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Introduction

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Introduction

Editorial team

This first issue of the Leiden Elective Academic Periodical (LEAP) focuses on the topic of crisis. At its core, crisis signifies a condition, a situation, or a period of pending change. The denotations of “crisis” are, however, multifold. The term can mean a variety of things, such as “choice, decision, the power to distinguish or separate”, but also “judgment, critique, or diagnosis.”¹ Crisis holds the potential to challenge the demarcations of eras, cultures, and societies, and to disrupt the established order of a society. But such change is never guaranteed, as crisis “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.”² The outcome of crisis, in short, remains unpredictable.

In this issue, we are especially interested in how moments of crisis trigger or even demand critical reflection and interrogation. Rodrigo Cordero summarizes this in the idea that crisis “places us in relation to the limits of the frameworks that sustain our forms of life and, therefore, in relation to a world that is not immune to questioning.”³ Crisis, in that sense, also acts as a sign of “the irremediable fragility that inhabits the foundations of social life,”⁴ a fragility that becomes painfully clear in a time of COVID-19, global warming and forced displacements across the globe.

Digital technology and global interconnectivity have increased not only the visibility of crises, but also the proliferation of the term “crisis”, which media cultures now tend to overuse.⁵ This explosion of the term presents a danger, as the rhetoric of crisis is never neutral

¹ Boletsi, Houwen and Minnaard, *Languages of Resistance*, 2-3.

² *Ibid.*

³ Cordero, *Crisis and Critique*, 1.

⁴ *Id.*, 2.

⁵ Masco, “The Crisis in Crisis,” 65.

and “favours clear-cut distinctions between perpetrators and victims, between those who are guilty and those who are innocent.”⁶ Many cultural productions and academic studies call awareness to the ideological implications of how “crisis” is used and which mechanisms of in- and exclusions this use entails. In this first issue of LEAP, we seek to contribute to this discussion, by critically reflecting on various manifestations and representations of crisis. Through a variety of case studies, we situate specific crises within larger political, ideological and cultural constellations.

This first issue is divided into two sections. The articles in the first section, “Community in times of crisis,” explore important political questions of community belonging and community preservation. In the first contribution, Arijana Šimunović analyzes the Central American refugee crisis and its representations in media and literature. She traces how the US-based Latin American writer Valeria Luiselli provides a counter-perspective to official representations of the so-called “Central American migration crisis.” Matthew Luck continues this focus on how crisis manifests for specific migrant groups. His article homes in on the key role of legislative language in the uncertain status and rights of both the Windrush generation, and EU citizens after Brexit. Luck argues that a reoccurring crisis has developed for transnational citizens in the United Kingdom.

In her study of the digital presence of Dutch mosques in response to COVID-19 restrictions, Sophia Mons subsequently examines the online initiatives of Centrum de Middenweg in Rotterdam and how these create a virtual religious communal life. Analyzing the internet as a social space of communication, she argues that the traditional Islamic institutions of the mosque proves resilient and adaptable to unexpected circumstances. The first section concludes with a review by Lotte van den Bosch of Viktor Pelevin’s novel *The Clay Machine-Gun* (1996; translated 2000). Van den Bosch discusses the ways in which this postmodern novel plays with the axes of time and space to reflect on the uncertainty experienced by a community in transition from socialism to postsocialism.

⁶ Boletsi, “Towards a Visual Middle Voice,” 23.

The contributions in the second section, “(Im)materialities: engaging with crisis,” discuss different ways in which material and immaterial objects relate to crisis. Gabriël de Klerk, firstly, examines the imperial ideology that materializes on the coinage of Emperor Galba during the crisis of the “Year of the Four Emperors” in 68/69 A.D. Investigating the coin-types that were minted during Galba’s reign, De Klerk analyzes how the imperial administration employed coinage as a political medium. The following article by Chiara Juriatti investigates the motif of permanent ice in contemporary art installations that refer to the climate crisis in the glacial regions. Through the sensual engagement of the human body, Juriatti argues, the artworks make the implications of climate change tangible.

Didi Spaans, in the next contribution, highlights the role of algorithms in the anti-vaccination movement that emerged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She delves into the question of how YouTube algorithms influence the political and social understanding of vaccines. Next, Frank van den Boom explores in what manner Ovid’s epic *Metamorphoses* (8 A.D.) is able to contribute to a viable frame of mind in times of the contemporary ecological crisis. The corporeal transformations in Ovid, Van den Boom argues, reflect philosophically on the unpredictability of the future. Kaspar Hendrichs, finally, reviews Agustina Bazterrica’s novel *Tender is the Flesh* (2017; translated 2020), zooming in on how the theme of cannibalism simulates the power-relations between the eater and the eaten in consumer society. In this way, Hendrichs discusses, the novel constructs a critique of the savage fundamentals of late capitalism.

In different but complementary ways, the contributions to this first issue of LEAP shed light on the various manifestations and cultural representations of crisis. Writing in the spring of 2021, with COVID-19, the precarious situation of refugees, and climate change on our minds, we start from the belief that crisis necessitates critical reflection.

The 2021 editorial team of LEAP consists of: Frank van den Boom, Lotte van den Bosch, Kaspar Hendrichs, Gabriël de Klerk, Chiara Juriatti, Matthew Luck, Sophia Mons, Arijana Šimunović and Didi Spaans.

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