



UNIVERSITÉ PARIS
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interdisciplinaires sur les médias



Call for Papers After the Crisis: Media and the “Return to Normality”

Paris and Athens—2025/2026

The contemporary period is profoundly marked by the emergence and proliferation of new risks related to technical and scientific progress (Beck, 1992), by a saturation of events that are difficult to understand (Augé, 1994), and by an “ambiguous” and “catastrophic” conception of modernity (Latour, 1997). Crisis emerges as an omnipresent category in contemporary history (Koselleck, 2006): economic, political, health, environmental, and media crises... whether systemic crises, crises of growth, or institutional crises. The concept of crisis emerges as an omnipresent category in the contemporary history of our societies (Koselleck, 2006), encompassing crises related to event-driven “event-driven rupture¹” (Arquembourg, 2006), systemic crises, growth crises, and institutional crises. However, crises are not perceived uniformly: while some communities experience them as threats, others view them as opportunities. It is difficult to imagine a field of human and social sciences that has not mobilised this concept to analyse intense or enduring conflicts, sudden upheavals, decisive

¹ In this regard, various examples can be identified, including terrorist attacks, climate events, natural disasters, and traumatic incidents. The nature of these events is diverse and can be more broadly associated with a collective and societal dimension due to the effects they produce on the social body.

ruptures, or deep dysfunctions of the established order. As explained by Heurtaux, Renault, and Tarragoni (2023), a crisis is not merely an objective circumstance or a naturally imposed phenomenon; rather, it is understood as a process of qualification based on discursive operations (naming, interpreting, explaining) and practical actions (mobilisations, political decisions, media coverage). However, while the concept of crisis has been analysed and published, the “return to normality²” question remains distinctly underexplored. What are the transitions between event-driven rupture and the “return to normality”? What discourses, practices, or imaginaries are associated with these transitions? When can a crisis be considered formally over? What does this “normal” mean? What criteria, temporalities, and processes define the transition from the exceptional to the every day, or from the perception of crisis to normality?

Let us take a symptomatic case of a so-called post-crisis: Greece provides an emblematic example of the ambiguous dynamics of exiting a crisis, where the official discourse of “restored normality” masks the lasting effects of the economic crisis. After a decade of austerity policies imposed by European institutions, the country displays a growing economy and a relative return of investor confidence. However, what about this period’s deep and persistent repercussions, especially on public infrastructure and the social fabric? A tragic event illustrates these tensions: On February 28, 2023, a collision between a passenger train and a freight train near Larissa resulted in the death of 57 people and 80 serious injuries. This tragedy sparked a wave of silent protests, including one in Syntagma Square in Athens, a highly symbolic location for popular demands since the first anti-austerity demonstrations. This railway disaster, largely attributed to dysfunctions resulting from the privatisation of the Greek railway company Trainose (which became Hellenic Train under Italian control in 2017), reflects the post-crisis political compromises. The Greek and international press hastily highlighted the “return to normality” with narratives of economic progress and political stability. However, popular gatherings, such as the October 11, 2024 concert-protest at the Kallimarmaro stadium, reveal another reality: that of a people still suffering from the effects of political choices imposed during the crisis. This concert, organised in memory of the victims, reaffirmed a sense of belonging and silent solidarity, contrasting with the official narratives. Thus, the discourses highlighted by the media show a systematic attempt to transform symbolic events into proof of a return to normality, while obscuring the social and political consequences of the crisis. The question remains open: Is the discourse of the end of the crisis a reality experienced by Greek citizens or a communication strategy to attract investments and restore the country’s image on the international stage?

Greece is not an isolated case. Although distinct in their contexts and origins, other crises reveal similar dynamics where crisis management or exit discourses clash with lived realities. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted structural weaknesses in health systems worldwide. Hospitals often said to be on the front lines of the crisis, had to manage a massive influx of patients with limited resources and no certified treatment. These challenges exposed persistent issues, such as chronic underfunding, staff shortages, and outdated infrastructure. While governments considered the

² Lisandre Labrecque-Lebeau (2022) reminds us that what is perceived as “normal” relies on a socio-cultural consensus that excludes certain behaviors or social realities, such as disability, gender, delinquency, madness, or unemployment. The concepts of “normality” and “deviance” do not oppose each other rigidly, but are interdependent, in the sense that normality can only be defined in opposition to deviance, and vice versa. Thus, for a norm to exist, it is necessary that certain behaviors or states deviate from it. However, within the framework of this call for papers, the analysis does not focus on the relationship between what is socially considered “normal” or “deviant.” Rather, it concerns how the media construct and convey the idea of a return to a period of normality after a crisis. Here, normality becomes the antonym of a critical moment, embodying a collective aspiration for stability and continuity in the face of major disruptions.

pandemic crisis to be over, despite the ongoing disease, healthcare workers continue to denounce its lasting impacts: burnout, mass departures, and the system's lack of resilience against other potential health crises. The question arises: how has the pandemic transformed the health order? Are we facing a new "normality" marked by permanent tensions?

A third example: Brazil illustrates a political crisis marked by institutional tensions and increased social polarisation. After a period of instability under Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2023), characterised by controversial pandemic management, massive environmental damage, and brutal attacks on democratic institutions, the return to power of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva in 2023 raised hopes for stabilisation. However, this transition comes with major challenges: reconciling a deeply divided country, rebuilding dismantled public policies, and fighting corruption and inequalities. This case highlights the difficulty of turning renewal discourses into concrete actions. Do the social, political, and economic crises of the "Bolsonaro years" remain vivid? How do the media perceive and portray the "post-Bolsonaro normality"?

This call for papers aims to explore the discourses, practices, and dynamics of transition that surround the end of crises, adopting a perspective centred on media studies. How do media narratives contribute to constructing the return to normality after a crisis? What mechanisms allow for imagining a fresh start or, on the contrary, projecting a return to life as it was before? The goal is to examine the role and practices of the media and communication professionals in structuring post-crisis temporalities: how they help to formulate a memory of the crisis while tracing the contours of a possible future. It involves analysing the processes of constructing these narratives, the actors who promote them, and the political, social, and cultural issues they raise. How can the role of the media and political discourses be articulated in shaping dominant post-crisis narratives? How do post-crisis narratives influence collective perceptions of justice, resilience, and responsibility?

The examples mentioned in this call are only an entry point to explore this issue; other case studies are welcomed enriching the reflection on the construction of collective narratives marking a return to an (alleged) "normality". Furthermore, crises, although initially confined to a specific domain, often reveal their capacity to evolve and intertwine with other layers (Koselleck, 2006), illustrating a dynamic of permeability and circulation. This scenario, in which one crisis triggers a cascade of other disruptions, highlights how the return to "normality" can be complex and sometimes illusory.

Six Axes for a Critical Analysis of the "Return to Normality"

Axis 1: The role of the media in constructing a return to normality

In contemporary societies, the media play a central role in shaping narratives of crisis resolution. These narratives may adopt optimistic and consensual perspectives, often aligning with official discourses, or they may obscure persistent or emerging issues, creating the impression that the crisis has been resolved while its political, civic, and societal consequences continue to unfold. For example, in the Greek case, media coverage of economic recovery and foreign investments starkly contrasts with social realities, such as fragile public infrastructure and persistent inequalities. What media mechanisms contribute to this "normalisation" of discourse? What responsibilities do journalists have in balancing criticism with support for official narratives?

Axis 2: Political discourse and the media as a sounding board

Political leaders often use the media as a channel to spread post-crisis success stories, focusing on specific indicators (growth, unemployment reduction) to reinforce their legitimacy and attract investments. This post-crisis storytelling sometimes transforms tragic or critical events into opportunities to demonstrate national resilience. The Brazilian case, with Lula emphasising a return to democratic stability after Bolsonaro, illustrates this strategy. What is the relationship between political and media narratives in these contexts? To what extent do post-crisis narratives serve specific political objectives?

Axis 3: Resistance and Mobilisation

In response to official and/or dominant narratives, dissenting voices emerge to denounce the contradictions or shortcomings of post-crisis discourses. These resistance may take the form of popular mobilisations, such as the silent protests in Syntagma Square following the railway tragedy in Greece, or individual figures who act as spokespersons for these struggles, such as activists or intellectuals. How do these opposing voices reshape public debate? What methods do they use to contest official narratives and draw attention to hidden realities? What are the most effective means for dissident actors to intervene in the public space and influence these narratives?

Axis 4: Lived Experience: Perspectives of Witnesses, Victims, and Those Directly Affected

This axis focuses on the experiences and trajectories of individuals directly affected by the crisis: victims, witnesses, and their families. These people, often on the front lines, are not only confronted with the immediate impacts of the crisis but also with the challenge of navigating a period of “return to normality”. This axis examines how the emotions of those directly affected are expressed in the public sphere, particularly through media narratives and associated commemorative practices. At the same time, it explores the diverse experiences of individuals who have endured the repercussions of a crisis—victims, witnesses, and others concerned—and their perception of a past that remains relevant in the present. In this regard, the axis interrogates the role of the media in shaping collective memory and the place of those affected within these narratives: how are these emotions articulated and narrated to construct a shared understanding of overcoming the crisis?

Axis 5: The “return to normality” as populist rhetoric

The discourse of the “return to normality”, or the necessity of such a return, often emerges as an apparent response to crises. It is particularly mobilised by populist parties and movements to convey the idea of an idealised stability and an order that was lost during the crisis. Beneath this notion lies a discursive strategy aimed at exploiting citizens’ fears and frustrations by promising the restoration of a past era perceived as more prosperous, secure, and orderly—set in contrast to a contemporary reality deemed threatening and chaotic. This axis invites a critical examination of this sentiment of “regressive nostalgia” (Fantin, Niemeyer, and Dufresne-Deslières, 2023). Similarly, political actors frequently invoke the rhetoric of “common sense” while their discourse remains deeply characterised by controversy and conflict. These dynamics further complicate and problematise the transnational analysis of such phenomena. Ultimately, the “return to normality” is accompanied by a persistent sense of crisis, strategically revived to legitimise increasing societal polarisation.

Axis 6: The “return to normality” in Identity and Nationalist Conflicts

The “return to normality” can become a space of negotiation and confrontation around the nation and the “imagined and imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) that emerge from it. At the same time, this concept also fuels forms of “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995), which, without being explicitly conflictual, normalises nationalist practices and discourses in everyday life and institutions. For example, how is the discourse of “return to normality” mobilised in post-conflict contexts (Northern Ireland, former Yugoslavia, Baltic republics, etc.) or in contemporary independence movements (Catalonia, Scotland, Quebec, Flanders, Basque Country, etc.)? What are the characteristics of these discourses? How do these discursive forms relate to territories seeking national recognition? What is the defining characteristics of the discourses employed by various actors—national, pro-independence, civic, and media—to frame (or depict) their actions within the context of a “restored normality”? How do these discursive forms interact within territories seeking national recognition? Moreover, how do they relate to global narratives on national self-determination, peace, and normality?

Submitting a paper proposal

Paper proposals must be submitted by May 12, 2025, to the members of the scientific committee: stefanos.pnevmatikos@u-paris2.fr, jaercio-bento.da-silva@u-paris2.fr, and cristian.monforte-rubia@u-paris2.fr.

The working language is English. However, submissions in French, Spanish, Italian, or Greek will also be accepted and evaluated, provided that an abstract in English is also submitted.

Proposals must specify the thematic axis (or axes if the proposal addresses multiple ones) of the call for papers:

Proposals should specify the thematic axis (or axes, if the proposal aligns with multiple) and the preferred location of participation (Paris, Athens, or both).

Submissions must not exceed 3,000 characters (including spaces) and should include the following elements: the subject of the presentation, its disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological orientation, the research question addressed, the main expected findings, a selected bibliography, and a brief biography of the author.

Once anonymised, paper proposals will be evaluated through a double-blind process by members of the scientific committee. Proposals from all disciplinary fields will be considered.

Provisional calendar

Call for Papers release: February 2025

Proposal submission deadline: May 12, 2025

Notification of acceptance: Week of June 23, 2025

Publication of the Program on September 15, 2025

The event in France is scheduled for November 7, 2025

The event in Greece is scheduled for June 2026

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