Section 1 - Social Movements

Toward a Theory of Climate Praxis: Confronting Climate Change in a World of Struggle

David Bond and Daniel Aldana Cohen

Climate changes everything, but nothing is only climate change. Drawing on fieldwork in Alaska, the Gulf of Mexico, New York, and São Paulo, we describe how social movements and policy elites grapple with the disruptions of climate change. In the aftermath of climate-linked disasters both slow- and fast-moving — respectively, coastal erosion, an oil spill, a hurricane, drought — we ask how people in the world confront the climate crisis. We distinguish between two moments of critical positioning: locating climate change in reference to historical struggle, and using climate change to construct visions for the future. In each case, we find struggles between two broad camps: social movements whose primary concern is ending oppressive inequalities and safeguarding everyday life; and, elites with a variety of projects, all of which seem to defer social justice until their particular economic or environmental project is complete. We find not one climate crisis, but many competing climate crises. Overall, we find that political struggle plays an outsize role in shaping the ways that social movements and policy elites engage in climate change politics. Only by understanding broader contexts of political struggle can we make sense of the specific ways that these groups interweave rising climate concerns with their longstanding entanglements with social structures, cultural frameworks, institutional arrangements. We name this politically charged practical nexus “climate praxis,” even while insisting it is never about climate alone.

Crisis, Critique and Migrant Political Agency in the ‘Summer of Migration’

Robin Celikates

Some speak of ‘the refugee crisis,’ others of ‘the summer of migration’ – in both frames, the sudden and significant increase in the numbers of migrants and refugees arriving at the borders of the EU in the summer of 2015 constitutes a break, a moment either of crisis or of a critical opening. Both discourses – despite their contrasting diagnosis and political positioning – rarely pay any attention to the perspectives and practices of migrants themselves. This is all the more surprising as it was precisely migrant perspectives and practices that politicized the question of borders, at
least temporarily broke down the dualistic grid of securitization and humanitarianism, and manifested both the political and epistemic agency of those usually stripped of any agency. In my contribution I will focus on migrant and refugee activism – and more specifically the ‘migrant caravan’ leading to the US-Mexican border and the ‘march of refugees’ from Budapest to the German-Austrian border – to illuminate how ‘street politics’ can not only be seen as response to, but an active ‘agent’ in producing crises as well as (critical, emancipatory) knowledge about them. Highlighting the production of knowledge about crises – in this case: crises at the border and, more generally, the border regime itself as a permanent crisis – within political movements ordinarily seen as responses to pre-existing crises will focus on an aspect undertheorized in the rich literature on migrant and refugee political agency.

**Undoing the Market: Contesting the Economic Rule of Law**

**Rodrigo Cordero**

This chapter explores critical social responses to contemporary crises of marketization. Taking as a case the student movement for free public education in Chile (2011-2016), the chapter studies the ways in which the movement places and engages with the central question of how to *disembodied* the educational system, and society more broadly, from markets. The inquiry focuses, more specifically, on the students’s contestation of what may be called “the economic rule of law”: namely, the naturalized and hegemonic assumption that legal regulations must be economic in the sense of being restricted and modeled upon economic rationality. To develop this analysis, the chapter first reconstructs and historicizes the significance of law in the student’s diagnosis of the crisis of marketization. Then, it explores the various ways in which the public contestation of market laws leads to a re-signification of the political meanings of law (Parliamentary Committees and Constitutional Court). Drawing on such analysis, the chapter discusses one of the most salient but less discussed aspects that emerges out of this critical response to crisis: a reconsideration of the political imagination of law.

**Rowena He**

This paper will use China’s 1989 Tiananmen Movement as a case study, drawing on extensive primary source materials, to illustrate the challenges people face when they seek to intervene, to report, to document, and to study crises in a society where critiques are forbidden and critics are
punished. The dominant notion of Crisis and Critique was developed in western democracies to explain western political and social discourse in societies where social criticism is a way of coping with and understanding crises and creating conditions for social improvement. But in China, persons who seek to offer such ameliorative and constructive social criticism themselves often become victims during the next wave of social crisis. In the Tiananmen case, both domestic and foreign critics who responded to the crisis, became *actors* in the aftermath of crisis, simultaneously social critics as well as political victims who were demonized, marginalized, and criminalized by those in power.

**1919 Britain: Capitalism Contested**

*Clara Elisabetta Mattei*

This chapter intends to revive, 100 years later, the most acute crisis in the history of capitalism. After WWI the system was in crisis because its core drive - production for profit- and its pillars of private property, wage relations and money were contested, and this contestation found expression in widespread practices towards alternative structures and values that were emerging within the working classes. The first part explores the conditions that produced such crisis, especially the intervention of the State within the economy. The second part is devoted to investigating the movement for workers’ control of industry that reached its climax in 1919. Worker control meant the substitution of the capitalist industrial system by a new industrial order where associations of workers would control their industry, either partially or completely. In this sense, capitalist exploitation would be overcome in favor of an industrial organization, based on human freedom and public service and production for use instead of profit. I focus on three cases (the metal workers, the miners and the building guilds) exemplifying the wide scope of praxis: from unofficial revolutionary workers committees that stood for an anti-parliamentary ideology to a union campaign that successfully pierced the British establishment all the way to the effective operation of building guilds producing for need instead of profit within the capitalist market.

**The “Yellow Vests”, Critical Actors**

*Sophie Wahnich*

The movement of the yellow vests has been much commented on, but the actors themselves have invented gestures that bear in themselves a critical dimension: to wear a yellow vest as symbolic
manifesto of the relationships of danger, of visibility and invisibility but also of singular unity; interrupt the flow, occupy spaces, manifest without administrative authorization. They also produced objects, huts of all kinds on round-about, statements on their vests, songs that circulated in the form of clips, texts that were sometimes carefully edited. Acts of Criticism are undeniable. They were almost simultaneously associated with a critical reflexivity in which the aim was to analyze the strategy to be adopted in view of claims that have gradually become more refined and complex. This reflexive criticism has changed the demands and the political consciousness of the actors. They believed in democracy and believed that they were heard and even listened to as a sovereign people and they discovered that their voice was not carrying, that it was stifled and disqualified, that their bodies were repressed and assaulted outside any ordinary democratic rules. Then the movement of criticism accompanied the movement itself and its discoveries and disappointments. Historical knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge gives themselves points of support and references, French revolution became their allegory.

Social Movements and Social Criticism
Michael Walzer
My essay will examine two kinds of social movements—those whose protagonists act in their own behalf, for themselves; they are their own cause; and those whose protagonists act in solidarity with others or for some distant cause. What social theories inspire or guide these movements? What sorts of social criticism do they produce? Who speaks for the movement? What is the relative standing of the militants and the ordinary participants? I will focus on mid-twentieth century social movements in the United States: the union campaigns of the 1930s, the civil rights movement and the anti-war politics of the 1960s; and (if I have the courage) feminist organizing and theorizing in the 1970s. I will argue that there are significant differences between men and women who act for themselves and for others. The differences appear most clearly in the role of theory and critique and of militants and ordinary participants in the two kinds of movements.
Section 2 - Alternative Responses

Love Trumps Hate: Community Caretaking in the Shadow of the Border Wall
Denise Brennan

This chapter focuses on community caretaking in undocumented communities as a strategy of resistance to racialized surveillance and criminalization. Drawing from ethnographic field research in U.S. southern and northern border communities inside the “100-mile border zone” (an enhanced immigration enforcement zone), as well as from migrant communities deep in the U.S. interior, this chapter showcases how members of migrant communities counter policing with strategic "rights work," improvisations, and kindness. Whether hosting parents preparedness workshops in living rooms in the Rio Grande Valley, dispensing legal advice at a weekly immigration clinic at a Tucson high school, or simply posting photos of early morning ICE raids on Facebook, undocumented individuals forge community infrastructure through networks of support and knowledge. The power of giving and loving, much like the "love-politics" that Jennifer C. Nash has described as undergirding black feminism, fuels an intergenerational undocumented activism. These activists reference the notion of "resilience" to explain how people are able to tend to the banal tasks of everyday life in the context of constant threat. Solidarity practices and "love politics" are no match, however, to brutal policing, detention and deportation policies. People's resilience is constantly being tested. This chapter explores this breaking point -- the tension between active solidarity practices of community building and the constant setbacks and struggles individuals face in the current deportation regime.

Abstention as the New Boundaries of Politics?
Anne-Claire Defossez

Electoral abstention is not a new phenomenon in France. However, its strong rise since the late 90s, with no election level spared, led commentators to speak of a “democratic crisis”, and even “the end of democracy”. Given the extent of abstention (during the last French legislative election in 2017, more than one elector out of two did not go to the voting booth), some have gone as far as to refer to abstention as “France’s first party”. Yet, surveys on relations with politics show that, on the one hand, French citizens remain attached to the electoral process and to democratic values, but that they are very critical towards politicians in general. On the other hand, only a minority of
citizens never vote: even if abstention rates are growing among all social groups, the distribution of abstainers, whether intermittent or regular, is socially, generationally and territorially very marked. This chapter, based on municipal and political archives and on interviews with activists and local politicians, questions the founding principles of representative democracy as they are inscribed and expressed in the popular city of Aubervilliers, in the banlieue of Paris, over the course of seventy years between 1945 and 2017, with particular attention to the evolution of electoral participation and the social composition of the municipal councils throughout the years. Electoral abstention is perhaps just a magnifying glass revealing and highlighting the growing inequalities among social groups and territories and the confiscation, by French elites, of all the apparatus of decision and power.

The Emergence of a Moral Economy: Colonial and Anti-Colonial Practice in Northern Namibia, 1948-1978
Gregor Dobler

In the late 1940s, more and more people in Northern Namibia interpreted everyday experiences of exclusion and discrimination as elements of a systematic crisis caused by South African colonialism. If this interpretation seems self-evident in retrospect, it came as new to many of the people concerned. Using three case studies, I trace the emergence of this new diagnosis and discuss its consequences. By jointly discussing instances of discrimination, people turned everyday experiences into sites of political interpretation. They made implicit moral evaluations explicit and opened them up to comparison. Comparison enabled them to de-individualize experiences, to interpret them as collective and systematic, and to link them to available discourses and moral judgments. Seemingly anecdotic experiences were made socially relevant, politicized, and interpreted as symptoms of a more general crisis. This process, I argue, created more than just a new interpretation. The crisis of colonialism led to a social process of critique which simultaneously became a process of social integration. It allowed people to renegotiate their moral values, their social relations and their political subjectivities. Crisis, through critique, became socially formative.
Are Conspiracy Theories Critical Responses to Crises?

Didier Fassin

Conspiracy theories have flourished across the world in the modern era. Not that they did not exist in earlier periods, but the notion that emancipation from religion and superstition promised by the Enlightenment would prevent them has definitely fizzled out. Whereas their multiple scenarios share a common structure, they present different modes of formation, notably depending on whether they are created purposely to discredit individuals and groups or developed in a more uncertain and diffuse manner. But in both cases, what is remarkable is that they are embraced by many, which leads to wonder about the general meaning of such a broad adoption of a paranoid apprehension of the world. Indeed, conspiracy theories can be regarded as signaling the existence of a dual crisis: crisis of authority (distrust towards those in power) and crisis of veridiction (distrust towards their official truth). At the same time, they can be viewed as a response to the crisis: the production of an alternative truth and the regaining of a certain counter-power. This is what I will try to demonstrate in the case of what has been one of the most important conspiracy theories of recent decades: that surrounding the AIDS epidemic in South Africa. This case study thus shows 1) that conspiracy theories must be taken seriously rather than merely derided or deemed irrational; 2) that they can be seen as critical modes of responding to critical situations in the sense that they propose an heterodox critique of the official version of facts; 3) that they may have a productive function as they unveil complex and troubling relationships between power and truth as well as ambiguous and perplexing forms of political consciousness through what can be called cognitive resistance.

“The Moral Underground”. How Are Working-People Coping With the New Capitalist Economy?

Axel Honneth

In my contribution I will attempt to find out how today’s working people in Western capitalist countries react to and cope with the new working-conditions often characterized as “neoliberal” (erosion of the welfare regulations, loosening of conditions of dismissal, creation of ever more informal, precarious and poorly remunerated employment relations). Based on empirical studies on worker’s reactions to these new conditions in three countries (France, Germany, USA), it will be analyzed in form of a moral sociology what kind of evaluative criteria ordinary people are
applying when asked to judge today’s world of labor and what they individually or collectively do in order to deal with its threats to life and living. Practices like repeated and mutually agreed upon absenteeism, the establishment of networks of mutual support, and collective calculations of exploiting the (ruined) welfare-system will be studied in order to find out whether they represent instances of an alternative “moral economy” or unavoidable strategies for pure material survival – or whether both are inseparable.

No Exit: Social Sciences as Critical Refuge in a Time of Crisis

Munira Khayyat

This chapter explores the flourishing of critical forms of knowledge in times of crisis. Specifically, it looks at the burgeoning of the social sciences in Egypt in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, as the counter-revolution and violent forces of repression tightened their grip on the possibilities of the political. During this time – the time I have been teaching anthropology at the American University in Cairo – the social sciences have emerged as something akin to a critical refuge and a haven for those dispersed, dispossessed, silenced by political violence and repression. The urgency and importance of the social sciences – anthropology in particular – as an alternate space, somewhat protected from intrusive state forces, as the vise continuously tightened around what can be said and done, became apparent in the years since I moved to Egypt. I arrived in Cairo on the day of the Raba’a massacre – an event that one could point to as the day the 2011 Revolution died. Many youth whose worlds were unmoored in different ways by the events extending from the return to political prominence of the military-backed regime and its violent dispersal of opposition and consolidation of power, were searching for ways to understand what they had experienced, to express what they thought in the aftermath of these cataclysmic, existential events. Those whose ideologies and convictions, political communities, families and bodies were broken by the cascading events sought to find new ways of re-collecting themselves, imagining other possible worlds and possibly carrying on. Religion-based opposition movements were under siege, emancipatory youth-led activism was under attack, and it looked like there was no exit. The social sciences – in university classrooms, civil-society gatherings, salons etc. – provided a protective space of relative safety and freedom to do this, and in bringing together people with burning existential questions, organically emerged in this time as a place of possibility, a conversation, a centerless collective. It has been remarkable to both witness and participate in this. Classes at the
American University in Cairo, where I teach, such as courses on violence, on gender, on power, the state, labor and class, the youth, address visceral and urgent questions posed by those who feel themselves trapped in a hopeless situation. The theories, ethnographies and methodologies we encounter are never merely intellectually interesting – they give words to the unspoken, shape to the unimaginable. Our classrooms and collectives are seen as spaces of safety where boundaries can be tested and even transgressed without judgement and danger. Such modes of learning/teaching have not only taken place in formal spaces of learning: off the institutional beaten path, aggregations of social scientists (such as the Cairo Institute of the Liberal Arts and Sciences and others) and students have come together to continue to read and debate and formulate understanding around pressing questions and concerns. In the political darkness of Egypt today, the social sciences have emerged as a possible way (for now) to engage with politics in a treacherous political time. This though can always change. Nothing can be taken for granted. In this chapter, I will reflect on the role of social scientists and of the social sciences (as well as neighboring humanities disciplines such as history and literature) in times of crisis by drawing on my experiences teaching in Cairo since 2013. Drawing on my personal experiences in Cairo since then, and upon conversations and interviews with scholars and students who comprise this political alter-space of knowledge production here, I will ethnographically document the intellectual underside of political hopelessness in the post-revolutionary social sciences resurgence in Cairo since the (end of the) revolution.

**Helping Refugees in Rural Germany**

**Greta Wagner**

When in 2015 many refugees arrived in Germany thousands of ordinary citizens got engaged in refugee support for the first time. In large part they are not from urban activist or student circles like refugee supporters in previous decades, but they have a rural and middleclass background, many of them are retired. Especially in rural Germany, people did not get involved based on their universal moral or political convictions, but because refugees were settled in their communities and they saw a need to help them integrate. But how do volunteers in small villages understand the crises that refugees flee from and how do they relate to these crises biographically? I am going to reconstruct volunteers’ images of conflicts and global inequalities that shape their engagement in supporting refugees. Volunteers tend to see their help as acts of charity, often shaped by their
Christian beliefs. But while they usually do not reflect on Germany’s implication into the causes of poverty and conflict that people flee, many volunteers relate to refugees biographically. In many family histories of people helping refugees today, experiences of flight and displacement abound. This makes volunteers identify with refugees. They draw parallels to their or their parents’ feelings of helplessness and dependency after 1945 and want to reciprocate the help they received.

**Section 3 - Intellectual Interventions**

**Space, Time, and the Moral Economy of White Nationalism**
Hector Amaya

In this article I use data from the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville and the more recent massacre of Christchurch, NZ to analyze white nationalist protestation. The former gives me a grounded sense of what white nationalists protestation looks, feels, emotes, and reasons. The latter provides me with an opportunity to use an event that I kept track on 4chan, the notorious imageboard that serve as meeting place of white nationalists globally. My approach to white nationalism is indebted to the work EP Thompson on moral economy. I am particularly interested on how moral economy helps us understand white nationalism as protestation and the contemporary need to expand our understandings of moral economy so that we can account for the changing spatial infrastructure of belief and traditional rights. I argue that new media technologies such as the have transformed the manner in which belief and rights are constituted and this transformation has the capacity to alter the foundations of protestation. I will show that a vacillation between digital and conventional materiality at the heart of contemporary life invigorates radicalized moral claims at the heart of nativism and xenophobia and engenders perplexing displays of ethnic and nationalistic hate that often rely on different understandings of time and space.

**Democracy, Evicted: Urban Redevelopment, Cultural Activism, and the Question of Violence in Contemporary South Korea**
Hae Yeon Choo

On January 20, 2009, a commercial building in Yongsan, a central district of Seoul, South Korea, erupted into flames during a police crackdown on the tenants-turned-evictees’ militant protest
against the urban redevelopment of the neighbourhood. During the fire, five protesters and one police officer died. The Yongsan disaster (Yongsan chamsa), as it is commonly referred to in South Korea, has become a focal point of mobilization in South Korean civil society on the issues of state violence, control over urban space, and the state of democracy. In this chapter, I analyze three documentaries on the Yongsan disaster produced by independent filmmakers who are cultural activists involved in the Yongsan activism, and their critique on the question of state violence.

The first documentary, *My Sweet Home* (2010), closely followed the evictee activists who were charged for the manslaughter of the police officer during the court trial, offering a critique of the criminal justice system and the rule of law. The second documentary, *Two Doors* (2012), focuses on structural violence by closely examining the experiences of the SWAT team members who were deployed in the police raids as direct agents of the state, complicating the narrative on state violence based on a simple victim/perpetrator binary. The last documentary, *The Remnants* (2018), follows the lives of five evictee protesters of the Yongsan disaster after their imprisonment, showing their conflicting memories, loss, and tensions among themselves; their bodies and lives become the site where state violence continues and reverberates beyond the spectacle of fire as a form of slow violence. In this chapter, I will situate these independent filmmakers and their documentaries within larger cultural and social activism in South Korea on the Yongsan disaster and beyond, and illuminate the critique they provide as well as their strategies for mobilization for reclaiming democracy and urban space.

**Peace, or, the Moral Economy of War: Du Bois, Nkrumah, Gandhi, and Qutb**

*Murad Idris*

This paper lays out how four anti-colonial intellectuals—Du Bois, Nkrumah, Gandhi, and Qutb—acknowledge the eroded boundary between war and peace. They write from marginal critical positions and different twentieth-century geographic contexts linked by empire. They are bound to political movements as different as the Peace Information Center in the US and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Their writings on war and peace shift the focus away from peace simply as the opposite, aim, or outcome of war toward the crisis of the boundary between them. They do so in overlapping but distinct ways: Du Bois highlights how the *structure* of world peace is predicated on war; Nkrumah that the *technologies* of peacemaking maintain war; Gandhi that the *rhetoric* of peace by the powerful is hypocritical; and Qutb that the *subjectivity* of the peace-lover authorizes
violence. These four theorizations, I argue, anticipate recent arguments about the erosion of the boundary. When brought together, the four critiques illuminate that the moral economy of peace is embedded in a political economy of war. Each of the four thinkers championed an alternative constellation of peace: anti-war internationalist, decolonized, mass non-violent, or Islamic. Perhaps they located real alternatives; or perhaps their critiques are incomplete, the rhetoric of peace too useful, the desire for it too formidable.

**Critique and Crisis in the Language of Latin American Development. Social Science during the Second Half of the Twentieth Century**

Aldo Marchesi

Through the notion of crisis Latin American social scientists were able to have a privileged place of enunciation in the public debate during the second half of twenty century. As a modernized community with new methods and vocabularies (mainly provided by sociologists, who had a central role in the modernization of social sciences during the fifties and sixties) social scientists established a rupture with previous intellectual traditions. They played a crucial role in the redesign of the traditional debate about the viability of the American new Republics with the language of development and the ways in which Latin America countries could achieve it. In this new language, Crisis (mainly identified with its socio and economic dimensions) was the antonym of Development. And the ways to solve crisis were the methods provided by social scientists that could open possibilities for development. Although social scientists had common features that defined their broad framework, there were serious disputes around the meanings of the notions of crisis and development. These disputes showed how the place of expertise was not univocal and it varied trough different historical moments from the fifties to now. By tracing the work of Juan Pablo Terra, a renowned Uruguayan sociologist and a Democratic Christian politician in two Uruguayan crisis (1955 and 1982), I will show the ways in which the relationship between crisis and critique worked in two particular historical moments of the history of Developmentalism in Latin America: the sixties radicalization, and the democratic transition of the eighties.

**Poetics as Critique: Notes from Manus Island Prison**

Anne McNevin
In October and November 2017, over 600 refugees staged a protest on Manus Island, in Papua New Guinea, refusing to leave what they described as a prison in which they had been incarcerated without trial for as many as four and a half years, as part of Australia’s offshore detention regime. This chapter engages protest actions by refugees on Manus in order to foreground forms of critique made by those directly affected by punitive border policing. The chapter draws in particular on the writings of Kurdish-Iranian journalist and refugee, Behrouz Boochani, whose book, No Friend But the Mountains, was written on Manus Island via thousands of whatsapp message installments sent in secret to his translator in Sydney. Much more than a first-hand account of refugee experience, Boochani’s work is a systemic critique of prison life on Manus and its conditions of possibility. This chapter reflects on three dimensions of Boochani’s critique: material, colonial and epistemic. The poetic form of his writing illuminates more precisely the prison’s material violence, its connection to enduring colonial relations, and its obfuscation and rationalization via bureaucratic language conventions. I argue that Boochani’s critique has implications well beyond Manus Island and Australia. It compels an interrogation of the histories of settler/colonial states as to whether and how they condition the specific forms of incarceration multiplying in the present.

“My thoughts are murder to the State”: Crisis and Critique in Thoreau and Coates

Dieter Thomä

I aim at comparing two critics in times of crises: Henry David Thoreau and Ta-Nehisi Coates. Thoreau and Coates have a topic in common: slavery and its consequences. Coates’ mode of critique is surprisingly close to Thoreau’s. Both deal with social and political problems externally and internally: in the society at large and on the level of individual mindsets, including their own. They feel tacit self-limitations and preoccupations, experiment with modes of liberation, interaction, and cooperation. This self-concern comes to the fore in the fact that they use the first-person perspective in most of their writings. They act as concerned or participating observers and insist on their particular vantage point. The comparison between Thoreau and Coates gains an additional twist as both excel in different genres. Thoreau is the author of “Walden,” “Civil Disobedience,” and “Slavery in Massachusetts.” Coates is not only the author of “Between the World and Me” and “We Were Eight Years In Power,” but also of numerous episodes of the “Black
Panther” graphic novel series. Thoreau and Coates will be situated within the frameworks established by theories of liberation, violence, subalternity, marginality, and social habit.