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Introduction
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Introduction

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Welcome to the fourth issue of *The Ethnographic Edge*. As we write this, the world is experiencing yet another wave of Covid-19. We are grappling with understandings of life and illness that are foreign to most of us in this age of vaccines and public health, advanced surgeries and antibiotics. The virus is challenging the way we live and has established a new common lexicon that includes social distancing, lockdowns and masks.

In the midst of the losses and grief that are sweeping the world, the smaller world of academia is reflecting on what and how we 'do' the academe, and (mostly) adapting accordingly. Teaching practice is now taking place online across the globe, with not only implications for pedagogy but also for recognising just how much human interactions inherent in the classroom mean to teachers and students alike. In addition to the loss of casual interactions before and after class and during breaks, we have lost the moments of eye contact, of shared humour and the life force of the class group. We have lost the ability to gauge the level of class engagement with the material and with our efforts to share our knowledge. It takes quite a different skillset to track student knowledge acquisition via a computer or phone screen than it does to recognise the murmurs and confusion of a class who can't yet grasp new content, or, conversely, who suddenly have that 'aha', *Eureka!* moment. Teachers are reporting exhaustion, burnout and dread about managing their workloads (Flaherty 2020) and students are at increased risk of depression and anxiety (Islam et al. 2020). If this is, in fact, our 'new normal' then we have work to do at the humanitarian interface of our academic teaching practice.

In the research space things are no less fraught, although some academic populations are undeniably faring better than others. Women have submitted fewer academic publications during the pandemic than their male colleagues and less than they did in the same period last year, while men have submitted more (Kibbe 2020, Pinho-Gomes et al. 2020). The ongoing consequences to individual women's careers are likely to be significant, but even more important is the widening of the already existing gender (and wage) gap in many fields. The diversity of academic practice is also under threat from the additional burden Covid-19 has placed on Indigenous populations. Anecdotally, there are many stories of Indigenous students and early career academics who have left their organisations in order to care for their families, whānau and tribes, particularly as Indigenous peoples have significantly higher risk, infection and mortality rates (Curtice and Choo 2020). Additionally, the reduction in university revenues from the loss of international students has placed early career researchers at risk as staff costs are slashed across the global tertiary education sector. The future of the currently existing academy is uncertain, as the consequences of these short-term impacts will roll out for many years to come.

We are launching this issue of *The Ethnographic Edge* into this uncertain global space as a beacon of hope. We have extraordinary authors who are demonstrating a combination of determination to



continue to make a difference and who seek answers to challenges about how we can proceed. We have five papers in Volume 4, of which seven are created by women; two are Indigenous authors.

The issue begins with Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon's poetic ethnography gaze at her innovative response to Covid-19 in what she termed a *crisis curriculum* for her Temple University (USA) students. Coping with many barriers, her graduate-level seminar students, many of whom were in shelter-in-place or quarantine situations, wanted to continue with their projects throughout the semester. The result is linked online as they produced an evocative and heartfelt response to racism, Coronavirus, and changing cultural norms in the United States.

In an evocative and important paper, Tess Moeke-Maxwell and colleagues present an autoethnography of a Māori family's experience of the birth and death of a baby with an anticipated life-limiting illness during the most restrictive lockdown phase, Level 4. *Te Whakatara!—Tangihanga and Bereavement COVID-19* describes the effect of restrictions on their cultural practices and challenges the government of Aotearoa New Zealand to attend to Māori worldviews when considering future pandemic-related controls.

In her paper *Cartography of Evidence, Ethics and Engagement: Researcher Decisions in Representation*, Kerry Earl Rinehart crafts a play to critically examine the use of quotes, poetry and story to locate her doctoral research decisions. She argues for a multi-layered approach to providing reference points for the reader in terms of disciplinary and research scholarship and of the continuity of researcher biography and values. Through the description of the research design and researcher decisions, the situated, relational and textual structure of the research and the thesis can be evaluated.

Allison Upshaw has composed a performative autoethnography in *Black Women as Compost: An Autoethnographic Cantata*. Allison's contribution draws together poetic and musical representations of her work that aim to invite the reader to make meaning for themselves. She creates the space for individual interpretations through the use of a musical staff without notes and the absence of in-text citations. She describes her work as "a call to Black women everywhere to sing their own melodies, to compose their own songs".

Jana Hoffmannová and Luděk Šebek, attendees of the 2014 CEAD hui in Hamilton, are academics from Palacky University, in the Czech Republic. They document, as situated action-sport aficionados, their family's time during quarantine and lockdown in the CR. In a moving duo-ethnography, they reflect on the embodied concepts of freedom, individual and collective meanings accrued to "risk assessment", and life in a post-communist (1989) country. At times humorous, other times touching, boring and frustrating, this account reminds us of a myriad of ways of enacting the shared human experience of a worldwide pandemic.

These varied—and yet strikingly similar, in some ways—responses to the times we live in reflect not only government-centred coping strategies, but also how the human spirit seeks to prevail within both inner and outer constraints.

Ngā mihi mahana (warm greetings)

Jacque and Bob
Co-editors

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