

33 DAYS IN LOCKDOWN:  
REFLECTIONS ON ‘CRISIS’, STATE-CITIZEN RELATIONS, AND EMBODIED  
ANXIETIES DURING NEW ZEALAND’S COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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ABSTRACT

*Extracts from an online ethnographic diary kept during what is, to date, New Zealand’s most intensive Covid-19 lockdown offer insight into the lived experience of lockdown. Analyses of State-citizen relations and critical engagements with the academic literature on ‘states of emergency’ and ‘crisis’ are brought together with examinations of lockdown’s affective, sensory, and other embodied dimensions. Topics explored include: what lies at the interstices between states of emergency and structural violence? How does crisis reconfigure the temporality of material objects? Is there a place for embracing collective pain in the midst of assertions of national pride and sacrifice? Collectively, the entries offer an on-the-ground view of the unfolding of a new social and political environment at a time when national consensus dominated the headlines, the effects of new social norms were just being experienced, and there was both anxiety and growing weariness over how long the dislocation might last and where it might eventually lead.*

*Keywords:* Covid-19; crisis; lockdown; New Zealand; State-citizen relations

INTRODUCTION

On March 26, 2020, New Zealand experienced its first Covid-19 lockdown. Over the next thirty-three days while the nation was at ‘Alert Level 4’, members of the public were required to ‘stay home’, unless purchasing groceries, seeking medical assistance, exercising, or providing essential services.

Like many people who find themselves housebound, I turned to social media to socially reconnect (*cf.*, Miller 2011), launching a daily Facebook diary to both examine events and provide a platform for dialogue. As scholars have long

noted, the ability to create narratives, emplot events, and narrate a place for ourselves in the world is a central way of creating coherence and meaning, particularly in times of personal and political crises (Mattingly 1998; Trnka 2008). Diaries are frequently employed for such purposes, with public, online diaries involving the added dimension of addressing a range of potentially diverse, known and unknown audience members who can speak back. Promoting an ‘ethos of immediacy,’ online diaries act as both an “‘of the moment’ ... record of how the individual felt or thought at that particular point in time’ (Reed 2005, 227) and an invitation for immediate dialogue. Retrospectively examining such online accounts enables insight into what at the moment felt most pressing to communicate, was taken for granted, or was elided or missed.

The diary extracts below were written over the thirty-three days that New Zealand was subject to Level 4 lockdown. They are offered here as a social chronicle of unfolding events which, like all diaries, is necessarily situated, subjective, and partial (Paperno 2004). In this case, it mirrors my professional and personal interests as well as my positioning as an expatriate academic living in a predominantly working-class neighbourhood of West Auckland. I was in the fortunate position of having my household ‘bubble’ sorted; as soon as the impending lockdown had been announced, my eldest (adult) child moved home, my husband stocked up on essentials, and our family of five was privileged enough to feel relatively secure as we buckled down together, allowing me to focus on events outside of our household.

Despite what felt like at the time to be an open-ended inquiry, in hindsight, my diary entries coalesced around two inter-related themes: the reconfiguring of State-citizen relations and the embodied, affective, and sensorial dimensions of living through a national, and global, crisis. The entries that follow query the interstices between states of emergency and structural violence, what is at stake in deploying the term ‘crisis,’ and the agentic dimensions of passively waiting. Other topics explored include: how does crisis reconfigure the temporality of material objects? How might proximity become a new bodily weapon? Is there a place for embracing collective pain in the midst of assertions of national pride and sacrifice? Incorporating not only ethnographic documentation but scholarly critique, the reflections offer an on-the-ground view of the unfolding of a new social and political milieu.

In a recent essay, Ghassan Hage (2020, 663) suggests that ‘there is a lot to be intellectually critical about amid a pandemic. If the virus itself appears as something a-social, it is nonetheless experienced socially, and the struggle against it, whether in the form of prevention or medication, is still a social

struggle' that requires reflection and critique. The entries below represent a modest, initial foray into such an exercise at a time when national consensus dominated the headlines, the effects of new social norms were just being experienced, and there was both anxiety and growing weariness over how long the dislocation might last and where it might eventually lead.

The entries below appear as they were written with only light editing, including minor alterations to shorten word count and delete unnecessary repetition and in one case, re-ordering of an entry (day 13).

#### DAY 7/APRIL 1: STATES OF EMERGENCY

I am finding that the state of emergency literature only goes so far in helping to make sense of the current crisis as the majority of scholarly accounts (*e.g.*, Agamben 2005; Foucault 2004), including those of the current situation (Agamben 2020; Chomsky 2020) focus on outlining how states of exception are used to unjustifiably escalate state power, leading to the imposition of authoritarian rule and privileging of the interests of elites and the private sector. This line of argument is a very worthwhile endeavour, but leaves out the possibility of justifiable states of emergency, as well as ignoring the role of the citizenry in constituting states of emergency. In these accounts, citizens tend to be portrayed as powerless, ignorant, or blinded by state power, rather than not only calling for state action, but also playing a role in constituting it.

In New Zealand, the lockdown has certainly resulted in unequal effects – and critiques of them – privileging elite interests; for example, the definition of 'essential services' has clearly financially benefitted some (large) businesses rather than others (*e.g.*, food supply monopolies as opposed to small grocers, fruit and vegetable shops, or independent butchers). Nonetheless, public sentiment has helped constitute the lockdown, and enabled it to run, for the most part quite smoothly, without the need (thus far) of significant police and military presence. In fact, before Ardern's announcement that we would go to Level 4, public discourse was dominated by demands to impose a lockdown. Many people stopped sending their kids to school *before* the schools were closed. The government message that 'we are all in it together' alongside Ardern's endorsement of the Teddy Bears in Windows Movement (on the day she declared we would be moving to Level 4) has been met with great enthusiasm. Just walking around our neighbourhood, you see house after house that has teddy bears or other stuffed animals on display in their front windows, symbolic messages of 'hope,' as one news account put it (Anonymous 2020), and of care.

And now people are taking up the work of policing the lockdown themselves – there were so many (thousands) of calls to the police, informing them of those seen infringing lockdown regulations that the police went and created a new online form for this purpose – within the first forty-eight hours after it was launched, people used it to report 9,600 suspected breaches of the lockdown. I think we need to add to the state of emergency literature greater consideration of the ways citizens’ co-constitute the affective landscape of a crisis. This may include, in some circumstances, actively investing the state with hope (for safety, security, *etc.*), and even blaming and shaming (and setting up for arrest) those deemed noncompliant. In these ways the citizenry does not just acquiesce but may even propel the state into action, particularly in a nation (like New Zealand) where there is a major election just a few months away.

DAY 8/APRIL 2: MUSEUM PIECES

I was emptying out a travel bag today and out fell a leftover candy from my last overseas flight (Air New Zealand hands out these iconic candies to passengers just as the plane starts to descend). It felt like a memento from a different life. As Heidegger puts it in *Being and Time*, what makes a museum piece a museum piece is not the thing in itself, but the fact that it speaks to a different lifeworld. It may in fact still be of use in some contexts, but it signifies the past:

What were the ‘things’ [in a museum] that they no longer are today? They are still useful things, but out of use. However, if they were still in use, like many heirlooms in the household, would they then not be historical? Whether in use or out of use, they are no longer what they were. What is ‘past’? Nothing other than the world within which they were encountered as things at hand belonging to a context of useful things and used by heedful Dasein existing-in-the-world. That world is no longer. (2010 [1953], 362)

DAY 9/APRIL 3: COLLECTIVE AFFECT

Boris Johnson has discovered ‘society,’ [stating while self-isolating that ‘One thing I think the coronavirus crisis has already proved is that there really is such a thing as society’] and this morning, I too find myself turning to Durkheim, but with respect to his insights into the constitution of collective affect. I realise that I deeply miss being with people, even though I am spending all day with people via Zoom.

I initially thought what I missed was a sense of collective intellectual

engagement, but I've now taught an online grad seminar and taken part in an online reading group, and I still feel like something fundamental is missing from my daily life. It can't be physical contact with others as I am not a very physical person except with close family (and they are just about all in my house, twenty-four hours a day now.)

I'm thinking this sense of social isolation might stem from having much less sense of how other people are feeling – I can glean a bit over audio and video but it isn't the same as the intuitive feeling you get when you are in the same room with someone, much less with a group. As Durkheim pointed out, it isn't a matter of 1 + 1 + 1 + 1. You can't just add up the emotions from each little-box-of-a-person on Zoom and get a sense of 'the vibe in the room.' It is much more about the (often tacit, deeply embodied) ways we communicate and collectively create affect, be it 'collective effervescence' or something much less profound.

#### DAY 12/APRIL 6: GLOBAL VS NATIONAL CRISIS

The Queen in her speech today told her subjects (in words that seemed directed primarily at Brits, but were widely reported on here in New Zealand) – that they should rally themselves to best get through Covid-19 ('with good humoured resolve'), making reference to how the UK survived the Blitz. This seems to be one of many sporadic references comparing the current crisis to World War II, mostly highlighting the moral importance of social solidarity and putting a heroic frame on the need to 'make sacrifices' (as Ardern put it in an interview this morning).

But the current global state of emergency seems quite unique as, amongst other things, it lacks an external referent (other than a temporal one). As we watch this spread across the globe, there is a standing news item listing the 'countries that don't have Covid-19,' but I would imagine most of the people in those countries are just as fearful. Clearly this crisis has its centres and peripheries and it is an entirely different thing to be in Lombardy or New York City versus Auckland, but it is hard to shake the feeling that there is nothing exterior to this.

We might say the same about other global crises such as climate change, or the global financial crisis (how would it be if 90% of our daily mainstream newsfeed was focused on the spread of environmental damage – and there wouldn't be a list of countries that are immune – or poverty and unemployment, complete with pink spots marking the rising figures on a global map?)

But to me there is something terrifyingly different about this. There is something

about the speed and brutality of the pandemic, alongside the crucial questions it raises about how best to deploy political and social power to attempt to mitigate it, with respect to not just for a certain group of countries, but for all of us in this world, that defies comparison. I fear that using the nationalist framework of World War II deflects the fact that we need not just national solidarity but global cooperation and global strategising (and also sets an interestingly long timeframe on the period before, as the Queen put it, we can ‘return to normal times.’)

DAY 13/APRIL 7: SOLITUDE

Much has been said about the need to combat social isolation, but I’ve been noticing a lot of people actively seeking out, or creating, spaces of solitude. Our family has discovered the golf course around the block makes for a nice open space to walk in (now that no one is allowed to play golf), but increasingly, I encounter other folks who’ve likewise gravitated there, searching out an opportunity to carve out ‘their own’ bit of green space, where they can be alone, even if just for a moment or two. Similarly, people seem to be using sound to create their own ‘bubble.’ On the weekend I passed houses in which the music was blaring, creating a sonic wall between themselves and the rest of the neighbourhood. I also saw a middle-aged man in his front garden, bent over what looked like an old-style transistor radio, listening to Hindi devotional songs, and via sound separating himself both from the pedestrians on the street and, it seemed, the rest of his household. As the lockdown continues, will we become even more creative in finding spaces that enable a sense of solitude?

DAY 16/APRIL 10: BODIES AS WEAPONS

The Labour-led government is repeatedly suggesting we need to be aware of what moving out of the lockdown will look like, once we get there. At the same time, the New Zealand news is full of increasing reports of people using their bodies as weapons during lockdown. These appear to be occurring along two registers – domestic violence against those who are already engaged in relations of proximity, or by forcibly injecting proximity into the public sphere, through bodily acts that might spread Covid-19, such as spitting or coughing against the police or against general public (*i.e.*, the news report of the man purposefully coughing on other people shopping in the grocery store). While the underlying social dynamics are quite distinct (between acts of domestic violence, spitting on the police, or coughing on shoppers), all of them seem to be suggesting that enactments of the body as a weapon are expanding, and I wonder what this will mean for how we conduct ourselves once lockdown is lifted.

Already there seems to be a wariness among strangers as to if we might be engaging in too close a physical encounter – people jump off the sidewalk and into the street if they see another person walking up the sidewalk towards them (enough to make many of us hyper vigilant while driving, as there are so many people walking in the street now). At the moment, many people seem to be trying to counteract this by being as friendly as possible – and you have complete strangers waving, or shouting hello at you – as they leap away.

#### DAY 19/APRIL 13: COLLECTIVE PAIN

Several recent images have conveyed the scale of the tragedy. ... The mass graves being dug in Central Park, army trucks transporting the dead across Italy under the watchful gaze of a priest and the Italian police, the faces of new-borns in Thailand donned in protective visors. In thinking about the power of these pictures, I find myself returning to Veena Das' (1995) descriptions of pain as a collective sensation.

There is a strongly-rooted assumption in Western culture that our embodied experiences are radically separate and containable within our individual bodies, and moreover, as Elaine Scarry so beautifully elucidates in *The Body in Pain* (1985), that pain causes an impermeable divide, impossible to bridge through language or other intentional communicative acts, resulting in those who suffer from pain finding themselves living in a 'separate world,' a 'world unmade by pain' (Good 1992, 42). Drawing on Wittgenstein, Das problematised this in her work on ethnic and religious violence, not suggesting that one person's pain is identical or commensurable with another's, but rather portraying instances in which pain is inherently collective, existing beyond the confines of particular bodies.

For years I gave a lecture on social suffering where I discussed this idea, and would initially get blank looks from students, until I brought up examples of the visceral sensations you and your friends might feel while watching a horror movie. Then last year the social suffering lecture was scheduled a few days after the Christchurch terrorist attack. Both I and many of the students went to class that day feeling completely emotionally spent. When I started to talk about how we might feel the pain of another in our own bodies, it was like stating the blindingly obvious, putting words to a sensation that was already enveloping everyone in the room (and several students started to cry).

It is, for me, the same with this crisis. I can't imagine what it feels like for those physically struck down by the virus, nor those who have lost someone due to

Covid-19, but I, like so many others, have found ourselves living in a world enveloped in pain. This is not my world, divided from all others. Nor, when I look at these pictures, is it my pain I am contending with. It is our pain – which is not to say that each of our sensations are somehow commensurate, but to denote how the world that has been radically altered by pain is our shared one.

DAY 20/APRIL 14: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

The New Zealand government is now putting the homeless up in hotel rooms, but many are wondering how long will this last? Like most major health crises, Covid-19 throws structural violence into stark relief, underscoring poverty as the key factor in determining who – as the UN warns of disruptions to global food supplies – gets the food they need, the medical care they need, who is more likely to have ‘underlying conditions’ and have them left untreated. As Paul Farmer notes (2009, 23), when it comes to extreme human suffering, ‘an inordinate share of this kind of pain is currently endured by those living in poverty.’

Sadly, many governments seem to be offering more of a helping hand now that those who are on the margins will not only be suffering more, but – and here seems to be the tipping point – it is also feared that unless they get support, they may directly infect, or enable the spread of infection through, the general populace. I had been thinking this crisis was going to require a rethinking of Adriana Petryna’s (2002) biological citizenship, but now I wonder if a closer match is some version of Achille Mbembe’s ‘necropolitics’ (2003), but rather than it being death or extreme injury that makes some people/some bodies take on political meaning, it is their perceived potential to spread infection to others?

That said, the media seems to be more keen than usual to recognise these discrepancies, highlighting the widening gap between celebrities and their audiences as they go through lockdown (*i.e.*, the Ellen DeGeneres story) or, more significantly, reporting on class and ethnic disparities in Covid-19 death rates. Maybe, with the groundwork already laid down by reporting on the structural inequities exposed by natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina or on the diverse impacts of the Global Financial Crisis, now in light of Covid-19, class will become a more familiar rubric of popular media analysis? Or am I being too hopeful here?

DAY 21/APRIL 15: WALKING

One way I have been getting through this lockdown thus far has been through

(extensive) daily walking. Now on our second day of rain and with a forecast of strong winds putting this on hold, it seems fitting to reflect on what walking might mean not just as a form of (currently legally sanctioned) exercise, but a way of supporting mental wellbeing, awakening spiritual and emotional awareness, and a means (and for some of us, a vital one) of engaging with the world.

I walk when I am happy and when I am sad. I've been known to take off for an hour or two of walking when I am angry or even just emotionally or mentally lost and in need of finding direction. There is something about the steady movement, one foot after another, that so clearly contravenes the feeling that I am stuck, mired in unhappiness or indecision, and replaces it with the acutely powerful sense of having accomplished something significant through the most basic activities of propelling my legs, my body and thus myself in one direction or another.

No matter how bad my sense of the situation I am in when I start off, walking clarifies my thoughts and reveals things that were obvious but just outside of my reach. Each footstep forces a shift in perspective. Losing myself in movement (re)connects me with the earth, as well as with a particular city or neighbourhood, with other people, and with the natural landscape around me. Nowadays when time seems suspended and it is hard to remember which day of the week it is, much less where we are in the year, in the academic calendar, or in the crisis – and sitting back in contemplation feels so dangerous as it merely reminds one of the horrors so many around the world are experiencing – walking anchors me to the (seemingly timeless, yet, for each of us, time-bound) world, giving me the freedom to explore the surprise of the next vista, while also imbuing me with a sense of anchorage.

No matter how it is undertaken, walking never feels solitary. It is always about discovering oneself immersed within something bigger, a place which, whatever that place might be, is full of life. While several scholars have noted how our modes of walking connect us with specific cultures and societies (e.g., Mauss 2007 [1935]), for me, walking always evokes a powerful sense of history, conjuring up an awareness of the thousands or millions who have walked here before me and will do so after I am gone. To stretch dance theorist Andre Lepecki's (2004) description of the movement of dance as simultaneously constituting presence and absence, walking creates a sense emplacement while throwing into relief its ephemerality. In doing so, it presents the world as inherently imbued with possibilities, while also underscoring the importance of enacting them.

Sharyn Graham Davies and I have been reflecting on the (very odd) new social form of ‘bubbles.’ It seems to me that in the forty-eight hours we were given to prepare for lockdown, there was an assumption that, for the most part, most New Zealanders would already know who was going to be in their bubble. There was advice from government as to what to do with respect to joint custody of children, or the need to support people living in situations of domestic violence, but unless I missed it, outside of these scenarios, there seemed to be a general assumption that we would just buckle down for the next four weeks with the people we already live with. But the way this would function involves several (often incorrect) assumptions about household composition.

One fallacy that appears to surface in the lockdown regulations is the assumption that the people we live with form an economic unit. Thus the advice (regulation?) that one person from each bubble should do the grocery shopping. What about students sharing a house together or other shared tenancies? These people might live together due to the force of economic circumstance, but they do not form a ‘household’ in the traditional economic sense (they don’t share resources, much else engage in production or consumption together, outside of perhaps consuming shared utilities). In such circumstances the possibility of pooling together money to send one person to the household shop is extremely challenging, and may be just impossible to pull off.

Another fallacy is that our primary relations of care and responsibility will somehow coincide with our bubble. TV ONE is showing a repeated advert informing us to ‘love your bubble’ and is asking viewers to send in videos showing how we enact this. But as in the above example of students or workers living together, a bubble may not involve ANY relations of love, collective responsibility or care. This raises the challenge of what happens when someone in the bubble falls sick (not an unlikely possibility given there is a pandemic) and needs support or care, or someone else to make healthcare decisions on their behalf, (given that those who might normally provide this are locked in other bubbles and cannot respond appropriately)?

And, as we all know, many of us have enduring ties and obligations to those outside our bubble which are now even harder to fulfil. Some families regularly have members who traverse from one household or another, shifting domiciles based on ties of love as well as shifting care-giving responsibilities and economic needs. Even if we do happen to live in a nuclear household, we face challenges of supporting kin who live elsewhere (elderly family members,

adult children who may have lost their jobs in the crisis, *etc.*), friends who live alone, colleagues or community members who are immuno-compromised, *etc.*

The regulations enabling members of one bubble to join up with another, or enabling movement of a vulnerable person into a different bubble (*i.e.*, an elderly person living alone can now move to join another bubble), go a step forward in addressing these complexities. But given all the recent attention to supporting mental wellbeing during lockdown (which I think is a really good thing), it would seem useful to add to these discussions greater recognition of the diverse patterns of co-habitation we engage in – namely, that those who cohabit together do not necessarily equal a household, that a household does not necessarily equal a family, and that the ties of care, love, and obligation many of us are involved in far surpass any of these delineations.

Across the nation there's been a very visible rise in domestic care activities (baking, trying out new recipes, *etc.*), but it remains the case that for some people, it is not a matter of 'making home better' – their sense of belonging or 'at home-ness' may not coincide at all with the residence in which they must currently 'stay home' and live out a period of great stress and anxiety. For others, the choices made in those forty-eight hours were not easy and will have enduring (and sometimes unanticipated) consequences.

#### DAY 23/APRIL 17: WAITING

For a while, I was obsessively following the news with rapt attention. It felt like things were constantly moving. There was the day just before we went into lockdown, when I finished teaching and went straight to the car park and on our drive home from the university, my daughter Anika asked me what I made of the latest news, and I found myself apologetically replying that I was behind, explaining that I'd been teaching for two hours and thus didn't know the latest – and then I realised how ridiculous such a statement would have been in other times, other situations. For a while, whenever I woke up in the middle of the night (inevitably feeling anxious), I'd whip out my phone to see what the US and UK news feeds were running.

Now it feels like the numbers are all blurring together. How many dead? How many recovered? I realise this is by virtue of my privileged position of being able to feel disassociated from the figures. If one of those numbers represented someone I knew, it would have a completely different meaning. But instead not only has living through the crisis come to have its own little rituals (wake up, check the news, make coffee, check the news again, do some work, check the

news again) but they have begun to blur together so that it is hard to separate yesterday's 'breaking headlines,' yesterday's numbers, from today's or even last week's (last week – that time, before Easter, when it was the same, but wasn't). Things have started to feel stagnant, as if in my little domestic and virtual spheres of the world, life has become the act of waiting. But waiting for what? For lockdown to lift? (But it doesn't look like New Zealand's Level 3 will be all that different from Level 4). For the pandemic to go away (via the magic of a vaccine or otherwise)? That seems like a very long wait.

And even the waiting has changed. At the start, it was an attentive waiting, what Gillian Tan (2009, 67), in her essay 'Senses of Waiting among Tibetan Nomads,' has described as the form of waiting that 'reminds us of the etymological root of 'waiting' in French. *Attente*, or 'attending' is to direct one's energies or mind towards something, to pay attention to, to wait for. This reveals a sense of waiting that requires our five physical senses to be attentive and interactive, the way that hunters wait for prey or mountain climbers wait for belay. I have never been a hunter or a mountain climber, but it reminds me of the waiting one feels in the last week or two of a pregnancy – exhausted, ready for it to end, but never complacent ... just in case, the action starts now.

Now it is more like the other form of waiting Tan (2009, 66) describes: 'waiting ... associated with passivity or feeling that one is unable to move or act. When we wait, we are caught in between one action and another, in between moving from one state of being to another. What is more, we are often not in control of our movements but are subject to another will.'

But must such passive waiting necessarily be non-agentive, experienced as out of our control, or does this not require assuming a particularly Western (masculinist, ego-centric) view of what 'control' entails? Can it not be a very agentive act to embrace or even cultivate within oneself passivity?

Maybe there is a third kind of waiting, not alert, attentive, interactive but also not feeling 'stuck' or helpless, but one characterised by intentionally turning down the volume on life in order to let things wash over, until, as Veena Das (2007, 80) so beautifully puts it, through 'the *work* of time,' the situation becomes a very different one and we find ourselves able to act again.

DAY 24/ APRIL 18: 'THE CRISIS IMAGINARY'

The government seems seriously out of step with the general public. Yesterday, the government gave a detailed description of the regulations for Level 3, whilst

repeatedly warning that there are no assurances that when we get to the end of the four week lockdown (next Wed), we will actually transition down to Level 3. The announcements describing Level 3 were, we were told, intended to ‘allow businesses to prepare’ for the eventual transition to a lower level, but they were accompanied by strong warnings that the general public should not become complacent, as well as repeated reminders that Level 4 regulations currently remain in effect.

But – in a predominantly democratic, non-police state like New Zealand – the Level 4 restrictions only work as a form of collective widespread risk management if the general public sees them as valid and meaningful. The very terms ‘crisis’, as Janet Roitman (2013) points out in her analysis of the rhetorical force behind various elements in the ‘crisis imaginary’, ‘state of emergency’, and, increasingly in New Zealand’s ‘Level 4’, have a performative force. Once the risk starts to look as if it is receding, the directives put in place to mitigate it will obviously lose such force. Trying to pretend otherwise threatens pitting the government and the public against one another – a bad idea in an election year, and an especially bad idea when there may be more anti-Covid-19 measures that we will need to collectively, willingly undertake in the near future. It also re-instates some very old stereotypes of rational, forward-thinking states (interestingly in this case, in partnership with rational forward-thinking businesses) versus an emotional, irrational citizenry (portrayed as quick to be swept up by the desire to drop all the restrictions that have been put in place to keep Covid-19 in check) who are thus in need of being governed by the State, rather than being those who grant power to the State.

It didn’t help that in describing Level 3, the government’s metaphors seemed to be stretched to breaking point. Finance Minister Grant Robertson told us we can’t stop now, as we are engaged in running ‘a marathon, not a short sprint,’ – surely by day 2 or 3 it was pretty evident that this was never going to be a sprint? Marathons also tend to have an endpoint that you know in advance, not one that might be extended. Education Minister Chris Hipkins gave a hilarious explanation of how having children of essential workers back at school will not entail breaking their respective bubbles as they will form a ‘new bubble’ that incorporates all their classmates (and then when all 20 of them go home for the day, do they bring their school bubble-mates with them?)

Today, when it finally stopped raining, we – and it seems, all of the rest of West Auckland – emerged out of the house to find the parks and beaches teeming with people. Based on the numbers of cars in the car park, there were many more people who drove to the beach, stretching the meaning of ‘local travel,’

holding picnics or sunbathing (not often seen during Level 4), or obviously chatting with others who are ‘not in their bubble’ given their attentiveness to keeping two meters apart (also not generally seen during Level 4).

Everywhere we passed there seemed to be an air of excited anticipation – and subsequently, and not unexpectedly, a loosening of attentiveness to Level 4 restrictions. No matter how the government tries to pitch it, in response to the news that there may very well be a visible light at the end of the tunnel, the public has shifted its future orientation. We may still be caught in a ‘crisis imaginary’, but we have come back to a much broader framing of the future. After over three weeks of what the government itself has characterised as ‘sacrifice’ being replaced now by a detailed, colour-coded chart or ‘dashboard’ of all the characteristics of Level 3, it is difficult to see how government can expect Level 4 to continue to be self-enforced.

Potentially even more problematic, however, will be the enforcement of Level 3 regulations, particularly as there seem to be some odd discrepancies in what will or will not be permissible. Swimming will be ok, but not hunting or taking a boat out to go fishing (never mind that for some economically marginalised people, particularly in Māori, Asian, and Pacific communities, hunting and fishing are a form of food provision, rather than being viewed as sport or entertainment). Takeaways will be open, as will schools for children of essential service workers, but families are reminded to keep children away from the elderly (never mind that many Pacific, Māori and Asian families, as well as quite a few Pākehā ones, live in multi-generational households). Funerals will be ok, but only ten people will be allowed to attend (so no large extended families, which again has significant cultural implications). If the government wants to keep the sense of all of us ‘being in this together,’ it might be worthwhile to include some more cultural advisors or even a few anthropologists among their advisory team.

#### DAY 28/APRIL 22: SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

I find myself returning to the work of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1989 [1967]) who conceptualised life as lived across three registers (or ‘movements,’ as he put it): 1) the sinking of roots or the building of familial ties; 2) self-projection through the world of work; and 3) self-transcendence, or moving beyond the particulars of our place and time in the world to embrace the universe itself.

The lockdown has forced us to transform our activities across all three, com-

elling us to grapple much more intensely with intimate relationships and domestic dynamics; injecting the world of work (or absence of work) with often dramatic feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and anger, as well as acts of intense goodwill towards one another. I don't know how many email communications I have now had with distant colleagues where the opening line of 'I hope you are doing ok,' which ends up instigating previously unheard of intimate exchanges about how we are actually doing. It has also recast the balance between nature and built environments while throwing into relief, yet again, just how deeply the world is interconnected.

I was initially opposed to the language of a 'new normal' as I wanted to hold onto what felt like the radical abnormality of this situation – *i.e.*, the crisis as a crisis. While I agree that the word 'crisis' is often over-used, for me, it captures the unique scale and depths of devastation, evoking both the affective power and the need to act in the midst of these events. Reinhart Koselleck, in his overview of the historical uses of the concept of 'crisis,' suggests that part of its power is that it connotes both a turning point/the end of an epoch, as well as 'a state of greater or lesser permanence, as in a longer or shorter transition towards something better or worse or towards something altogether different' (2006, 358). Koselleck thus posits understandings of 'crisis' as we now know it, as the starting point of modernity, in that the term gained traction in the mid or late eighteenth century when history came to be seen as necessarily unknown and open-ended (as opposed to grounded in constant principals such as the relation between 'God and man').

The roots of the term stem much further back, and Koselleck underscores several shifts in its usage across European history, including how in its first known usage in classical Greece, crisis (*krisis*) referred to both an upheaval and a moment of judgment, assessment, or critique: 'it meant not only "divorce" or "quarrel"; but also "decision" in the sense of reaching a crucial point that would tip the scales' (2006, 358).

The current crisis seems to fulfil both sides of the coin. With global food shortages looming, we could be on the verge of even more massive global devastation. But there has also been an increased awareness of how environmental damage is tearing apart our health – indeed, a recent story by *The Guardian* proposed that air pollution (specifically NO<sub>2</sub>) might be a key factor determining higher death rates from Covid-19. At the same time, a second *Guardian* story focused on how a dramatic drop in air pollution in Milan during the lockdown has resulted in moves to restrict future car emissions by transforming city streets into walkways and cycle ways. A crisis in the true sense of not only crisis but

critique, perhaps the pandemic may possibly prove to be a ‘tipping point’ in terms of how we recognise and relate to our planet.

DAY 30/APRIL 24: ‘NOT HUNGRY’

Up until a few weeks ago, there were programmes distributing free food, including free lunches for those in need, to kids through schools. But not everyone who was eligible for such food ate it. In her beautifully-written, ethnographic examination of the lives of primary school children in a low decile, South Auckland school, Julie Spray (2020, 103) analysed children’s embodied dispositions and associated discourse of being ‘not hungry’, suggesting how for many of them, ‘lunch means more than sustenance; it is also a highly visible symbol of socioeconomic status and of a parent who is giving care as parents should. Because the spare lunches require special – and public – request, this well-intended charity service marks out children who have unfulfilled needs, establishing the idea that lunches are not meant to be supplied by the school. Lunches are meant to be supplied by parents.’

Spray (2020, 133) goes on to explicate the connections between children’s discourses and embodiments of ‘not hungry’: ‘Instead of risking being seen as scabbers, children may cultivate a bodily practice of “not hungry,” which in itself conditions those children to be less tuned in to hunger signals, and may instead focus attention onto other perceptions – a practice that accrues over time into an embodied habitus of “not hungry.”’

The UN is warning of a global famine (‘of biblical proportions’). Here in New Zealand, with schools closed, some of the school meal programmes have been diverted to home delivery, but need for food is still skyrocketing. In Wellington and Palmerston North, distribution of free food parcels has gone up by 900%. That is not a typo – it is the number announced on the TV news and on Radio NZ (Robson 2020). This is a stark figure, not just in terms of who is hungry, but also those who are ‘not hungry’.

DAY 31/APRIL 25 (ANZAC DAY): RITUAL

First there were teddy bears in windows, then sprawling, coloured chalk Easter eggs drawn across fences and sidewalks. Now bright, red and black ANZAC poppies adorn several of the houses on our street. Some are paper cut outs with semi-filled in crayon scribbles, while others are more intricate cloth or metal creations.

When I first moved to New Zealand, I was surprised by the widespread levels of public engagement in ANZAC day, particularly the ways that people from a broad range of political persuasions actively commemorated those who died during warfare. Death during warfare is charged with a different political meaning in a society that has strong welfare provisions and minimal international military engagement. Interestingly, the past two decades have witnessed a groundswell in popular participation in ANZAC day in ways that rival the nation's national day, Waitangi Day, which commemorates the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between Māori and the British Crown, and has become increasingly politically charged.

This year's ANZAC day feels even more significant, as in lieu of mass gatherings at the dawn service, at dawn people stood up in their houses, in their gardens, or at their mailboxes along the sides of the road – symbolically together, while keeping their distance. I'm used to thinking of ritual in terms of collective embodiment (Turner's (1967) liminality, or Daniel's (1987) transformation via pain), but this is much more about the symbolic display or spectacle. Hardly anyone in my neighbourhood knows each other, in the sense of knowing each other's names, families, or life stories. But through the making and displaying of poppies, there is a very visible collective enactment of 'belonging' that one only needs to walk up and down the street to witness – just as there was at Easter, or when the bears first went up on display. I am struck again by people's palpable desire to demonstrate that – despite our face-to-face interactions being, for the most part, restricted to our own bubbles – they are a part of, and *want* to be a part of, something broader, be it Nation or Community/ies (however they be imagined).

#### DAY 32/27 APRIL: PRE-EMPTING LEVEL 3

There were some strange moments at the beach today. No one is allowed to swim, but the weather was gorgeous, the water was warm, and some people clearly could not resist. Several hadn't brought their bathing suits with them, so they went racing into the water in their underwear, or, in one young woman's case, completely naked [something I've never seen at our local beach].

I was trying to behave and had spent a good while wading in the sea, with my jeans hiked up over my knees – as close as I could be to getting in without swimming. I walked a good distance alongside the beach this way. At one point I passed a very narrow section of the beach where a man and woman, about my age [*i.e.*, late forties], perhaps slightly older, were walking. He stared at me and assumed (wrongly) that I was walking in the water to observe two metres

of social distancing (as there wasn't enough space on that bit of beach for us to share the sand at two metres apart). In a somewhat hostile tone, he called out to me, 'You don't need to nearly drown yourself, we haven't got the plague.'

I was a bit startled, but then laughed and replied, 'It's not that, it's that I really want to go into the sea. This is as close as I can get without diving in!'

At this point both the man and woman started urging me, 'Go in, go in!' And he added, friendlier still a bit gruff, 'It's a beautiful day – you won't get the plague by swimming in there!'

'Go in, go in!'

People's nerves seem really frayed. The language of the 'plague' is telling. And while the unseasonably good weather plus the fact that Level 3 starts in less than forty-eight hours should be making this easier, it seems to be doing the opposite.

#### DAY 33/27 APRIL, LAST DAY AT THE (CURRENT) LEVEL 4: CRITIQUE

In *Thinking in an Emergency*, Elaine Scarry (2011) argues that states of emergency must not preclude public critique. Rather, according to Scarry (2011, 3), we must stay wary of the 'seduction to stop thinking,' particularly given that crises may be ongoing rather than short-lived (and states of emergencies may thus be chronic), it is imperative to sustain democratic debate. Indeed, she suggests it is one of the responsibilities of citizenship to engage in how best to protect one another, both within and beyond national boundaries. In a similar vein, democratic theorist Bonnie Honig (2009) suggests that even during states of emergency, sovereignty ultimately resides with the people. If, as Honig (2009, 3) draws from Arendt, Wittgenstein, and others, 'democratic sovereignty ... [is] ... plural and contingent, ... a constellation of contending forces,' then even in times of crises, there will necessarily be a plurality of voices, making me reconsider my initial distress over protests against 'stay-home' measures in societies as diverse as the United States and Germany. I certainly do not support them, but I realise I need to support their right to contest, even if I strongly disagree with their methods of doing so. Considering the United States and its current presidency, clearly we need to hold onto consensus-building forms of decision making – especially in times of crisis – rather than embracing top-down measures, or we may just all end up following President Trump's latest provocation and inhaling bleach. As New Zealand shifts tomorrow into Level 3 and the criticisms and debates over how best to progress from here intensify,

it is crucial to embrace the cacophony of voices over how, when, and if to move forward as essential to democracy...

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lockdown transformed both my graduate theory seminar and social anthropology reading group into sites for collectively discussing, critiquing, and attempting to make sense of the unusual social and political events that were unfolding; many thanks to my students – Andi al Isra, Miriama Aoake, Claire Black, Laura Cole, Lucy Connell, Kate Harris, Tayla Muir, Deborah Resnick, Imogen Spray, and Michelle Thorpe – for their thoughtfulness, insight and creativity in engaging in these discussions, many of which shaped my thinking and are reflected here. Thank you also to all of those who posted responses to these entries when they were first posted online, in particular: Sharyn Graham Davies, Petra Ezzeddine, Elizabeth Frentzel, Kerry Gibson, Stina McLamore, Julie Park, Amy Speier, Julie Spray, Marek Tesar, Lisa Wynn, Carol Zanca, and Natasha Zaretsky. I would also like to thank Ruth Fitzgerald and the two anonymous reviewers for their very useful feedback.

#### NOTES

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