

## Women in Times of Crisis: Rethinking the Extraordinary and the Everyday

Columbia University, Sciences Po (Paris), Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University

Alliance on-line conference, Friday, October 18, 2024

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been one of crisis, including the geopolitical shock of September 11, 2001, the global financial crisis (2007-2008), the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine (2022) and the new war in Israel and Gaza (2023). These events have come on top of disasters associated with climate change, and the anxieties stemming from populist political discourses. Such multiple, extraordinary phenomena have led to extraordinary policy responses, stretching governmental powers; they have altered distributions of resources, and disrupted the organization of everyday life. As they have hardened inequalities, crisis politics and policies have also exacerbated polarization and favored rising illiberalism.

In these contexts, women have often, though not always, been disadvantaged: the pandemic, for example, brought increased gender-based violence as well as excess burdens of care; climate change-related displacement has affected women and children disproportionately; war and conflict have – yet again – been marked by sexual violence and casualties among women as non-combatants; while illiberalism has been characterized by direct attacks on gender-related rights (regarding sexual and reproductive health, freedom of expression and mobilization in the public square).

Researchers and advocates have examined the impacts of these crises on gender relations, and, specifically, on the status of women in relation to the intersectional factors that determine their life chances. Such analyses explore specific situations (e.g., the pandemic or the war in Ukraine), uncovering the gender-differentiated effects of the policies and politics they have led to. The specific crises to which they refer provide a temporal/spatial frame – but the significance of ‘thinking through’ crisis as an episteme is rarely thematized. Turning points that alter pre-existing equilibria and which are located in specific series of events, that we denote as “crises,” are often framing devices whose implications remain unexamined.

Two sets of implications of these analyses need to be discussed. Substantively, this research often reveals how the effect of a particular crisis reflects underlying structural factors. The crisis, in other words, illuminates the everyday as much as the extraordinary. As such, looking at crises ought to allow us to re-examine our perspectives on social organization more broadly, and not simply at a particular moment: we can debate feminist theory by ‘thinking through’ the literature on crisis. Epistemologically, the literature of crisis invites a reflection on crisis as an episteme: as a way of making sense of the world that simultaneously highlights rupture in social life, and which justifies such rupture as driving political and policy responses. The “work” that “crisis” does is worth investigating per se. What does it mean for feminist scholarship as well as policy-making that we lurch from crisis to crisis? How useful is the notion of “crisis” really? What does it allow us to think, and what does it obscure?

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This on-line conference, co-organized by Columbia University, Sciences Po (Paris), and Paris 1 Sorbonne-University, seeks to bring together scholars in the Alliance network who have examined the impacts of recent crises on women to ask both what we have learned substantively about gender relations when policies are formulated in apparently extraordinary – and dire – contexts, and how our frames of reference have held up. In this rapid succession of critical moments, does the distinction

between the extraordinary and the everyday, or, to put it somewhat differently, between ordinary life and times of crisis, continue to make sense? In which contexts is the distinction relevant? The conference seeks, therefore, to address both the substantive and the epistemological lessons for the analysis of women's conditions of the recent past.

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Independent of the type of crisis, women seem disproportionately vulnerable. As a result, equity between women and men is under further pressure, in all regions of the world (including in high income countries), and women's economic, social and political participation is increasingly at risk.

Feminist scholars traditionally aim to understand the nature of gender inequalities in societies which are often at the intersection of income, country-of-origin, age and family status. This conference intends to bring together social scientists in the Alliance network who work on gender-specific topics related to crises such as:

- climate change
- the global pandemic
- economic downturn and/or economic change (linked to AI, for example)
- demographic shocks linked to migration, fertility and/or mortality
- war and conflict
- illiberalism and/or political radicalization

Besides assembling empirical work about the impact of crises on women across the world, the conference will allow a holistic theoretical framework of women in times of crisis to be formulated. By considering different crises not only as risks of pushback, but as potential turning points, we may discuss how different crises affect feminist thinking, what the constant risk of crisis implies for feminism today, and what work on women in crises has brought and can bring in terms of policy reactions, dangers and opportunities.

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The conference will take place on Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024, as an on-line webinar, between 2 pm CET/8 am EST and 8 pm CET/2 pm EST.

The conference is part of the Alliance Program, but external submissions are also welcome. It aims to produce scientific contributions to the field, as well as policy-briefs for government, public institutions and other actors. The conference will also help to link up researchers in view of creating a more or less formal network of persons working in the areas covered by the conference. The conference will eventually figure as kick-off meeting for work on a joint publication (not mandatory).

**Submission deadline: February 29, 2024.** Proposals for communications should be about 300 words long and include a short biography of authors (institution, position, main research and teaching activities). Communications should be sent to Angela Greulich ([angela.greulich@sciencespo.fr](mailto:angela.greulich@sciencespo.fr)) and Nicholas Sowels ([nicholas.sowels@univ-paris1.fr](mailto:nicholas.sowels@univ-paris1.fr)).

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