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Governing Emergencies

Peter Adey¹, Ben Anderson², Steve Graham³

Beyond Exceptionality

In the wake of the ‘war on terror’, a simple claim has dominated critical work on the politics of emergency: ‘the state of exception has become the rule’. Finding inspiration in Giorgio Agamben’s analysis of the role of the ‘state of exception’ in democratic rule and life, work has honed in on how the ‘state of exception’ functions as ordinary technique, a paradigm of government and topology. Whether in relation to events of terror, environmental catastrophes or civil unrest, the ‘state of exception’ is no longer, if it ever was, exceptional. Rather, the state of exception – or at least the *possibility* of a state of exception (Fassin & Pandolf 2010) – has proliferated and intensified in a world of emergencies. Lines between norm/normality and exception/exceptionality blur as emergencies become occasions for the “lightning strike” (Massumi 2005: 1) of sovereign power. Sovereignty is affirmed as certain lives are caught in an inclusive-exclusion: “He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable” (Agamben 1998: 28, emphasis in original).

This special issue takes issue with such an analysis of the contemporary. Work on the ‘state of exception’ has provided a powerful and compelling diagnosis of sovereignty, but the ‘state of exception’ is only one way of governing emergencies. As much as the ‘exception’ may have proliferated in analysis, it has proliferated *as* analysis, being extended to a wide range of events and situations. Exception coexists with, indeed may dominate, other ways of governing emergencies. But it is no longer, if it ever was, the single technique or paradigm, nor does it provide a kind of general model for understanding all ways of governing emergencies. Emergencies

¹ Department of Geography, Royal Holloway University of London, peter.adey@rhul.ac.uk

² Department of Geography, Durham University, ben.anderson@durham.ac.uk

³ School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, steve.graham@ncl.ac.uk

have long been governed in ways that do not fit with the 'state of exception'. New or redeployed ways of governing in and through emergencies have emerged in relation to changes in how life and events are problematized and rendered actionable. And the state of exception itself – as technique and paradigm – has itself morphed and been transformed as it is brought into contact with different events and as assemblages of authority and rule are transformed.

Our aim, then, is to disclose some of the ways in which emergencies are governed today in ways that may incorporate but exceed the 'state of exception'. To do so requires that we avoid reproducing a single, always applicable, interpretive key in the analysis of how life is governed through emergency and emergency governance. It also requires that we think again about emergency and the politics of emergency. Our first step in doing so is to turn to current uses of the term emergency and discuss their limits, before we introduce the papers thematically, and then conclude by posing a set of new questions and provocations that the papers cause us to ask and urge.

Emergency

What characterises emergency today, like exception, is the proliferation of the term. Any event or situation supposedly has the potential to become an emergency. Emergencies may happen anywhere and they may happen at any time. They are not contained within one functional sector or one domain of life. The substantive focus of the papers collected in the special issue reflects this proliferation: they range from different types of emergencies and explore emergencies in different domains of life. Typically, emergency refers to an event or situation of limited but unknown duration in which some form of harm or damage is in the midst of emerging (Anderson & Adey 2012). Life can be lived in and after emergency, but also in the presence of an anticipated emergency. Whilst crisis now has more of a sense of geo-historical phase rather than emergent situation (Roitman 2013), emergency and crisis both gesture towards some overturning of normal and normalised order. Emergencies are not, however, merely rare, unpredictable exceptions to an otherwise

stable life. For many, life is lived in a state of emergency in which, as Simone (2004: 4) puts it, situations endure on the verge of emergency in which “[t]here is a rupture in the organization of the present. Normal approaches are insufficient. What has transpired in the past threatens the sustenance of well-being at the same time as it has provided an inadequate supply of resources in order to deal with the threat”.

Nevertheless, emergency as a term is inseparable from faith in action: the promise that some form of action can make a difference to the emergent event. It is no surprise that emergency has become so central to contemporary humanitarian reason. Aligned to moral demands to respond to suffering, claiming that there is or is about to be an emergency is supposed to motivate timely action. We might note how ‘emergency claims’ (Scarry 2010) work across the political spectrum. Consider how, for example, counter-movements to austerity invoke a forthcoming emergency; imagining a post-austerity landscape of ruination to cut through political apathy. Likewise, climate change activism has long involved emergency claims that time for action is running out, alongside invocations of imminent catastrophism and promises of a better future with appropriate action. Emergency claims and the affect of emergency – urgency – have also been central to the advent of new political movements and the emergence of new demands. This means that emergency is not quite equivalent to a series of linked terms such as disaster or catastrophe even though it is often used interchangeably with them. In emergency, the outcome remains uncertain and action still promises to make a difference. Like catastrophe or disaster, though, emergency moves between exactness and inexactness⁴. Emergency has categorical orders of difference to notions such as disaster or crisis, and yet, despite its contextual specificity (to institution, or legal system), the instantiation of emergency can be relatively vague and unclear. This gives the articulation of emergency a quality to be otherwise, to be more or less than itself as it is positioned as a phase liable to be lessened or heightened in magnitudes of urgency or seriousness. It is those ill-judged limits between terms like catastrophe, or crisis, which can mean that, in some circumstances, emergency like crisis becomes politically expedient because it leads beyond its immediate condition, justifying

⁴ Our thanks to one of the anonymous referees for stressing this point.

policies and responses that are disproportionate, or out of line or context. Outside of whatever definitional circumscription that might bound it, the calling of emergency in some of the more catastrophic contexts can become part of “a disaster producing apparatus” (Ophir 2010), in which lives are destroyed in the name of emergency.

And yet, outside of the categories of type or orders of magnitude - which allow emergencies to be compared to others, and resources prioritised towards certain threats and so on (something like potential impact, or likelihood) - emergency is etymologically and definitively contextually specific. For example, emergency may exist as a branch of parliamentary, governmental or executive powers; as an institutional legal apparatus; and as a variously defined categorical distinction over a time-space of events that might present damage, harm or loss of life. It is precisely the variation *of* precisions that is troubling. Emergency takes form in a given circumstance, for given individuals or organisations, over thresholds and other spatial and scalar definitions, and over a variety of things, humans, bodies, technologies, processes, infrastructures, water, waste, pipes, homes, pets and food. In other words, the excessive exactness of emergency is easily unobserved, forgotten, ignored or misapplied in ways that we need to bring into question.

It is important to hold onto, then, the proliferation of emergency as a term and its variable definitional and contextual specificity if we are to follow how, and with what ethical and political consequences, life is governed through emergency. Work that has attempted to do this has turned on questions of exceptionality: the exceptionality of decision and response and the exceptionality of life and events.

First, the Schmitt -Agamben line of thinking about the ‘state of emergency’ has focused on how the power to suspend the legal order - to act outside of the protections, rights and benefits it provides - is held inside the political system. Without conflating Schmitt and Agamben, both are concerned with the affirmation of state sovereignty in the operation of the ‘state of emergency’ (and related terms such as ‘state of siege’, ‘state of emergency’ or ‘state of necessity’). Tracking the state of emergency’s routes from the French revolution, and thus what he terms the ‘democratic-revolutionary tradition’ (5), Agamben (2005) claims the apparatus of the ‘state of emergency’ has become a “paradigm of government”. To summarise what is

a now well-known thesis, Agamben rejects what he reads as Schmitt's attempt to legislate for the exception, instead diagnosing a 'zone of anomie' in which "the state of exception is neither internal nor external to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with one another" (Agamben 2005: 27). In this 'ambiguous zone', life is subject to a double abandonment by and to the force of sovereignty in which exception and rule "pass through one another" (Agamben 1998: 37). Simultaneously bound to the law and abandoned by the law, lives are caught in a tense relation of 'inclusive-exclusion'. Much work in the wake of 9/11 and the advent of the war on terror, has diagnosed how this topology of exceptionality materialises a series of spaces of exception, or how exceptionality has morphed (see Armitage (2002) on a 'hypermodern' state of emergency). The 'state of emergency' is thus treated in this discourse as a global legal-political technique through which sovereign power is performatively (re)affirmed and, in recent work, a distinctive topology that materialises specific ordinary spaces (see Belcher et al 2008).

A second, but related approach to emergency today treats the relation between life and emergency measures differently as a consequence of starting from the emergency as emergent. This line of thinking sees emergencies, and that which calls for or demands response, as not "derived from a base distinction underlying law" but rather instead emergent "from the infinite empiricities of finite life understood as a continuous process of complex adaptive emergence" (Dillon and Lobo Guerrero 2008: 10). The claim is that the radical contingency of environments – their 'turbulent' (Amin 2013) or 'meta-stable' (Massumi 2009) status – necessitates new ways of governing events and life. On this account, there is no longer, if there ever was, a distinction between a stable normal life and a rare, time limited, exceptional and abnormal events. Rather, life itself is understood as emergent, based on sciences of connectivity that "give novel accounts of global-local propinquity, adhesion, adherences, proximities, associations, alliances, virtualities, realities and belonging" (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008: 16). As life changes, and becomes more interconnected, contingent and transactional, so the argument goes that liberal governance has adapted to that changing understanding and new ways of governing

before and after emergencies have emerged and intensified. These include logics that involve action before emergency happens – chiefly preemption (Amoore 2014; Cooper 2008), anticipatory surveillance, and premediation (Grusin, 2010) – and logics that prepare for action as the emergency is emergent – including preparedness (Anderson & Adey 2012; Collier & Lakoff 2008) and resilience (Grove 2013).

Feldman (2004) points out that such logics increasingly centre on the attempted tracking of mobile subjects and objects in and around the transactional infrastructural systems that gird the planet. Efforts centre on trying to continually separate proscribed mobilities, activities and events from the mass of normalised ones that are rendered as the invisible backgrounds of global neoliberalism (which sustain urban consumption, corporate globalisation, legitimate tourism etc.). Such programmes Feldman labels ‘securocratic wars’ – programmes centred on discourses of maintaining public safety through open-ended and martial invocations of emergency (the ‘war on drugs’, the ‘war on terror’ etc.). Central here is the distinction between an emergency and the normal, societal background. Thus, ‘security events’ emerge when what Feldman (2004, 333) calls “improper or transgressive circulations” become visible within and through the disruption or appropriation of urban infrastructure, and are deemed to threaten the ‘normal’ worlds of transnational capitalism. At the same time as transgressive circulations are rendered as security events or emergencies, the global logistics, commodities, tourism, labour, migration and financial flows sustaining neoliberal capitalism are rendered invisible by their very ‘normality’. These are the ‘non-events’ of “safe circulation” organized through infrastructural backgrounds to link up transnational archipelagos of safe or risk-free spaces for capital and socioeconomic elites. “The interruption of the moral economy of safe circulation is characterized as a dystopic ‘risk event’,” Feldman suggests:

“Disruption of the imputed smooth functioning of the circulation apparatus in which nothing is meant to happen. ‘Normalcy’ is the non-event, which in effect means the proper distribution of functions, the occupation of proper differential positions, and social profiles.” (Feldman, 2004, 333)

Of course, the declaration of a 'state of emergency' happens before, or as, emergency happens, but what preemption, preparedness and other forms of action do is expand the spatial-temporal field of intervention in the name of a future event. Here claims of emergency resonate with, and often become inseparable from, what Ophir (2010) describes as processes of 'discursive catastrophization' in which appeals for exceptional response are made on the basis of imminent danger (or on the basis of claims about what Ophir terms 'protracted disastrous conditions'). Life is here treated as a 'turbulent' field of far from equilibrium processes, in which the lines between normal and exceptional events and normal and exceptional response blur as emergencies are governed in advance of their occurrence.

What we learn from this approach is that multiple ways of governing emergency coexist, none of which are reducible to exceptionality as technique, paradigm or topology (nor, though, are they necessarily separate from exception). These ways of governing emergency are simultaneously ways of governing by emergency: life is reorganised in relation to the emergency that is to come or has just been. The special issue resonates, then, with other attempts to open up the 'closures' of the exception/exceptionality paradigm and think again about emergency. We might note here, for example, Honig's (2011: 10) effort to sense the "over life" through a sustained effort "to diagnose the sense of stuckness that emergency produces in its subjects and to identify remaining promising opportunities for democratizing and generating new sites of power even in emergency settings". Like Honig, our aim is not to replace an analysis centred on the 'state of exception' with an epochal account that simply diagnoses an alternative, over-determined paradigm. Whilst compelling, we would caution against claims that the contemporary is now governed solely as a state of emergence characterised by "the anywhere, anytime potential for the emergence of the abnormal" (Massumi 2009: 155), or as an "event field", in which each event is "a phase transition that may emerge without warning, instantaneously and irreversibly transforming the conditions of life on earth" (Cooper 2008: 82). Rather, we want to open up critical work on the politics of emergency by exploring specific instances in which life and events are governed in, with and through emergency, and hone in on what, if

anything, is common across those specific instances and what alternative possibilities exist. By which we mean that our focus is on how emergencies may be problems for government, as well as emergency being a way through which government is assembled and achieved. It is a problem that calls for the invention of new techniques or the redeployment of existing techniques. Furthermore, if there are many partially connected ways of governing in and through emergencies then we need to think again about how they relate to modes of power; modes of power that might work very differently to the 'lightening flash' of a sovereign decision on the exception from outside of life or the capacity to 'mould' an always-already emergent life from within life.

Beyond Exceptionality

Beyond the exceptional measure or exceptional event as the spatial-temporal leitmotif of contemporary emergency governance, papers in this special issue attend to more subtle, sometimes quieter, localised, and even non-secular kinds of emergency. These see the governance over and through emergency taking place within the normal operation of state, parliamentary and governmental power. As Collier and Lakoff very clearly assert in the context of the United States' expansion of emergency management in the second half of the 20th century, it "has not involved grants of exceptional powers to the executive branch". If the 'state of exception' appears simply not to have happened in various cases, papers in this special issue go further to suggest that attention to the 'state of exception' may have cloaked or obscured not the suspension or separations of powers, but other sets of crucial relationships entangled in the protection and promulgation of social life but whose links are becoming frayed and fractured. What Cooper identifies as "the *specific juridical constitution* of the mid-twentieth century social state" is one such example of a foundational assumption of "statehood that was crucially shaped by the logic of social insurance and administrative law", a 'chronic emergency' intensifying amid the contemporary neoliberal reorganisation of capital and politics.

Beyond secular times

Beyond the exceptional event, which has tended to denote a period of crisis peaked by exceptional measures to deny some catastrophic or apocalyptic imaginaries or affects that make the future present as an end (with or without some form of revelation regarding the here and now), multiple temporalities play out in emergency governance. These do not simply blur or fudge linear times of a catastrophic or a threatening future, or the singularity of a punctual event, or the strike of a sovereign decision as a blip, break or caesura with the past. Instead, we see emergency temporalities distributed to various techniques and technologies.

Temporalities other than the apocalyptic can be seen in the development of emergency scenarios that produce particular space-times in which possible futures are brought into the present to be acted upon in the form of scenarios and exercises. This is witnessed in De Goede and Simon's study of emergency planning within the European Cyber Security arena, as scenarios of cyber threat are developed to balance the production of new capabilities and subjectivities as well as the inculcation of existing protocols, routines and rationalities of response. In some respects this has become a more familiar understanding of contemporary northern European practices of emergency management, but it opens up a wider interpretation of emergency's temporalities in a broader non or post-secular register.

For Cooper, at stake in religious involvement in international emergency aid is a Pentecostal conception of the *eschaton* situated in the 'here and now' and not the end of times. Thus providence becomes a politics of conditional salvation in a political theology highly receptive to neoliberal economic policies. Cooper explores this application in the debt-ridden status of Sub-Saharan Africa. From *chronos* to *kairos*, redemption is to be found in a manner of an 'indefinitely renewed debt' which enables charitable emergency relief to replace public or state directed resources and response. Furthermore, the emphasis on conduct such as in Museveni's policies in Uganda, institutionalises conservative moral codes embedded within ideas of normative familial structures and the dogmas of faith based

initiatives, especially around public health programmes funded with foreign donorship.

Opitz and Tellman's intervention provides an important engagement with Nikolas Luhmann's writing on time and social orders, which he calls 'temporal orders'. As they argue, the emergency figured in contemporary governance reworks a secular eschatology. So that rather than seeing an emergency interval as a potential space of theological redemption, instead, emergency politics "valorizes the interval between now and the catastrophe to come as a domain of decision and action within this world". Opitz and Tellman explore this peculiar, but now common (to this special issue) address of the interval across multiple temporal social orders, from economic financial derivatives to law. These two domains combine quite fixed time thresholds and boundaries, such as the time-limit of a derivative, or the chronomos enshrined in the time consuming manner of legal justice. As with Cooper's assertions over the neo-pentecostal revision of humanitarian relief into a kairos of extreme immanence, the temporal order of emergency is based on action now rather than eschatological deferment.

Scales and Agency

A major emphasis of the papers is therefore to shift the scales of how and where emergency operates, and the ways in which it is produced, distorted and governed through complex forms of agency. For Collier and Lakoff, emergency arrangements are concerned with "more mundane problems: how to best allocate resources or delegate responsibility for the political administration of emergency in the face of an uncertain future", while in De Goede and Simon, emergency is generative of a series of concerns set at the level of relationality, that is, a set of cyber security practices targeted at fostering the generation of interoperabilities between systems and organisations. The move is predominantly to the small scale, the local, the idiosyncratic and, somewhat paradoxically, the distributed and the diffuse.

In De Goede and Simon's study while the consequences of cyber emergency threaten to be wide-scale, the focus of the scenarios and the exercise they witness are

the little things of 'bureaucratic interconnections and banal practices'. Likewise, in McCormack's paper on the emergency of price increases which have plagued US economic policy since the Second World War, inflationary affects are produced through various versions of emergency which gather publics because they are decidedly mundane. These kinds of emergencies are productive of and governed by affects, emotions and materialities that are highly localised within a more national problem, so that price inflation is governed as a series of small changes that potentially effect expenditure on consumer products at the level of the population. The future emergency is governed by intervention in the everyday.

And yet, these objects of security perform in ways that exceed normal senses of agency and even location. They are distributed in a manner that disrupts scales and distances - especially as they are mediated. For example, McCormack exposes how emergency atmospheres and inflationary sentiments crossed the boundaries of the domestic and public sphere, mediated by television announcements, talk shows and other representations. Crowds also act as exemplars of a volatile uncertain of emergency governance, as conduits of dangerous and unruly affects, as shown in Claudia Aradau's analysis of UK counter-terrorism and emergency management practices. For Aradau, the crowd is a shifting, uncertain, object of emergency government inseparable from ambiguity. Furthermore, Opitz and Tellman argue that within financial derivatives, we see a further temporal ambiguity, between the 'binding and blending' of utter certainty over an emergency, and an uncertain one.

These ambiguities also chime with uncertainties over agency. De Goede and Simon's bureaucratic infrastructures appears to behave with what they describe as a 'bureaucratic vitalism' - to have almost a life of its own. Cascading failure and unpredictable non-linear causalities characterise a 'cyber milieu'. This means that for Dutch national cyber security officers, an emergency may form from anywhere, cross boundaries unpredictably and manifest in multiple points. In the government of emergencies, multiple ambiguities co-exist and trouble any sense of a stable, secure, 'object' that is nothing but the secondary effect of government action.

Making actionable

In almost all of the papers, governing emergencies requires a repertoire of specific capabilities to make the emergency actionable. We see some of these practices identified in the papers through the location of particular object-targets which are conditional for emergency and the governance of its response. We can focus on two sets: affective intensities and economies, and systems and infrastructures.

For Aradau, the notion of the crowd figures highly in a continuum of security discourses and practices, from counter-terrorism to emergency management and policing. Figured through transformations in the ways in which the nature of threat has been imagined in many western liberal democratic societies, Aradau argues that the crowd has emerged as an important 'subject' of contemporary violence, subject to emergencies, terrorism and relatedly criminality. Under this configuration, the emergency of the crowd is its volatility which has been pathologised by its capacity to panic and become suggestible. Under different governance regimes influenced by other human sciences, the crowd is a group characterised erstwhile by calm collective-empowerment, animated not by the momentum of communicable passions, but through social identify formation and common bonds. In this sense, knowledge of crowds is essential to the performance of different security, policing and planning practices that intervene on crowd formation and action.

Rendering the emergency actionable through the affective contagion or group solidarity that may characterise the behaviour of crowds under threat (of terrorism or police), seems to give types of governance a substance or a surface to act upon. In several of the other papers, particular affects figure in specific urgencies that come under the purview of governance. These affects are not objects of vulnerability but more conditions to help accelerate - often politically - acts that attempt to take hold of the event. For instance, the movement of legal justice in Opitz and Tellman pushes and resists against demands for urgency, or in McCormack's very different study, the identification and production of particular atmospheres of urgency - space times of affectivity - compel the actions of individuals, publics or governments. As McCormack puts it: "An inflationary atmosphere in this sense names the condition

within which a particular kind of economic emergency may be incubating with the potential to become a generative participant in the volatile unfolding of that condition". Going with these atmospheres are also a range of devices, technologies and techniques to vigilantly watch and monitor indicators of inflation.

In De Goede and Simon, and Collier and Lakoff, attention is paid elsewhere to the constitutive vulnerability of larger socio-technical systems, complex networks and their physical infrastructures. Endemic to the social, economic and industrial modernisation of North America and Europe (the main contexts explored in these two papers) are networked infrastructures which are identified as the object-target of potential emergencies. Networked societies produce new kinds of vulnerabilities. But as with atmospheres, there is a simultaneous extensiveness and locality to a network; a hiddenness and agency which makes them hard to grasp and manage.

In all, our papers compel our attention to be turned both critically to and away from the 'state of exception', and to develop other manners of address that are predominantly outside of a central trope of emergency as exception. If anything, the papers in this issue articulate a distributed, quotidian emergency, and in other areas of life outside of the juridical, such as finance, economics and development and humanitarian aid. Aradau suggests that her approach has been to move instead to regimes of knowledge and veridiction, more precisely, fields of practice within which professionalised knowledges more or less circulate. For Opitz and Tellman, legal regimes, texts and practices as well as financial products and monetary instruments (such as derivatives) produce their own temporalities and futurities. In Collier and Lakoff's terms it is similarly a turn to a distribution of central to regional and local powers, in Cooper, to faith-based initiatives, charities, NGO's - chronic emergencies - and, in McCormack, to distributed affects and capacities to sense or register economic crisis. In short, then, a decentered and diffuse sense of governing emergencies is present here.

Concluding Comments

Writing in the midst of the 2007/8 financial crisis, Slavoj Žižek (2010: 86) identified the existence of an emergent global 'state of economic emergency'. "We are now entering a period in which a kind of economic state of emergency is becoming permanent, turning into a constant, a way of life", he wrote. Žižek's identification echoes other diagnoses of the 'state of emergency' in the contemporary condition. In the translation of state of emergency into a way of life, it resonates with diagnoses of the (neo)liberal present that stress that 'life itself' is now governed in emergence, what Massumi (2009: 164) describes as the "proto-territory of emergences". In contrast to these claims about emergency and the contemporary, the papers keep open the question of how emergencies are governed today, by showing the ambiguity of the objects of a distributed, everyday, emergency government, and exploring the everydayness of specific techniques and logics. Instead of reducing specific instances to another illustration of a dominant technique, logic or topology, the papers stay awhile with the distributed nexus of practices, techniques, knowledges and logics that render events or situations governable. Doing so, allows them to open up a series of new questions about what it means to act in the 'interval' of emergency, on the 'verge' of emergency or 'after' emergency. Specifically:

- How does 'emergency' as a legal-political and practical-operational term differ across different sectors or domains of life and how does 'emergency' relate to linked terms such as 'accident', 'crisis', 'catastrophe', 'disaster'?
- How and with what consequence are past or future emergencies made present i.e. through what discursive and affective means?
- How have specific logics been invented, (re)deployed, and/or intensified to govern in and through emergencies, including 'preparedness and all hazards security' precaution, pre-emption and resilience.
- How do different ways of governing emergencies – from intervention in everyday atmospheres to the deployment of law- coexist with one another; supporting one another, resonating, strengthening or otherwise relating?

- What catastrophic and providential relations with life are involved when governing emergencies: how is life fostered, abandoned, differentiated, destroyed, made to live, disavowed and so on?
- What forms of legitimacy and authority follow from acting in relation in the 'interval' of emergency or invoking a 'suspension', 'threshold' or a 'return'?
- How are forms of power enacted, expressed, reflected, and intensified as emergencies are governed, forms of power that extend beyond sovereignty.
- What alternatives to forms of power open up in emergency, how are forms of power contested, negotiated and reworked and how do new ways of being and living happen in emergency settings?

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