

HISTORY OF CRISIS I

Master and PhD course, Fall 2022

Schedule, readings and course plan

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Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, set design for Giovanni Pacini's opera L'ultimo giorno di Pompei, La Scala 1827.

History of Crisis I (7,5 credits)

Course content

In the early 2000s, global societies have been increasingly perceived and connected through the lens of crisis and crisis discourses, emerging from public debate, critical reflection and knowledge production on financial crises, the crisis of democracy, ecological crises and climate change, the global health crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the crisis of globalization itself. The notion of connected and extended crises in late modernity has also framed social understandings and movements, raising demands for political decisions and reforms, broader epistemic shifts and changing lifestyles. But what does it mean to understand society and the world through a perspective of crisis? What does it imply for our understanding of the past and the future? How is the concept of crisis used in different scientific contexts, and in relation to different types of emergencies? How did the understanding of the concept of crisis change over time and between different historical settings? What role did it play in the theory of history and different modes of historical explanations? And how can an advanced understanding of the history of crisis influence the way societies deal with crises today?

In this course, we address these issues through a series of lectures and case-oriented seminars with teachers who specialize on different aspects of the history of crisis. The course is designed to connect historical and contemporary perspectives as well as different research areas within the human, social and natural sciences. The course is open to advanced students at master's and doctoral level from all disciplinary backgrounds.

History of Crisis I focuses on historical perspectives and provides an introduction to the role of the concept of crisis in historical explanations and historical theory. It will give an orientation in the long history of disaster narratives and crisis management, shifting notions of natural, technical and social crises, and their reflection in politics, social theories and cultural critique. We will also discuss concepts of crisis and crisis narrative in the history of other sciences – for example ecology, medicine and economy – through a selection of historical and contemporary cases. History of Crisis II (Spring 2023) will deepen and develop thematic and scientifically integrative approaches to current and connected crises related to global warming, environmental crises, global health emergencies, and financial and political crises. It will especially highlight the temporalities of crisis, discussing the role of crises and disasters in past and present processes of temporalization and future making. Both courses deal with social, cultural and political theories of late modernity as an era increasingly defined by crisis as an interconnected and world-making phenomena.

Both courses can be read separately or as two coherent courses that offer gradual progression and specialization. The courses are given in English (unless only Scandinavian speaking students participate).

Course goals for History of Crisis I

After completing the course students should be able to

- account for the history of the concept of crisis and its role in the theory of history and historical explanation;

- demonstrate an ability to compare and analyze narratives of crisis in the context of different sciences and in relation to historically situated crises (for example in areas such as environment and climate change, economy and democracy, medicine and global health);
- critically reflect on how the understanding of crises and their historical, societal and global impact has changed over time.

Examination (History of Crisis I)

1) Mandatory and active participation in seminars is required; 2) an essay on the history of crisis of between 3500-5000 words using and expanding on the readings from at least two of the seminars and lectures. Preliminary ideas and essay abstracts are presented and discussed in a workshop on Monday, December 5, 13.00-16.00. Absence from a maximum of three seminars can be compensated by a written assignment (minimum 1000 words) discussing the readings for the seminar/lecture.

Schedule: History of Crisis I (module 2, half-time, 7.5 credits), Fall 2022

Week 44-45

Preparatory readings:

Reinhart Koselleck, "Crisis", transl. by Michaela W. Richter, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67:2 (2006), pp. 357-400.

Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* (Penguin Books, 2010).

Thursday, November 10, 10-12

Lecture (Anders Ekström)

History of crisis: Concepts, theories, politics, critique

Introductory lecture focusing on the history of, and relations between, the concept of crisis and neighbouring concepts, such as catastrophe, emergency, disaster, state of exception and risk society. We will also discuss historically contingent distinctions between natural and technical disasters, crises in society and nature, and theories of crises as unexpected events, interrelated and connected, and intrinsically inherent to late modern societies. The lecture will also survey the role of crises and catastrophes in historical thinking, which is typically exemplified by the difference between revolutionary and evolutionary understandings – or catastrophism and the *longue durée* – in theories of historical change. In the early 21st century, the critical importance of crisis as a temporal category permeates global politics, giving rise to numerous debates and research initiatives on creeping, slow, accelerating, connected and normalized crises in nature and society. We will survey these debates but also touch on the question of what the lens of crisis hide from view.

Readings:

See preparatory readings week 44-45.

Thursday, November 17, 10-12

Lecture (Jenny Andersson)

End of history, new beginnings: 1989 in historiography

In a previous generation of historical thought 1989 was regarded as a triumphatory event: the year marked the end of the Cold War, the final victories of democracy, the market economy, and new possibilities for individual self realization and mobility both East and West. The end of what Tony Judt called "Post War" was the dawn of a new era, marked more than anything by a new set of market oriented liberties and rights. As economies East and West were integrated into the capitalist economy, crises seemed a thing of the past, and stabilization was again thought as a functional process of integration. At the same time, and highlighted by a new generation of historical thinking, the liberalization of markets, and people, triggered a

new wave of instabilities and interdependencies between economic, political, social, ecological crises. The national sentiment that communism had repressed returned with a vengeance in Europe, oftentimes aimed at both old and new elites. Populism reiterated notions of people and nation thought eradicated from political history. Marketisation undid welfare statist structures that upheld unprecedented levels of quality of living and in its wake, some grew much richer and some grew much poorer. How can we think, through this literature, of 1989 as epochal shift and historiographic problem? How did 1989 change the temporality of the post war era? What were the future aspirations connected to thinking 1989 in history, and how did these transform in the decades after?

Readings:

Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989. The Struggle to Create Post Cold War Europe* (Princeton University press, 2009), 319 pp. (read in particular pp. 1-119).

Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, 16 (1989), pp. 3-18. Available through JSTOR.

Thursday, November 24, 10-12, 15-17

Seminar class (Jenny Andersson)

Life at the end of history

The seminar will discuss biography as history and discuss personal accounts of 1989 as a life changing or generational moment. In these accounts, freedoms are weighed against new constraints, future hope travels with nostalgia. Freedom also appears as a double edged notion, it is not easy to learn how to be free. How can we make sense of this? Does it have relevance for our own personal biographies and life experiences?

Readings:

Lea Ypi, *Free: Coming of Age at the End of History* (Allen Lane, 2021), 275 pp.

Thursday, December 1, 10-12, 15-17

Lecture/Seminar class (Anders Ekström)

Mediating disasters in space and time: Vesuvius, Johnstown, Fukushima

By focusing on three disasters in three different continents and eras, this combined lecture and seminar class will initially concentrate on issues of how disasters travels in narratives och images, and between different media frameworks and communication systems. The lecture takes a long view on information speeds and practices of remediation in the history of disasters, building on a rich variety of media historical research on the communication of crises and catastrophes. In the seminar, we will discuss how disaster imaginaries and media practices inform actions and protocols of crisis perception and management, focusing on examples from the early 21st century "war on terror" and contemporary nature emergencies. Comparing old and new media cultures, this session will also reflect on changing practices of

witnessing, and patterns of circulation of images of crisis, in the context of emerging global and digital news frames.

Readings:

Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 1-61.

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Penguin Books, 2003).

Craig Calhoun "The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order", *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, eds. Dider Fassin & Mariella Pandolfi (Zone Books, 2010), pp. 29-58.

Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc & Erica Kuligowski, "Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina", *Annals of the American Academy*, 604, 2006, pp. 57-81.

Monday, December 5, 13-16

Workshop (Anders Ekström & Jenny Andersson)

Presentations and discussions of student paper drafts and abstracts

Brief drafts or abstracts (maximum 500 words) should be uploaded to Studium no later than Thursday, December 1.

Thursday, December 8, 10-12, 15-17

Lecture (Jenny Andersson)

2008 – how crisis changes nothing?

The financial crisis in 2008 was, on the surface, the result of a speculative bubble on the American housing market. In actual fact, historians are today showing that the two decades of liberalization that began after 1989 unleashed wholly new intersystemic disturbances that, quite possibly, could mean the end of capitalism as we know it. Why then, does economic crises not leave to systems change? What kind of crisis was 2008, and how have political economies responded to it? Are economies ideological constructs where forms of knowledge, expertise, and structures of thought mediate what a systems crisis is, and how status quo can be restored? We consider especially the role played by expert knowledge in this process of ‘stabilizing the present’ – even when it seems an infinitely problematic one.

Readings:

Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (Verso, 2013), pp 1-39.

Helen Thompson, "We are Not in Kansas Anymore: Economic and Political Shocks". In: Hay, C., Hunt, T. (eds) *The Coming Crisis: Building a Sustainable Political Economy*: SPERI Research & Policy. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.) Will be made available.

Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World* (Allen Lane, 2018), pp. 1-141, 447-607.

Thursday, December 15, 10-12, 15-17

Seminar class (Anders Ekström)

Knowing and governing society through the lens of crisis

Discourses of crises are powerful tools in shaping the futures of global and local societies. In this seminar, we will discuss how certain modes of politics and critique are enabled and limited through the lens of crisis. Historical case studies show that actions and non-actions in emergencies often give rise to long-term changes in the shape of institutions and political concepts. As a particular form of governing, crisis management became increasingly powerful in the 20th and early 21st centuries, which was also reflected in critical interventions on the question of the increasing pervasiveness of crises in late modernity. We will discuss key contributions to this debate, spanning from the sociologist Ulrich Beck's work on 'risk society' to political theorist Giorgio Agamben's theorization of the 'state of exception'.

Readings:

Adi Ophir, "The Politics of Catastrophization: Emergency and Exception", *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, eds. Dider Fassin & Mariella Pandolfi (Zone Books, 2010), 59-88.

Minami Orihara & Gregory Clancey, "The Nature of Emergency: The Great Kanto Earthquake and the Crisis of Reason in Late Imperial Japan", *Science in Context*, 25:1, 2012): 103-126.

Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards A New Modernity* (1986; Sage, 1992), introduction (by Lash and Wynne) and preface (c. 15 pp).

Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, eng. övers. Kevin Attell (University of Chicago Press, 2005), chapter 1 (30 pp).

Thursday, January 5th, 10-12, 15-17

Seminar class (Ylva Söderfeldt)

Corona histories – historiography of an ongoing crisis

As the COVID-19 pandemic grew into a global crisis, journalists, researchers, politicians, and the general public turned an unmatched attention to past epidemics in search of a better understanding of the unsettling and unprecedented course of events. Soon, a steady stream of popular science and academic literature appeared that sought to explain both biological and political dynamics from a historical perspective, and often used historical

examples as ammunition in the debate on mitigation and containment strategies. In the seminar, we will read and discuss two of the very first attempts at writing 'corona histories', and compare them to the historiography of epidemics before COVID-19.

Snowden's book will be our starting point for orientation in the pre-corona historiography of epidemic disease. I recommend that you focus on chapters 1, 3, 6-7, 13 and 19-22. Christakis and de Waal then present an exercise in selective reading: you are expected to use what you learned from Snowden and the previous readings in the course to develop reading strategies for these books. The purpose of your strategy should be to enable you to discuss how the authors use historical arguments and examples, which events and contexts are emphasised and which are left out. This will enable reflection on how a crisis can affect the interpretation of previous historical events, and on what historical background is relevant for understanding the present.

Readings:

[Frank Snowden, *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*. Yale University Press, 2019 \(especially ch. 1, 3, 6-7, 13 and 19-22\).](#)

Nicholas A. Christakis, *Apollo's Arrow: The Profound and Enduring Impact of Coronavirus on the Way We Live* Little, Brown Spark/Hachette Book Group New York, 2020.

Alex de Waal *New Pandemics, Old Politics: Two Hundred Years of War on Disease and Its Alternatives* Cambridge/Medford, MA Polity Press 2021.

Thursday, January 12, 10-12, 15-17

Seminar class (Julia Nordblad)

Historicizing the species crisis

In the last decades, climate change has become the dominating environmental issue in public debate, activism, and international environmental cooperation. But in its shadow increasing attention is paid to another global environmental trend, namely the loss of biodiversity. Although this issue receives less attention than climate change, the last decade has seen the construction of a new international institutional infrastructure dedicated to the loss of species, with the establishment of international treaties and an intergovernmental scientific panel (IPBES, founded in 2012) that regularly issues synthesizing scientific reports. In later years, loss of biodiversity has become popularized as the Sixth Extinction, a concept that places the present in a series of dramatic species loss episodes in the history of the Earth. But the issue has a longer history in the public arena. In 1986 a group of biologists in the US organized a public conference, the National Forum on Biodiversity, to draw attention to the acute problem of species extinction, especially in tropical forests. For this purpose, they invented the term *biodiversity*. The effort to make tropical deforestation a public issue in the global North also met with severe critique, most prominently from Indian historian Ramachandra Guha. But the accelerating destruction of tropical forests was also of deep concern to people in the countries where it occurred. In the 1980s, the Brazilian union leader Chico Mendes organized and led a successful movement against deforestation in the Amazon until he was assassinated by local ranchers in 1988.

This seminar explores the species crisis as a public issue in the 1980s, with a special focus on the aspect of global inequality as a problem tightly intertwined with biodiversity loss. We discuss texts from different corners of the 1980s biodiversity movement (and one text by a contemporary historian). These texts can be read as historical source material from a pivotal moment in the history of the species crisis as a global issue. Students are asked to consider for example the following questions: In what way was biodiversity loss described as a crisis by the different actors? What was seen as its causes, and its cure? What, ultimately, was regarded as being in crisis?

Biodiversity (proceedings from the 1986 National Forum of Biodiversity)

Chapter: 1, 2, 8, 15.

<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/989/biodiversity>

Biodiversity (teleconference from the 1986 National Forum of Biodiversity)

<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/989/biodiversity>

[click on the video on the right]

Ramachandra Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique”, *Environmental Ethics* 11:1, 1989.

<https://go.exlibris.link/gn1B4qF0>

Chico Mendes, *Fight for the Forest*, Latin America Bureau, 1989.

[<http://www.uky.edu/~tmute2/GEI-Web/password-protect/GEI-readings/chico-mendes-fight-for-the-forest-chico-mendes-in-his-own-words-1.pdf>]

Megan Raby, *American Tropics: The Caribbean Roots of Biodiversity Science*, 2017, “Introduction”.

[will be available through UUB]

Suggested extra reading: Revkin, *The Burning Season*, Island Press, 2004.

[ebook available via UUB: <https://go.exlibris.link/dHHDWjQT>]