

Editorial: Critical perspectives in times of uncertainty

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This special issue centers diverse voices of scholars, practitioners and community leaders and highlights different methods of communicating these critical approaches within the field of disasters, hazards and risks. Many scholars have reminded us that “critical” scholarship and approaches are not necessarily new. This special issue serves as a testament to scholars, activists and practitioners who have sought to employ critical approaches to their work and its continuous development. Just in the past couple of years, the global community has witnessed and experienced the dire effects of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, the development of the Ukraine–Russia war, the genocide in Gaza and, most recently, the involvement of the United States in the developing conflict between Iran and Israel. These shifting realities, each with endless and complex possibilities, compel people to respond. Whether these events are labeled a crisis, an emergency, a disaster or a catastrophe, when humanity is threatened, when the constitution of *acceptable risk* reaches its threshold, people are called to respond. This special issue is dedicated to the recognition that *critical* perspectives evolve in times of uncertainty.

In the face of uncertainty, vulnerable spaces become sites of contestation as people resist and adapt to satisfy their needs in a changing environment. Yet, change itself does not always or necessarily yield to transformation. Critical perspectives and approaches offer the potential to reveal the unnatural systemic forces that dictate people’s choices. Structural violence, embedded within and perpetuated by social institutions, shapes the constitution and outcomes of disasters. Critical theories uncover root causes, not solely the symptoms. That is to say, as Jacobs (2019) has argued, we must start with the isms – *racism*, *sexism*, *classism* and beyond – instead of the social categories formed as byproducts. “Othered knowledge,” community-originated, -driven and -centered approaches and participatory, creative and reflexive research methodologies allow us to do so. When Anderson and Dynes wrote of the May Movement in Curacao in Los Angeles (1975), instead of asking, “*Why do people riot?*” they asked, “*How do people respond to injustice when constrained daily by institutions embedded with oppression?*” They made clear that the riots existed within a social context and could only be interpreted as such. Following in those footsteps, that is the path forward: research that brings to the center those on the fringes of society and honors that they, too, have stories to tell. The significance of these approaches pushes the epistemology of disasters forward as we envision what emancipation and justice look like for marginalized and underserved communities.

The multiplicity of voices amplified in this special issue – by way of the guest editors, authors and the studied communities impacted by the shifting climates – teaches us that the development of critical approaches bridges us across geographic and disciplinary lines. The threads of inquiry must be global in nature, borne in groups of scholars, advocates, artists, makers, community members, practitioners, professionals and beyond. We must expand our circles to include holders of knowledge along a spectrum of socio-political positionalities and thereby pave the way for ingenuity and innovation in how we understand, question and respond in times of uncertainty.

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