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Cetinkaya, Hasret  and Tuğrul, Rodja (2025) In Motion Together: Crisis, Connection, and the Political Imagination of the Peoples' Platform Europe. Feminist Legal Studies. ISSN 0966-3622

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-025-09582-3>

Publisher: Springer

Version: Published Version

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In Motion Together: Crisis, Connection, and the Political Imagination of the Peoples' Platform Europe

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Accepted: 13 June 2025
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Keywords Peoples' platform · Crisis · Hope · Political imagination · Prefiguration · Memory

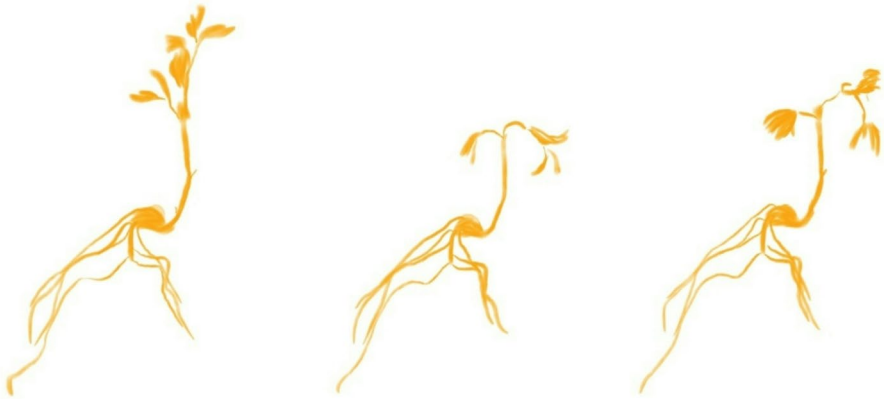
*Desperation is hope in the storm,
hope in-and-against the storm,
hope in-against-and-beyond the storm.
We do not just want to survive the storm
but to stop it and create something else.*

John Holloway at Peoples' Platform Europe,
Vienna, 14th of February 2025

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Stills from time-lapse video by Author Rojda Tuğrul as the artist, “A seed,” 2018.

In the midst of our current storm(s), we like the image of a time-lapse seed struggling to grow. It struggles in the face of howling winds and pouring rain to give birth to the new. To initiate a new becoming. The life of the seed is not unlike the temporality of politics within the storm. It grows without guarantees, existing in that threshold between the world of the soil (the past) and the world of the bright sun and crisp air (the future). It is an existence marked by interdependency, a networked existence drawing sustenance from soil and adjacent plants, in the shelter of rocks, trees and human infrastructure. Its process of becoming occasionally wanes but always returns again, bringing new vitality and clean air, providing inspiration for new feats and political beginnings.

In a world marked by extinction and ecological crisis, once again like the plant and its soil, we live in a world of fragmentation and the collapse of the ‘old world’. New forms of imperialism and rivalry between former allies, economic inequality and monopolisation, neo-fascism, AI feudalism, and climate breakdown mark the world of ‘the future that stands before us’ and add to the strong winds that blow in the face of the seed of political hope and possibility. In the midst of such chaos, and uncertainty, feelings of *desperation* are heightened. We are at once paralysed in thinking and feeling about the future, whilst we hold strong to the *determined hope* for a different one – yet to come. It is this kind of hope that the recent Peoples’ Platform Europe cultivated for us as scholars, translators and activists.

Offering a political space where transnational bonds and solidarity were built, the Peoples’ Platform prefigured an affective relationship that can shape the present and future otherwise. Its inaugural gathering was less an ‘event’ than one nodal point within a network of assemblies, forums and collaborative work between artists, activists, academics and civil society organisations from across the world. Our entry into this network was through the ‘Reclaim the Initiative’ assembly held in February 2025. Hosted at the University of Vienna and located within the Ring, the wide boulevards that encircle the city centre, 800 participants from 35 countries came together in what can best be described as a *collective sense-making* praxis that invited everyone to identify what is going on, and what can be improved. Organised by the

Academy of Democratic Modernity, the Students' Union of the University of Vienna, and Fey-Kom, the Organisation of Kurdish Associations in Austria, the platform was set to work with the inspirational words of keynote speakers William I Robinson, Silvia Federici, John Holloway and Mireille Fanon Mendès-France, and bookended by spontaneous outbreaks of 'govend' dancing. Govend, a Kurdish style of dance, where participants hold hands and dance in a chain to an at time hypnotic rhythm that never seems to end, as such, constituted not only an expression of Kurdish cultural heritage but an act of embodied solidarity, where rhythm became a shared language, dissolving boundaries and forging connections. Its aesthetic, emotional, and cultural dimensions reinforced that movements growth through the alignment of ideas, as well as shared presence, rituals, and joy.

Attending to this affect in (be)coming together, and building counter-hegemonic power, through the collective task of naming the crisis and in holding on to hope, we ask: what is the value of, and, in sharing, the banality attached to the stories of our everyday? Who gets to name a crisis, its urgency, and the decisions available to us? These seemingly disconnected questions, we will demonstrate, are crucial to shaping our political imagination on other—more epistemically just—terms.

The Platform meeting centred around eight different workshops which in turn focused on themes and challenges we collectively are facing, including the following ones to name a few: anti-fascism, ecological resistance, women's democratic confederalism, and opposing genocidal politics (Peoples' Platform 2025). In these workshops, two of which we attended—Rojda as a translator in the ecology workshop, and Hasret as a participant in the women's workshop—the participants offered testimonies of their experiences and struggles, addressing the (hu)man-made crises and their impact upon us, earth, and the planet. These materials and everyday stories were translated across multiple languages. What might otherwise be viewed as mundane about such sharing practices, was nonetheless very powerful. Strangers to one another, and yet so vulnerable, the Platform and its workshops became a larger space of care, openness, and trust. It exuded warmth, intensity, energy, and connection—across languages and experiences—mediated by the powerful work of 40 volunteering translators. This had an enormous impact upon us.

Why do certain experiences linger in our consciousness as if something compels us to step back and understand? What is it about these moments that embed themselves in us? Touching, in our times of individuation, is no doubt revolutionary. This kind of affective labour connected us to the movements enabled by the Platform, movements that went beyond its actual moments. What the Platform achieved was a powerful contribution to the ongoing task of prefiguring a different mode of relationality and way of being together, shaping our perception of time (clock) and space (territory), and thereby our memory system. By offering us an imagination of future archives of peace, where solidarity is forged in the now, here in Europe, the Platform became one avenue through which we worked towards shedding our own colonial skin and biases, as we were touched by the stories we heard, and by the mass and energy of the Platform.

These affects and moments of provocation spurred us to think together about the power, value, and significance of these kinds of assemblies. Away from the harsh realities of the outside world, but deeply immersed in it at the same time, the Plat-

form, besides being an opportunity to strategise, to plan and to forge new alliances for the ongoing struggles for equality and justice, was also something of an ‘under-commons’ of care (Moten and Harney, 2013)—of rejuvenation, of hope-making, of dreaming, and of haptical intimacy. It left us both brutally aware of the challenges ahead and better prepared to stand together in facing them and the suffering they will continue to direct on us. Not only was it an assembly of European and Middle Eastern activists and academics, but also of Indigenous peoples, South American anarchists, Roma, gender activists, and migrant domestic workers—a prefigurative community rooted in deep difference. Its power emanated from its social archiving of the struggles in which we are participants, and from the capacity of memory to hold fast to that knowledge and motivate future work.

Like a game of chess, where remembering past moves is necessary to assess the present and determine the next move, the Platform became both a memory and hope for realising multiple future possibilities. The platform, therefore, offered us a perspective on the complex structures that shape our past, present, and future, preparing us to comprehend them more effectively. It trained us in the art of anticipation, patience, and consequence, as we listened to one another, our mundane struggles, and our hardships. Consequently, such everyday stories and experiences became central to breaking with the ‘grain of the clock and territory’ of colonial-capitalism (Moten 2015), forcing us to ‘organis[e] in the storm’ that is caused by such powers (Holloway 2025).

It is on this basis, that we return to our final reflection on the making-of-crisis, asking who writes its scripts and thereby determines what political actions are possible to us in the name of crisis-action and de-escalation? The temporality of ‘crisis’ is interesting but also dangerous. As Hilary Charlesworth (2002) has drawn our attention to, the language of crisis is always political. Reflecting on the place of crisis in motivating and shaping the work of international lawyers, Charlesworth warns of how the ‘crises’ to which we respond are an effect of hegemonic processes of framing events, injustices and facts—framings that are often top-down in their orientation. In this regard, Charlesworth called for a more bottom-up approach to thinking about crisis and placed great emphasis on the everyday aspects of injustice in motivating the work of international law. It is in this spirit, that we see crisis, when framed in hegemonic terms, as always already premised upon a temporality of urgency and concerns shared in the ‘Global North’. “Europe is running out of time”. The rest of the world was always in some sort of crisis, however. They were put in crisis. The word crisis, as such, is wielded by those in power as both a shield and a weapon—an externalised condition that justifies extraordinary actions while absolving responsibility. Framed as sudden and exceptional, crises are often narrated as external shocks—economic collapses, refugee and migration waves, ecological disasters—rather than as the accumulated consequences of systemic structures. This framing allows those in power to present themselves as reactive rather than accountable, positioning crisis as something to be managed rather than as a condition produced by historical and material inequalities. By invoking urgency, crisis discourse often forecloses long-term political transformation, reinforcing the idea that radical change is unthinkable in moments of emergency. At the same time, the temporality of crisis ensures that responsibility is always deferred; once a crisis is named, its symptomatic resolution

becomes the focus, distracting from the deeper structural forces that produced it. This strategic use of crisis creates a paradox: while crisis appears as an interruption of normality, it is, in fact, the very logic through which power sustains itself—perpetually navigating from one declared emergency to the next, ensuring that the conditions for true accountability remain out of reach.

This Eurocentric script of crisis was interrupted by stories shared from people at the Platform and their various locations beyond and within Europe. They demonstrated the entanglement of ecological disasters, gendered inequality, and genocidal issues, highlighting their historical-material conditions caused by coloniality. The temporality of crisis, which puts in place a set of politics, is a temporality shaped by anxiety and threat. Or we might say, following John Holloway, that it is angry and furious. But this cannot be the basis of sustainable political action. We need a politics that slows down the urgency of the crisis as well, so that we can develop strategies and mobilise—not simply to scream into the void of crisis, but to ‘organise our scream’ and make it so powerful that it might just be able to push against the wind of the storm (Holloway 2025).

The storm’s direction is ultimately set by us—the People. It was on this basis that Marcos’ imagined story, a leading Zapatista Subcomandante, reached the hall of the Platform. In the lecture given by anthropologist John Holloway, Marcos’ powerful anecdote was re-told. The Zapatista leader, it is told, managed to get onto a telephone call with a young girl who lives in the future, in the year 2145, 120 years from now. Marcos asks her: ‘how are you?’, to which she responds: ‘it depends’. Uncomfortable with a child answering the call, and in such a way, Marcos frustratingly asks her: ‘what do you mean, “it depends”’, as she powerfully answers: ‘it depends on you’, before the connection is lost. Holloway’s fragile but soft voice silenced the room with this story. Accountability suddenly took on a different, and more a/effective meaning, implicating us all. The unnamed child of Subcomandante Marcos’ story reminded us that our present is someone else’s future, that our present is their past. But time is not separate and linear, as implied here—it is entangled and interwoven. Such inseparability demands our awareness, understanding, and, most of all, action. It is from within this standpoint that we can begin to break free from ‘the clock and the territory’ of coloniality (Moten 2015)—to overcome the Eurocentricity and privilege penetrating such understandings of futures-to-come.

The story about the child had sprouted something within us, bringing us into motion in similar ways to the stories from the participants and the keynote speeches did. Central for our political imagination are such moments of rebirth—of new ideas—of seeing ourselves and each other differently. Crucial for our refiguration of other ‘worlds’, is the figure of the child. Invoking this figure is not politically unproblematic, however. As Emily Jones (2025) has recently argued, the political appeal to the future of the child, not least in the context of international and environmental law debates, imagines a particular kind of child: at once innocent, vulnerable, from the ‘Global North’ and ‘White’. In such a colonial-hegemonic framing, the figure of the child stands as a measure of accountability, of a future-yet-to-come, but it is far from universal. In its actual particularity, the universalised European child reminds us of how the fear of the ‘end of the world’ that marks the crises of the present was always already predicated on the colonial destruction of many other ‘Worlds’ in the

first instance (Krenak 2020). So, when we imagine the story of the unnamed though gendered child of Subcomandante Marcos' tale, we must ask who is this child? Is she the Euro-American child that Jones' reminds us how we all too often assume and imagine, or is she the indigenous girl of the Chiapas? In truth, this is a question some future may answer—though ours, perhaps, will not. What kind of future-child this is, and might become, depends on the prefiguration we embody as political and social communities—locally, regionally, globally. In the context of the Platform and the struggles it gathers, this is imagined as the child of the dispossessed, the colonised, the poor, those living under the violence of the modern colonial-capitalist state. This child's determination became our hope, mobilising us at the Platform toward new ways of imagining, being, and holding-together—moving out of sync with the clock, and transgressing the boundaries of the map. Being a living vessel of transferred memory, and instinctively embodying histories a child never lived but deeply carries, this child became a strong reminder of our entangled time and space.

The People's Platform stood as a vivid reflection of our co-existence, of the plural existence—*of worlds within worlds*—where entire cosmologies are encapsulated in the seemingly simple structures of collective action and dialogue (Escobar 2018). This platform, as such, allowed a space for contemplation as it did for imagining anew through the art of consequence, patience, and relationality. The Platform, in this sense, was more than an event; it was a rehearsal for new ways of being together, of organising in and against the storm, of prefiguring futures yet-to-come.

Such futures were not simply about abstract ideal solutions, but to initiate an embodied and affective practice—one that reshapes our perception of time, space, and history, together. By sharing stories, naming crises, and organising across differences, the Platform resisted the imposed urgency of crisis narratives, cultivating instead a politics of sustained engagement and *collective sense-making*. The Peoples' Platform thus became more than a moment; it became a movement, a memory, and a possibility. It showed that another way of being together is not only imaginable but already in motion—woven into the relationships and connections that extend beyond the Platform itself. It is through such encounters that we do not simply endure the storm but push against it, not just to survive but to transform it entirely. Assemblies like this are the rhizomic seeds that give birth to new cycles of political possibility and freedom.

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