in the context of contemporary critiques of financial capitalism and EU economic politics. Instead of interpreting the Athenian ice cube factory in the story as a site in/of crisis, he rather reads the melting ice cubes in the protagonist’s hands as a reflection on the grounds of critique of the neoliberal language of finance. Looking specifically at the financial notion of liquidity, Bækgaard explores how the act of melting ice cubes challenges liberal conceptions of the free-floating market and the dominant language of finance in a way that opens up possibilities to think otherwise.

In Chap. 14, “Rethinking Stasis and Utopianism: Empty Placards and Imaginative Boredom in the Greek Crisis-scape,” Maria Boletsi discusses different modalities for performing stasis and rethinking utopianism

against the backdrop of the Greek financial crisis and, generally, of conditions shaped within the totalizing order Mark Fisher has called “capitalist realism.” Boletsi probes the ways two works deal with the (im)possibility of resistance from within the neoliberal “now”: the story “Placard and Broomstick” (Ikonomou) and an Athenian wall writing that translates as “I am bored imaginatively.” The empty placard that takes center stage in Ikonomou’s story and the imaginative boredom registered on the walls of Athens test modalities of stasis against alienation, dispossession, and the contracting of the future by disengaging from conceptions of subjectivity that rest on the binary choice of a *passive* or *active* subject. The story stages the desire for alternative languages by registering a crisis of representation. The wall writing taps into the modality of the “middle voice” to reconfigure one of the symptoms of neoliberalism—boredom—into a potential resource for modes of being that carry glimpses of utopianism. Although both works stage the limited possibilities for resistance within a totalizing order, they also, just like many of the cases discussed in this final section, enable alternative configurations of subjectivity, agency, and futurity.

NOTES

1. Although migratory movement around the Mediterranean has historically been a common phenomenon, since 2015 such movements—particularly toward Europe—were dubbed a “crisis” and became world news following the forced migration of millions of people from Syria, but also Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sub-Saharan Africa, who have been fleeing their countries and trying to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean.
2. Koselleck’s account focuses primarily on German-speaking Europe, even though it includes various European contexts.
3. This applies to classical Greece, the Hellenistic era, and early Christian and Roman contexts.
4. For the mobilization of *crisis* as an instrument that contracts the space of political choice and promotes a politics of no alternatives, as outlined in this and the next paragraph, see also Boletsi (2018, 19–20).
5. Cf. Bryant (2016); Butler and Athanasiou (2013); De Cauwer (2018); Çelik (2015); Crosthwaite (2011); Dalakoglou and Agelopoulos (2018); Douzinas (2013); Fenske et al. (2013); Hamilakis (2018); Hess et al. (2016); Knight and Stewart (2016); Meissner (2017); Minnaard and Wienand (2019); New Keywords Collective (2016); Plantzos (2019); Roitman (2014); Tsilimpounidi (2018); Tziovas (2017); Valdivia et al. (2019); Vigh (2008); and many others.

6. For this debate, see the introduction and the essays included in *Critique and Postcritique* (2017), edited by Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski. See also Bruno Latour's influential article "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" (2004) that was partly responsible for triggering this debate.
7. *Critique* can refer to various and sometimes opposed approaches in literary and cultural studies. It includes traditions from critical theory as it emerged from the Frankfurt School to poststructuralist and deconstructive approaches, but also "both versions of New Critical close reading and New Historicist attacks on formalism's putatively apolitical aestheticism" (Michael 2017, 252).
8. As we mentioned before, *crisis* in the medical context referred to the "judgment ... about the course of the illness," i.e., the diagnosis—a meaning that in the seventeenth century was transferred from the medical to the political realm, i.e., to the "body politic" (Koselleck 2006, 360, 362).
9. These connotations of diagnosis and this version of the interpreter/patient relation carry the marks of the psychoanalytic tradition, which mediated between the clinical and the literary contexts (Anker and Felski 2017, 4).
10. The acronym PIGS stands for Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain and is derogatorily used to refer to the economic situation in these countries during the Eurozone debt crisis.
11. The term is used by Anna Carastathis in her article "Nesting Crises" (2018) in which she discusses the discursive nexus of Greece's socioeconomic crisis and the refugee situation in the country.
12. Bromberger also distinguishes a third model, popular mostly in anthropology, which sees the Mediterranean as a region comprising societies that present a "loose unity of family resemblances" and "underlying cultural complicities, beyond the fractures which separate them" (2007, 295–296).

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