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

Summary of presentations given at the online conference held on 18 October 2024 (9 am EST/3 pm CET to 2 pm EST/8 pm CET)

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Introduction

The 5-hour online conference began with a plenary session with two communications by keynote speakers. This was followed by two lots of parallel sessions with each session having two panels of three communications and panel discussions. Subsequently, a third keynote communication then led on to a more general discussion between all participants at the conference. This text seeks to summarize the key points made by all speakers, following up the literature review prepared during the summer of 2024.

Initial Plenary Session: a Feminist Approach to Crises, and Anticipating Future Crises & Policy Responses, Chaired by Angela Greulich (summary by Nicholas Sowels)

The conference started with two contrasting and complimentary plenary communications by keynote speakers Hélène Périvier (SciencesPo, OFCE) and Eugenia (Jenny) McGill (Columbia, SIPA), who respectively presented a broader overview of advances in women's rights and the threats stemming from crises; and a practitioner/instructor's approach to dealing with the impact of crises.

In her communication, ***A Feminist Approach to Crises: Structural Gender Inequalities and the Reversibility of Women's Rights***, Hélène Périvier began by looking at how women's rights advanced and how inequalities were reduced during the second half of the 20th century, despite most public policies acting to support the "male breadwinner" model. She identified three sets of factors, which were intertwined, to explain this - as far as Europe is concerned. First, there were political factors pushing for women's rights and full citizenship, including education, voting rights, and the economic participation in the labour market. Second, demographic factors were involved, notably birth control and abortion, allowing women to control their bodies, marriage age, and adopt different family norms, etc. Third were economic factors, including the tertiarisation of economies requiring different human capital and skills. That said, significant gender inequalities still exist in Europe, such as sex segregation in

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education (the under-representation of women in STEM disciplines and of men in care sector training), as well as employment and careers (in terms of wages, promotions, the glass ceiling, etc.). Underpinning this is the sexual division of labour and the "child penalty" of motherhood - which is well documented: for example by the Kleven et al. paper.[4] The male-breadwinner model is thus still present, notably in countries with strong gender norms.

So what about "crisis" (leaving aside the ecological crisis, which for Périvier is much more a disruptive structural phenomenon)? There are two major crises we can look at. First, the Great Recession (from 2008 onwards) is often viewed as a *He-Cession* as men lost their jobs more frequently at first (in construction, real estate and finance). This was followed by *She-Austerity*, especially in Europe, where governments pursued fiscal consolidation, which led to lower social rights and services to persons, affecting the tertiary sector more and women especially. Due to structural inequalities, public policies are therefore not neutral. The political answer to the collapse of capitalism was detrimental to women - but could have been different. Second, the Covid crisis also had many gender dimensions - in labour markets, in families, in access to abortion, in terms of poverty and migration (worldwide). Also in terms of education: work by Boring and Moroni indicates that there was a shift to more traditional beliefs about gender roles during lockdowns.[5] This means that social rights and progress are reversible. Public policy needs to continue to support gender equality - otherwise it will end - even in countries like France where equality may seem strong and accepted by young men.

Hélène Périvier ended with some thoughts about the politics of women's rights, which is not her field as an economist. But I am very concerned about what we see in terms of illiberalism, as we have seen in the United States with Trump, and in Europe. Despite the fact that gender equality in the European Union is a foundational value, we can see growing conservative forces within the framework of Europe. This is the case for LGBT rights, and pressure within academia on gender studies, for example in France "anti-wokism" is used for this and in Hungary departments in gender studies have been closed. In terms of reproductive rights, there is also pushback in Europe. Even if France has put the freedom (not right!) to abortion in its constitution, the right to abort has been highly challenged elsewhere (Poland and Hungary). There are conservative forces that are well-organised and funded. Social progress is reversible. Finally, young men seem to be less feminist - in fact, there seems to be a divide between young men and women. Périvier is not surprised by this because gender equality is not a win-win process - there are losers. In contrast to the neoliberal story of the 1990s, that everyone would be better off, this is not true. Having a gender-equal society that is sustainable is a big challenge. The problems are especially acute in regions facing economic difficulties, and climate change will intensify difficulties as resources become scarcer.

Jenny McGill's communication, ***Anticipating Gender Dimensions of New Crises Based on Prior Cases: Objects in the Rear View Mirror May Appear Closer Than They Are***, examined different ways of dealing with crises, referring initially to three policy documents. First, Diane Elson's "Gender and the global economic crisis in developing countries: a

[4] Henrik Kleven, Camille Landais & Gabriel Leite-Mariante, "The Child Penalty Atlas", *Working Paper* 31649, NBER, August 2023, DOI 10.3386/w31649.

[5] Anne Boring and Gloria Moroni, "Turning back the clock: Beliefs about gender roles during the lockdown", *Labour Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 84(C), 2023.

framework for analysis" (2010),[6] which draws on the Asian economic crisis (and others) to anticipate and think about the consequences of the unfolding global financial crisis (GFC, 2007-2009). Second, a toolkit by the ODA GAD network in the Philippines entitled "Gender Quality Actions for Hazard-Prone and Disaster-Affected Areas" aimed at dealing with annual crises created by typhoons (and the occasional earthquake). The document looks at the three stages of disaster preparedness, response and follow-up, providing detailed information about dealing with climate-related crises. Third, the policy brief by the UN Secretary General's office on the impact of Covid-19 on women published in April 2020,[7] examining the immediate gender-related impacts of Covid-19 globally (probably drawing on other crises handled by the UN system, like Ebola).

The three documents are very different guides and tools for anticipating and dealing with crises, and providing advice, and opening up analysis to the broader considerations of dealing with crises. From scanning the grey literature of agencies and organizations in the development and humanitarian spaces, with a student researcher, they found an incredibly diverse array of approaches that policy-makers have developed. In terms of methodology, most of the toolkits and guides etc. seem to build on general trends, on stylised facts about gender relations and disparities, in different settings: for example, Diane Elson adapts her analysis of the Asian crisis (in the South) to the GFC, which originated in the North, to examine different aspects of the care economy, and the reproductive sector. That said, toolkits show some bias because they are generated by organizations that provide reproductive services or financial services, etc. and so view crises from the perspective of their activity. Also, toolkits do not indicate to what extent they are actually used - are they actually helpful? Indeed, in crises, policymakers often find excuses not to deal with gender issues, which are deferred until later, given immediate concerns. The UN brief seeks to put women's concerns upfront. As her assistant has pointed out, the newer generation of tools with AI and machine learning means that there are initiatives to analyze big data and better predict the impacts of crises. The Complex Risk Analytics Fund and the Anticipation Hub are seeking to get ahead of future crises with social protection measures. Jenny McGill said she planned to investigate such new initiatives, to see actors' methodologies, whether they build on existing work to deal with biases that exist in big data.

Discussion: Angela Greulich asked whether crises, which often lead to risks of backlash, don't also provide new opportunities: for example, women who joined the labour market in Spain after the GFC in an "added worker effect", but then stayed; or the way teleworking after Covid has provided new working possibilities. Ania Szczepanska asked to what extent narratives affect the way we view the past - aside from economic and political causes. Yasmine Ergas asked, given that crises seem to occur systematically, what is the concept of crisis itself? Is it an aberration from normality or a systemic product of a particular set of social configurations, which should affect the way we think about preparation?

Hélène Périvier said that as an economist, she sees crises to be a temporary disruption - a big shock followed by a return to normality - while global warming, for example, is a trend. So for her, crises are more specific events, even though within capitalism - and its varieties - they

[6] Diane Elson, "Gender and the global economic crisis in developing countries: a framework for analysis", *Gender & Development*, Vol 18, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2010.491321

[7] UN Women, "UN Secretary-General's policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on women", United Nations, 9 April 2020.

occur repeatedly, albeit with different consequences (like the Great Recession). Yes, we need to look at definitions. Regarding Szczepanska's question on the narrative, Périvier would say that maybe during the 60s and 70s, there was a convergence between capitalism and feminism as women wanted to be emancipated - from (domestic) violence. Capitalism needed a high-skilled labour force and so it was easier for women to enter the labour market. But when the convergence does not exist women (and migrants) are threatened. She was not sure about the idea of backlash, in as far as you cannot go back to the past. Turning to Angela Greulich's point about the added-worker effect, yes it does individually help women, but such work is often highly segregated: "it's a 'small good news'". For telework, there may also be some drawbacks, especially if it is only women who work at home. This will impact wages and opportunities for promotion.

Jenny McGill added that concerning crises, there is a continuum, for example in the Philippines which has these annual natural disasters. The experience there does provide evidence for how to deal with climate effects more generally.

Parallel Session 1A: *Climate Change,* Chaired by Emmanuelle Kalfon (summary by Tamar Ly)

The four parallel sessions of the conference addressed the salient themes of climate change, gender-based violence (GBV), labor issues, political and economic crises, and community resistance. The first parallel session focusing on climate change engaged the works of Lydia Gibson, Angela Greulich and Jackie Dugard. In her presentation, ***The Process and Materiality of Gender in Rural and Traditional Communities,*** Lydia Gibson explored the intersections of gender and crisis, which serve as core conceptual frameworks for the conference. She argued that both gender and crisis are processes shaped by their spatial and temporal dimensions, which influence and redefine daily life. Gibson began by examining how crises are constructed as temporal and spatial phenomena, questioning how they arise, evolve, and eventually fade from public discourse. Drawing on Bertrand Russell's philosophical ideas, she critiqued the framing of crises as isolated, extraordinary events, suggesting that they often expose enduring, unresolved social issues. She highlighted how marginalization and poverty occupy their own "time and space," where the impacts of crises are especially visible. The scholarly discourse utilizing feminist geography ensued, including looking at how environmental crises disproportionately affect women. Women in marginalized communities face compounding pressures from both household duties and wage labor, which become even more demanding during periods of resource scarcity. Delving into her field research in a mountainous rainforest community in Jamaica, Gibson showcased this struggle by demonstrating how a 2018 government ban on single-use plastics disrupted traditional practices, particularly for women who relied on plastics for daily tasks like transporting goods. With no viable alternatives provided, this environmental policy inadvertently marginalized rural women further, highlighting how responses to crises can reconfigure gendered spaces and roles. Gibson's analysis underscored that the restructuring of these spaces was less a consequence of the environmental crisis itself than of the governmental response to it, which failed to consider the unique socio-economic context of these communities.

Angela Greulich's presentation, ***The Effect of Heat on Fertility Rates in France***, explored how climate change, specifically rising temperatures, impacts fertility rates. The research she conducted in collaboration with Sophia Noël indicates that in high-income countries like

France, heat waves result in fewer conceptions, as extreme heat negatively affects male sperm quality. The study observed that fertility rates drop significantly around nine to ten months after a hot day, with no "catch-up" in conceptions afterward. Quantifying the results, the estimated demographic impact in France shows 500 fewer births per day in years with temperatures above 25 degrees, with these effects accumulating over time.The research raised hypotheses about whether countries accustomed to higher temperatures, such as those in more tropical areas, might be less affected. Long term fertility decline was then explored as a consequence in the French context of the doubling of hot days due to climate change. Finally, Angela Greulich posed a sociological reflection on the implications of such phenomena: on one hand the decline in fertility may be viewed positively from an ecological perspective, reducing the human carbon footprint; on the other hand, it also suggests that many couples are unable to realize their life plans, possibly due to broader economic and political uncertainties.

The subsequent presentation, titled ***Indigenous South African Women and the Climate Polycrisis*** by Jackie Dugard, highlighted the devastating impacts of climate change on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) women, particularly in the Global South, where they serve as "shock absorbers" for societal failures. Similar to Gibson, Dugard explored the terminology and philosophical underpinnings of the concept of crisis. She introduced the term "polycrisis" to critique the structural inequities that allow the Global North to overshoot planetary boundaries, while those who contribute the least to climate change are forced to bear its most severe consequences. Furthermore, through this polycrisis lens, she argued that climate change cannot be viewed in isolation but must be understood as part of a broader convergence of capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, and supremacy, which collectively produce extreme inequality. From another perspective, she questioned whether framing climate change as a universal crisis truly motivates action or risks alienating people. Jackie Dugard framed the crisis not as a singular, isolated event, but as a systemic and deeply entrenched issue within an unsustainable global hegemonic system. She then argued that reducing environmental degradation to just a crisis oversimplifies the issue and could marginalize vulnerable groups, especially women. Instead, emphasizing the political dimensions of the crisis, she questioned how to effectively communicate the reality of these overlapping crises to those most impacted, but with the least power to change the system.

The case study that exemplified Jackie Dugard's conceptualization of a polycrisis was the resistance of South African women from the Amadiba community to titanium mining. This struggle highlighted how Indigenous women, in particular, have fought back against foreign interference in their daily lives and environment, even facing violence and assassinations. Taking their case to court, the community achieved a major victory in the landmark case *Baleni and Others v. Minister of Mineral Resources* (2019). For over 15 years, the community has resisted mining projects that threaten to destroy their land, instead advocating for eco-tourism and pastoral farming as sustainable alternatives. Dugard then pointed out the paradox in which those in power rely on the most marginalized - those who have contributed least to climate change while imposing the greatest burdens on them.

Discussion: The presentations were followed by discussion on both the semantics of "crisis" and the specific case studies presented. When a question arose regarding Lydia Gibson's Jamaican case study and the feasibility of replacing plastic with other technological tools, she emphasized how the ban on single-use plastics, while aimed at environmental improvement,

disrupted essential practices in Jamaican communities that rely on these plastics for basic needs like transporting food and grain. She argued that plastics, though harmful in some contexts, serve crucial roles in others, underscoring the complexity of applying blanket environmental solutions across diverse contexts.

The panel also discussed the term "crisis" itself, debating whether it motivates or demotivates people. Jackie Dugard emphasized that the concept of crisis can often be alienating and deeply embedded in systemic issues, making it challenging to address effectively. Lydia Gibson added that framing an issue as a crisis can shift responsibility away from those affected, potentially victimizing them instead of encouraging a deeper examination of root causes. The panel debated whether alternative terms could more effectively describe environmental and social challenges, focusing on how language shapes our perceptions of urgency and agency in addressing these issues.

Parallel Session 1B: *Gender-based violence (GBV)*, Chaired by Nadeera Rajapaske (summary by Youssef Sharaf)

The papers presented in parallel session 1B addressed the chronic problem of gender-based violence (GBV), the first of which was that of Laurine Martinoty (et *al.*): ***Mining, mine closures and domestic violence in South Africa****.* It explored a little-studied area of research in the literature, namely the effects of mine closures on local communities and gender, focusing on the case of South Africa, which has experienced large-scale mining restructuring operations since the 1990s. In their research, the authors compare women's reported violence in areas where mine shutdowns took place before 2016 and in other areas where all mines remain operational. From a methodological point of view, the paper draws on a sample of approximately 2,500 women, aged 16 to 60, using the South African Demographic and Health Survey, which is the only credible primary source on domestic violence. From a policy perspective, the paper concludes – by constructing indicators of *physical*, *emotional* and *binary* violence – that mine closures significantly increase all types of domestic violence, with physical and emotional violence doubling and sexual violence tripling. To reach this conclusion, the study explored three potential explanatory variables: migration, employment and the nature of relationships. Although it finds very little evidence of an impact of migration, the study argues that women are significantly exposed to violence when their partners are unemployed and when they have a boyfriend rather than a husband. The study also examines the motives for overall violence, arguing that it can be intrinsic or stress-related (which is significantly higher among unemployed men), or instrumental (aimed at reasserting dominance and extracting resources from their female partners when they are employed). The paper recommends incorporating mine closures into the Social License to Operate (SLO) and integrating poverty reduction, job creation and GBV awareness programs into the SLO framework.

The second paper presented, ***The Search as an Extension of the Caregiving Work of Searching Mothers in Mexico***, was authored by Paulette Bermúdez-Jordana. In her presentation, she presents "the feminization of care work" in the case of Mexico, which reveals how, in light of the 2019 ILO study by Charmes, women and girls carry out almost three-quarters of the unpaid care work – whether direct (such as feeding and nursing) or indirect

(also called “housework”) – necessary to maintain families and society.[8] Bermúdez-Jordana’s paper specifically discusses the systemic and structural crisis of more than 100,000 missing persons between 2006 and 2024 - men and women, of productive and reproductive age. She argues that women's care workload when persons go missing is significantly higher than that of their male peers. The paper highlights six main elements that give this crisis reality: its atypical scale, impunity, the lack of transparent information and growing uncertainty, the constant increase in the number of disappearances, human rights violations and, most importantly, the lack of effective state actions. Due to these policy failures, mothers have been forced, according to Bermúdez-Jordana, to “take up shovels and axes” across Mexico, and what is alarming is that these care responsibilities extend not only to the care of their loved ones, but also to that of dependents, which is a burden that disproportionately affects women.

The third and last paper of the session, ***Conceptualising the “Shadow Pandemic” of Domestic Violence during Covid-19 and Reviewing the Experiences of English-Speaking Countries***, was co-authored and jointly presented by Célia Atzeni and Nicholas Sowels. The latter first introduced the UN term “shadow pandemic,” referred to in the 2021 UN Women report on violence against women during COVID, which highlights how gender-based violence has increased in the form of verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, domestic, sexual, economic, etc. Sowels’ presentation then showed some paradoxical data for the UK, where official time series data does not reveal any significant change in declared “domestic abuse” during Covid-19 for the country as a whole. However, figures by the Metropolitan Police (of London, accounting for 1/7 of the UK population) showed that abuse by family members increased on average 8.1% and 17.1% respectively, but that abuse by ex-partners declined by 11.4% (due to separate lockdown). Similarly, in Canada, frontline services saw a 20-30% increase in reports of domestic violence. In this context, it is significant that Sowels argued that refugee and migrant women in Canada, because of their dependency and isolation, are particularly at risk. In the second part of the presentation, Célia Atzeni explained how she used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS) to process and analyze large corpora of texts and detect partners related to her research question. Using TXM (a tool for textometry) in her research, Atzeni interpreted the crisis-driven metaphor of the “shadow pandemic,” which ironically appeared seasonally in UN discourse in 2020 and 2021 to highlight domestic violence as a hidden but dangerous phenomenon, not as visible as the much-publicized health pandemic, but which remained absent from the UN’s terminology database. It is worth noting, however, that the term nevertheless became popular and was subsequently used by researchers and journalists. Célia Atzeni also added that there were several problems with this representation, including that the metaphor places domestic violence in the background, secondary to the COVID-19 crisis, rather than as an ongoing structural problem that requires long-term policy measures. In this regard, despite increased awareness during the pandemic, most governments only implemented short-term emergency measures, which were then rolled back after the pandemic, such as the *UK. Refuge and Women’s* Aid. Atzeni, therefore, concludes that in the future, the overuse of this term could diminish its impact, and that alternatively, it would be preferable to integrate more varied expressions, such as "phantom crisis" or "lifting

[8] Jacques Charmes, ILO, *The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market. An analysis of time use data based on the latest World Compilation of Time-use Surveys*, International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2019.

the veil" – although it is still uncertain whether they would be effective in maintaining its evocative power.

Parallel Session 2A: *Labour,* Chaired by Célia Atzeni (summary by Tamar Ly)

The first presentation, titled ***Women Migrant Workers: Navigating Through Multiple Vulnerabilities***, was given by Nadeera Rajapakse, who explored the crises faced by migrant workers, specifically those in Lebanon, under two categories: exogenous and endogenous. Exogenous refers to external shocks such as conflicts, which she particularly mentions within the context of the escalating war with Israel at the time of the presentation, as well as natural disasters. Endogenous, on the other hand, alludes to internal issues arising from the nature of domestic work itself. Rajapakse highlighted that Sri Lankan women in Lebanon often endure severe exploitation, frequently trapped in abusive situations without legal protection and facing conditions akin to slavery. She emphasized the significant economic impact of these workers, noting that remittances from migrant workers contributed 8% of Sri Lanka's GDP (2023), underscoring their role as a vital source of foreign revenue despite their exploitation. She then explored the underlying causes of endogenous crises, which stem from the low social value placed on domestic work, gendered attitudes, and the commodification of labor. The lack of legal recognition for domestic work exacerbates the challenges faced by these women. Rajapakse used resilience as a conceptual framework to critique the focus on external shocks in discussions of crisis, emphasizing the need to address the ongoing internal struggles of migrant workers.

Kseniia Gatskova's communication, ***Uncertainty in Refugee Labour Market Integration*** (presented also on behalf of David Adunts, Yuliya Kosyakova and Silvia Schwanhäuser) examined how uncertainty about settlement intentions impacts the economic integration of migrants, with a focus on refugees. Using the case study of Ukrainian refugees in Germany, she showed that uncertainty about whether to stay or return negatively affects employment outcomes, particularly for women, as men faced additional emigration barriers due to conscription and if they have emigrated, then in most cases they moved with a partner. She found that migrants with uncertain plans face significant challenges, particularly in investing in long-term skills like language learning, which are closely tied to employment opportunities. Migrants with clear, long-term settlement intentions are more likely to invest in language acquisition, which improves their job prospects and their wages. In contrast, migrants with short-term intentions tend to focus on maximizing earnings during their stay, limiting their investment in skills that would benefit them in the long run. However, those with long-term plans are more likely to invest in human capital, such as language skills. Yet this can create a "lock-in effect," where time spent learning the language reduces immediate job opportunities. She also highlighted that migration policies, especially long asylum processes, can further exacerbate uncertainty. Lengthy asylum procedures and unclear residency status make it difficult for migrants to plan their future, hindering their integration and economic prosperity. To explain these outcomes, Gatskova applied Goal Setting Theory, which suggests that specific goals lead to better performance. Migrants with clear intentions are more likely to set concrete goals, such as learning the language or finding stable employment, which improves integration. She also used the Immigrant Human Capital Investment Model, which posits that migrants who plan to stay long-term are more likely to invest in transferable skills, enhancing their long-term economic prospects. In conclusion, Gatskova argued that policies reducing

uncertainty can help migrants make informed decisions about their future, leading to better long-term economic integration.

Finally, Marta Dominguez Folgeras' presentation, ***The Mental Load of Domestic Work in France***, examined the cognitive and emotional burdens associated with domestic and care work, particularly how they disproportionately affect women. Drawing on qualitative research, she identified four key components of the mental load: anticipating needs, comparing alternatives, making decisions, and monitoring satisfaction. She emphasized that during crises such as economic or social shocks, these tasks grew more complicated. While available alternatives may be constrained, monitoring satisfaction also becomes more difficult, making the mental load even more overwhelming for women. To complement previous qualitative findings, Dominguez Folgeras conducted a survey in 2023 with 1,500 individuals aged 30-50 in heterosexual relationships, where childcare was more likely. The survey aimed to quantify how much time was spent on domestic tasks and how these responsibilities were shared between partners. The results revealed significant gender disparities: women reported performing nearly twice as many domestic tasks as men, particularly in routine chores and childcare. She also explored how men and women perceive the sharing of the mental load. While 80% of women stated they did more or much more than their partners, men often believed they shared the mental load more equally. This gap in perception was visually represented in a graph, showing how men and women view their contributions to domestic work differently. The research highlighted that domestic and care work involves substantial cognitive tasks such as planning, decision-making, and organization that are often shouldered by women. These tasks create an invisible and enduring mental load, which has a significant impact on women's well-being. The presence of children was found to greatly increase this cognitive burden, underscoring the gendered nature of domestic labor and its effects on women's mental and emotional health.

Discussion: Nadeera Rajapakse raised the question of how uncertainty about settlement intentions affects integration, particularly in relation to language learning. She noted that changes in migration policies, such as the temporary status granted to Ukrainian refugees, create uncertainty and hinder long-term planning. She highlighted how Austria's new visa types aim to provide refugees with more stability, thus improving their integration prospects.

The conversation then turned to the mental load of domestic work. Rajapakse asked about the actual level of inequality in domestic responsibilities, emphasizing the need to make tasks more visible. She suggested that quickly completed but mentally draining tasks are often underestimated. Gatskova contributed by discussing how perceptions of multitasking, particularly for women, influence the mental load. Finally, the concept of commodification in domestic labor was discussed. A question was raised about whether commodification could be seen as a form of violence. Rajapakse clarified that while commodification is not typically viewed as violence, it is closely linked to vulnerability and exploitation, particularly in domestic work where power imbalances are most pronounced.

Parallel Session 2B: *Political and Economic Crises, and Resistance* chaired by Jackie Dugard (summary by Youssef Sharaf)

The papers presented in parallel session 2B addressed the economic and political crises facing women, as well as their patterns of resilience and resistance, the first of which was that

of Iona Astier and François Facchini, ***Democratic Crisis, Polarization and Women's Rights***. Starting from a relative research gap on the effects of polarization in relation to gender equality, the paper focuses on gender equality in law in 37 OECD countries, between 1971 and 2023, through the lens of political polarization. In her co-authored article, Iona Astier asks whether political polarization impacts gender equality in law. The paper draws on World Bank data and uses the Gender Equality in Law (GEL) index, which includes a number of components, including parenthood, pay and pensions, mobility, and assets. The study concludes that political polarization is negatively correlated with gender equality, due to the legislative gridlock that occurs when different political parties fail to agree on policies. This lowers the ratio of laws passed relative to the parliamentary agenda. It is worth noting in this regard that the gridlock effect has already been highlighted in the American context by Sarah Binder (1999, 519-33). Furthermore, Astier concludes that women's representation is essential, but that it cannot by itself mitigate this impact.

The second paper presented, ***Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-first Century: The Plight of Women Living in the USA in the Aftermaths of the 2008 Economic Crisis, from Reality to Film***, is authored by Emmanuelle Kalfon. She addresses a crucial subject, that of the consequences of the financial crisis of 2008, where she revisits the socio-economic impact of the financial crisis on women living in the United States, through the prism of cinema and media production in general. Analyzing *Financial Times* coverage and Jessica Bruder's and Chloé Zhao's film *Nomadland*, she examines the social and economic effects of the crisis on women, such as increased job losses, economic instability, unstable working conditions, and widening gender income gaps, particularly for single mothers, older women, and women of color. In this context, Jessica Bruder's immersion journalism in *Nomadland* brings to light the lived realities of older women who, facing housing instability and economic insecurity, adopted nomadic lifestyles as a form of survival. Through years of living among these "new nomads," Jessica Bruder documents not only their hardships but also their resilience, adaptation, and sense of community, offering a vivid account of life on the margins. Chloé Zhao's cinematic adaptation amplifies these themes, blending documentary realism with fictional storytelling to immerse viewers in the experiences of Fern, the film's protagonist, who symbolizes the broader struggles of women displaced by economic forces. Utilizing intimate close-ups, a cold chromatic palette, and poignant musical scores, Chloé Zhao crafts a melancholic yet hopeful narrative that reflects the intersection of gender, poverty, and resilience. Both the essay and film thus serve as critical cultural texts, illustrating the enduring impacts of systemic inequality while honoring the agency of women who navigate such crises with strength and creativity.

The third and last paper of the session, ***Women and Solidarnosc***, was authored and presented by Ania Szczepanska. The latter looks back at three key moments in Polish history, all three in the 1980s: the first was August 1980, with the "strikes" that marked the victory of *Solidarnosc* (or Solidarity, an independent self-governing labour movement); the second was on 13 December 1981, when a state of war was declared by General Jaruzelski; and the third took place between February and April 1989, with the Round Table negotiations between the government and the Solidarnosc-led opposition, preceding the first semi-democratic, pluralistic parliamentary elections since 1947. These moments mark an important political turning point in Polish history, coinciding with the rise of Solidarnosc as a broad anti-authoritarian workers' movement using methods of civil resistance to advance the cause of workers' rights and political change. In this regard, as a historian of film and image,

Szczepanska examined how films and visual archives can recreate and change knowledge and memory of the past, as well as how we perceive them today. Her particularly interesting contribution takes into account the different roles of women as actors in the democratic opposition of the 1980s – she constructs a typology of female actors and their roles in the process, and how they were absent and invisible in political institutions after 1989. What Szczepanska therefore recommends, as it is not an easy task, is a more integrated historical approach to the Solidarnosc movement, in order to see that women's mobilization in the past was part of the current struggle for human rights.

Final Plenary Session: *The Work that "Crisis" Does* and General Discussion, Moderated by Angela Greulich (summary by Nicholas Sowels)

The final plenary session began with a keynote communication by Yasmine Ergas addressing the overarching theme of the conference: ***The Work that "Crisis" Does: Re-Setting the Politics of Gender?*** Ergas began by framing the term "crisis" as polysemic, carrying contested meanings that shift, based on context and usage. Specifically, when paired with terms like "emergency" or "disaster," crises legitimize distinct political and policy responses. The narrative emphasizes how women's precarious socio-economic positions often translate into re-marginalization during crises, juxtaposed with rare opportunities for advancement. She recounted her personal experiences of being on a plane flying into New York, as the 9/11 attacks were taking place, to illustrate the psychological and emotional dimensions of crises, particularly the inability to protect her child in the city, and whose sense of security and confidence in the future were greatly affected.

Yasmine Ergas went on to examine the notion of crisis, again drawing partly on her own experience (which she clearly admitted was privileged). She pointed to the personal shift she had undergone following the "Years of Lead" in Italy, when she moved from seeing crises from an essentially Marxist perspective as following a "historical trajectory", towards a more "complex and undeniably murky", post-modernist view of changes, inspired by Luhmann and Leotard. From this perspective - the historical or political and the personal - Ergas pointed to Habermas's assertion that a crisis is not only "objective" but "must exist also in the subjectivity of the actor". She also stressed the range of meanings crisis may have in the social/political science/economics literature, and how crisis has become a "term of common discourse".

Drawing on the research assistance provided by Poorvika Mehra of the US and UK media, Ergas noted that the two terms "women" and "crisis" actually appeared together relatively little in relation to the global financial crisis and the Covid crisis - despite the fact that "it must have been common knowledge… that each crisis was hitting women and men differently; that the corrective policies being implemented were not treating everyone similarly; that the long-term effects would be dramatically differentiated". This may just reflect the "usual marginalization of women". But she argued that it could also reflect the political dynamics of crises, whereby as societies "call to circle the wagons" in the general interest - "most often national" - everyone is cast in the same view, thus "reducing the democratic dynamic maybe necessarily": where women are mentioned it is often to serve the purpose of "compacting nations" to mobilize gendered tropes: for example on the issue of migration. Here men may be depicted as violent rapists, while women are qualified as "the willing subjects of such patriarchal authoritarianism,

the champions of dangerous customs, including female genital mutilation, the overly-fertile procreators of the 'wrong' children".

Ergas ended by pointing out that crises have "revolved around structural factors of discrimination", and that the "only possible remedies entail structural transformations, which may result from reformist progressivism": policies in place can and must be pursued further for "deeper transformations to take place". Accordingly it is vital to defend institutions producing knowledge, the possibilities of social action, the institutions of representation, and most of all women's habeas corpus, and women's right to control their own bodies.

Before the final discussion, **Emmanuel Kattan** (Director of the Alliance Program) joined the conference to emphasise the importance of the conference to the Alliance programme, which seeks to leverage the social sciences to provide solutions and policy ideas that address some of the challenges the world is facing. Crises involve structural injustices relating to gender and inequality and as social scientists the conference participants have a key role in addressing these issues.

General Discussion

Angela Greulich opened the discussion in response to Yasmine Ergas's presentation, thanking her for also giving her views from a personal perspective, because this is something we all face, especially as the succession of crises which we are living easily leads to a sense of paralysis. Greulich went on to note that it is not always easy to connect our works as academics with possible political engagements we may wish to pursue in the current political context [across the world].

Yasmine Ergas noted that it is important to safeguard the space of the academy, but also its place in terms of fostering critical knowledge. Coming back to the notion of crisis in contrast to normality (as Hélène Périvier stressed [among others]), it is important to realise that in any social system, crisis is endemic - and in many ways it is desirable: you don't want everything to sit still – as societies are not in states of Pareto optimality. That is also why I worry about the inflationary use of the term… and the politics of exception which crises often justify.

Jackie Dugard pointed out that positionality is going to influence how we view crises, and which crises speak to us. This brought her back to Nancy Fraser's work on recognition and redistribution, and finding herself continuously in this loop of how to reconcile these imperatives. How do we deal with the moment we are in where, for example, human rights in the Global North recognise the recognition model - getting women and black people into the existing systems, although these systems will disintegrate us? How do we reconcile this inclusion model with implosion? And where there isn't a win-win.

Yasmine Ergas noted that the politics of neo-sovereigntism, of national representativeness seeks to address this. All women are suffering from these pressures… even something as minor as the academic production during Covid penalised women, as men were churning out their publications.

Jackie Dugard's response is that women should withdraw having children from the market until the government socialises child care.

Yasmine Ergas noted she would have punished herself if she had taken that decision, which she could not commit to politically.

Nicholas Sowels pointed out that a radio programme mentioned in the literature review on women in moments of crises explained how the snap elections called in France in late spring 2024 led to a de facto relative marginalisation of women, just because women politicians did not have the same time available as men to prepare programmes and campaign. He also noted that young women are more engaged in politics than young men, which may lead them to being able to secure or even expand their rights.

Emmanuel Kattan: coming back the idea of crises and the risk of dilution of issues, maybe the connection between crises may both bring about a new kind of understanding and part into stronger relief some of the challenges that our societies are facing in terms of gender equality. He was thinking of work by Rachel Kleinfeld at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who observed that the strongest predictor of political violence is hostility against women. Kattan wondered whether these kinds of insights, which bring together two types of crises and connect issues that are not necessarily assumed to be connected can bring into relief these crises… and spur us into action.

Yasmine Ergas: the more dots you can connect the more you may understand, so long as you don't lose the capacity for fine-grained analysis. Such research would certainly be very useful… and fits into the *créneau* that more rights for women would be better for society as a whole. But as Hélène Périvier (and others) have noted, in the short term, a lot of this is zero-sum. There is no unidirectionality here.

There is also an extraordinary percentage of the world's population who believe that some violence against women is justifiable - and that includes an extraordinary percentage of women. That's what you are up against. Because when you make that violence less plausible, somebody has lost some power. We need to be optimistic but not naîve.

A final discussion followed after Tamar Ly and Youssef Sharaf presented summaries of the parallel sessions.

Nicholas Sowels asked whether there is any overarching theory one could put forward about the "work done by crises"? He was sceptical whether this was possible, but wondered if one could think about it.

Yasmine Ergas suggested moving forward with the analysis. Crises get naturalised and tend to leverage existing gender differentiations, but not really necessarily.

Can we say we have now a sufficiently well-developed common discourse, of collective action that has allowed for resilience in the face of policies that undermine women's situations and further policies that have dismantled the sources of institutional strength? It has been possible in the 21st century to mount responses that would have been hard to image 70 or 50 years ago, when you wouldn't have the gender studies programs, the women's rights machineries, when you would not have had the treaties, the laws, the women working in the media and

political institutions. Has that made a difference, and does it need to be defended? It is very different to be in a situation where there is a law on equality and where there isn't one.

Ania Szczepanska noted that in France we now use the term recherche-action - research action. There was an interesting film about migratory conflicts on the Polish border, which is closed to the media. Researchers from Holocaust studies are now trying to apply their methodology to act on this situation.

Yasmine Ergas said she had heard of this term, but more from the point of view that because you are doing the research you are having an effect.

Nicholas Sowels concluded by informing participants about creating this summary and signalling that Jackie Dugard will be coming to Paris in March 2024 and Angela Greulich will be visiting Columbia in April.

Jackie Dugard suggested that we use the web page of the conference to ask further questions.