The uneven distribution of futurity: Slow emergencies and the event of COVID-19

Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic strains conventional temporal imaginaries through which emergencies are typically understood and governed. Rather than a transparent and linear temporality, which envisions a smooth transition across the series event/disruption-response-post-event recovery, the pandemic moves in fits and starts, blurring the boundary between the normal and the emergency. This distended temporality brings into sharp relief other slow emergencies such as racism, poverty, biodiversity loss, and climate change, which inflect how the pandemic is known and governed as an emergency. In this article, we reflect on COVID-19 response in two settler colonial societies—Australia and the United States—to consider how distinct styles of pandemic response in each context resonates and dissonates across the racially uneven distribution of futurity that structures liberal order. While in each case the event of COVID-19 has indeed opened a window that reveals multiple slow emergencies, in these and other responses this revelation is not leading to meaningful change to address underlying forms of structural violence. In Australia and the United States, we see how specific slow emergencies—human induced climate change and anti-Black violence in White supremacist societies respectively—become intensified as liberal order recalibrates itself in response to the event of COVID-19.

Keywords

COVID-19, emergency, events, race, violence, Whiteness

Key insights

COVID-19 strains the spatial-temporal imaginary which has been central to how events are understood and governed as emergencies. Some responses to COVID-19 in Australia and the United States intensify slow emergencies, specifically those associated with the fossil fuel economy and anti-Black violence. Responses to COVID-19 need to be placed in the context of the uneven distributions of futurity which underpin liberal order.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The event of COVID-19 is inseparable from emergency claims. States and other national and transnational actors that govern life commonly describe COVID-19 as an emergency and are justifying exceptional measures in the name of ending the emergency. Even as specific measures vary, and the public moods that now characterise COVID-19 polarise and fragment, the use of the vocabulary of emergency is shared across different types of states and governments, whether populist, conservative, or (neo)liberal. Emergency has also been used by non-state actors (predominantly but not exclusively on the right) who are critical of lockdown measures and

claim the real emergency is economic, or a suspension of civil liberties and 'freedom.' The coexistence of these different articulations of emergency is no surprise. Alongside crisis, disaster, and catastrophe, emergency is one of the few genres we have for making sense of situations which, in some way, threaten to open up different, usually unwanted futures, and therefore demand action to bring them to an end. Beyond the plethora of actions undertaken in the name of emergency, the affect-imbued imaginary of emergency has been central to how COVID-19 has been encountered and made sense of. While a little different in the case of COVID-19, as we discuss below, the term emergency implies an interruption and suspension of 'normal' life, simultaneously indicating that this interruption and suspension is time-limited and can be brought to an end.

At the same time as emergency is being used to govern COVID-19 and to contest lockdown, activists and other non-state actors are increasingly drawing attention to the 'slow emergencies' (Anderson et al., 2020) that intersect with COVID-19 and amplify its effects in complex ways—including anti-Black violence, domestic violence affecting women, the continued erasure of Indigenous people's rights, and the increasing economic precarity of young people. Situations that do not fit easily into the categories of either event or condition, slow emergencies are characterised by processes of attritional lethality. They seem to lack the sudden onset and recognised scene of impact that are normally named as emergencies (Anderson et al., 2020). And yet, for those (including us) who recognise these situations as emergencies, there is a pressing need to act in order to bring them to a close.

In this article, we reflect on the relation between various slow emergencies and COVID-19 as an unfolding event, drawing on still-emerging experiences in the United States and Australia. Following Sparke and Anguelov's (2020) call to examine the uneven geographies of the COVID pandemic and response, we explore how the entry of COVID-19 into the rhythms and spacings of everyday life in settler colonial societies has unevenly entwined multiple temporalities of the emergency present. In Australia, we detail how the emergence of COVID has been cast as an opportunity to defend resource nationalism and petro-masculinity in the face of the "real" emergency—question marks over Australian fossil fuels' future created by the global turn to renewable energy. In the United States, we examine how public health measures designed to slow the virus' spread were received as posing an implicit limit on White desire—that is, a threat to the ability of White-identifying subjects to act out their vision of the future.

Read together, we suggest that these otherwise distinct cases illustrate how the pandemic has been exposing and unsettling some of the prevailing and highly unjust distributions of futurity that condition forms of life in settler colonial societies—leading to subtle recalibrations in racialising techniques and practices that concretise this uneven distribution of futurity throughout the population. We use the phrase *uneven distribution of futurity* to signal how the modern experience of futurity—an anticipatory orientation to the future as potential for change, growth, development, and becoming-otherwise to oneself—has been conditioned by historically-specific *de-futuring* practices that violently deny these same possibilities to the racialised Others of the

modern Self. As Thomas (2016) has reminded us, modern temporality is not singular, but rather holds together multiple forms of temporality simultaneously: anticipatory temporality exists alongside and through the repetitive temporality of recurring plantation violence and the durative temporality of suspension within violent anti-Black and anti-Indigenous environments (see also Hartman, 1997; McKittrick, 2013; Sexton, 2010).

As we have detailed elsewhere (see, for example, Anderson et al., 2020), an attention to this uneven distribution of futurity orients thought on emergency governance and its underlying biopolitical rationalities towards a founding violence in ways that are attuned to historically specific racialising assemblages (Weheliye, 2014). These assemblages mark some subjects as White, fully Human and in possession of lives worthy of protection, pastoral care, and perpetuation, while marking others as Black, female, less-than-Human objects in the future-making projects of White male subjects.[1] These deep divisions between and across lives means that the dominant linear temporal imaginary of emergency management—which envisions a smooth transition between phases of the event from disruption, to response, and ending with post-event recovery — is revealed as not equally applicable for all subjects. Only some subjects are automatically presumed to have a right to post-event recovery; for others such a future is always contingent and precarious—that is, always an emergency, but a slow and unrecognised one. In the case of COVID-19, the question, then, is how the spectacular event/disruption of COVID-19 and its associated emergency measures intersect with liberalism's racially uneven distribution of futurity. In this light, emergency measures both help generate uneven racial, gender, and class *impacts,* as has been well documented (Ali and Keil 2008; Mullings et al 2010), and they are also vectors along which the racialising assemblages that condition normal, 'pre-event' life are reinforced, or perhaps challenged. Rather than the smooth performance of COVID-19 as a classic time-bound emergency against a neutral background, we argue that current response measures (and efforts to motivate people to cope with them) reflect how the COVID-19 emergency has been intersecting with context-specific manifestations of the multiple slow emergencies such as racism, patriarchy, poverty, biodiversity loss, and climate change that characterise normal liberal life and its arithmetic of futurity.

We expand on this argument and approach in the next section, exploring the relations between emergency responses and uneven distributions of futurity. The following sections bear witness to some of the ways in which slow emergencies in Australia and the United States have intersected with responses to COVID-19, specifically responses which prioritised a return to or perpetuation of post-pandemic normality. The third section examines how Australian planning for post-COVID-19 recovery is based on continued state endorsement of the fossil fuel economy, in doing so preserving existing distributions of power, and intensifying the future harms associated with climate change. In this process, the uneven distribution of futurity that underpins Whiteness and maleness is reproduced. White masculinity is also at stake in our next example—anti-lockdown protests in the United States. Section four considers how they emerged out of a dissonance between the immediate pandemic response, on the one hand, and the expectations of White privilege, on the other. In both cases, we see how specific slow emergencies—human

induced climate change and anti-Black violence in White supremacist societies respectively—become intensified as liberal order recalibrates itself in response to the event of COVID-19. In conclusion, we argue that some responses to COVID-19 intensify the *uneven distribution of futurity* that structure liberal governance.

2 | EMERGENCY GOVERNANCE AND UNEVEN DISTRIBUTIONS OF FUTURITY

Emergency is an effort to ensure the continuity of the future. A happening is named and governed as an emergency not only because it threatens harm, damage and loss, but crucially because its outcome(s) remains uncertain: the future is open. The uncertainty of the future relates not only to what might be harmed, damaged or lost, but also the means through which the actual and/or threatening event is addressed and (if possible) brought to an end. In the assumption of both the openness of the future and the possibility of active intervention making a difference, emergency is part of a modern relation with time and temporality (Koselleck, 2004). Because of this distinctive relation with the future, emergency also reconfigures the present-future relation. The present becomes an interval for action, imbued with a more or less fragile hope that the event is not over, and that action can still be effective (Anderson, 2017).

The governance of emergency has been a recurring problem for liberal democracies such as, in our cases here, Australia and the United States. For polities organised around the principles of liberal political philosophy, such as universalising appeals to individual equality and freedom (ideal assumptions that, as we will see, are in practice highly racialised), the ability to respond to an emergency does not rely on an individual sovereign figure who exercises an absolute decision in the time-space of emergency, but rather a dense administrative machinery calibrated to "anticipate and govern emergency situations within the framework of constitutional liberalism" (Collier & Lakoff, 2015, p. 37). Logics of anticipatory action and calculative, imaginative, and other techniques congeal in a variety of styles of emergency management that develop capacities to anticipate, respond to, and recover from emergency events without recourse to a state of exception (Anderson, 2010). Importantly, these logics often operate through distinct visions of the temporality of emergency (Neisser & Runkel, 2017), and so involve different ways of relating to futures and acting in the present. For example, logics of preparedness rely on techniques of scenario planning to identify capacities and limitations in existing emergency response protocols. These anticipatory practices mobilise fear and anxiety that 'we are not prepared!' to compel action in the present. The aim is to develop specific response capacities that will prevent future unexpected events from unfolding into catastrophic systemic breakdowns (Collier & Lakoff, 2008; O'Grady, 2018). Logics of resilience, in contrast, view future systemic disruptions as inevitable, and utilise techniques such as community-based training and simulations to work on affective relations between individuals and their environments. These techniques attempt to design resilient 'cultures of safety,' metastable social and ecological systems capable of topologically transforming in ways that preserve the system's form, function and identity while undergoing change (Grove, 2018).

Different logics of anticipatory action—notably the logic of resilience—can be seen at work in the various responses to COVID-19, even as COVID-19 as an event mixes fast and slow temporalities, and distributed and punctual spatialities, in ways that perhaps differ from other events that are usually governed as emergencies. Key here is the way pandemic responses express place-specific linkages between emergency management and public health techniques, strategies, regulations, and spatio-temporal imaginaries. Public health techniques that restrict a population's movements and interactions, such as quarantine, stay-at-home lockdown orders, curfews, and mandated social distancing and face mask requirements, provide policymakers with a window of opportunity to institute testing and contact tracing measures that will control the disease's spread and a resumption of normal activities. This suspension in the pandemic present is enabled by what Everts (2020) terms the 'dashboard view' of COVID-19 that territorialise the pandemic as a problem requiring a *national* emergency response. Through techniques such as "heat maps and aggregated numbers" the dashboard has become a "biopolitical technology of anxiety that visualises the unfolding disaster, suggesting strong responses by national and regional governments" (ibid., p. 260).[2] Intertwined with the dashboard view, the emergency present is constituted through viral and epidemiological modelling. As Rhodes et al. (2020, p. 1) have argued, viral models operate as projections of anticipated COVID futures, functioning to "close down unknowns into a governable present" while simultaneously accounting for COVID-pasts, whereby "projections are actualised and particularised in social practices in the present."

While COVID-19 may be governed in ways similar to other events—through a suspended present that becomes an interval for action—the epidemiologically-mediated suspension of daily life introduces subtle transformations in emergency management's promise that emergency action will bring to an end the loss of life associated with the pandemic. Typically, emergencies are oriented around a cycle of normality-interrupting event followed by resumption of normality. This cyclical time is playing out in some COVID-19 contexts as lockdown measures are being eased and the 'resumption of normality' is being welcomed as a solution to actual or anticipated economic emergency. But as Flexer (2020) has emphasised, COVID-19 is marked by the specific temporal register (20)19, prefiguring a suspended present in COVID-time, a lost age, and an imagined post-COVID horizon. Writing of the COVID epoch, Flexer suggests that "there was no arrival but only an absolute awareness of being in the midst, temporally and spatially (and indeed the distinction has vanished here) of the present moment, the moment as it presents presence" (p. 4). The COVID pandemic destabilises the absolute division between the time of "normal" life and the "exceptional" time of emergency that structures emergency management and reproduces an uneven distribution of futurity. Moreover, as the term 'new normal' and invocations to 'learn to live with' the disease indicate, the possibility that COVID-19 signals a longer-term change is increasingly being considered. Planning for a seemingly unreachable post-COVID-19 world appears to be an increasingly interminable task. Nevertheless, efforts to render legible the enduring implications of the pandemic for individual and population heath— often framed in the terminology of 'long COVID' (Callard and Perego 2021)— constitutes a critical horizon in the political activisms marshalled in the context of COVID-19. There are thus

no guarantees about the timing of COVID-19 and its (non-)presence in the future. Indeed, even if the virus *per se* fades from view in a given context, the spectre of its potential return eviscerates the possibility of ever returning to life without it. In an effort to understand this context, Baraitser and Salisbury (2020) have analysed the temporalities of 'containment,' 'delay,' and 'mitigation'—terms that (if heavily contested) are central to public health interventions designed to predict and contain and, to some degree, control the spread of the virus—around a notion of *waiting* in pandemic time. They have also argued that "the often mundane temporalities of socially reproductive labour—temporalities of waiting, repeating, staying, returning, maintaining, enduring, persisting"—indeed practices of care more generally—are typically obscured in a logic of the return.[3]

At the same time that COVID-19 plays with the division between the 'normal' temporality of daily life and the 'exceptional' temporality of emergency, it also brings into sharp relief the racialised assumptions of futurity that condition this modernist temporal imaginary in the first place. Research on the geographies of emergency has increasingly emphasised how emergency politics revolves around often under-acknowledged assumptions about what exactly constitutes the 'normal.' While the cyclical temporal imaginary of formal emergency management assumes that emergencies are momentary, arrhythmic disruptions to the banal ebb and flow of everyday routine, scholarship in geography, anthropology, Black studies, Indigenous critical theory, and related fields have drawn attention to the way that 'normal' life is constituted through a series of racialised exclusions and violence. For example, Berlant (2011) has foregrounded how the experiences and expectations that make up the good life—the qualified life of the bios, lives whose promised future of growth and betterment are marked as worthy of ethical care, and political attention and resources—emerge out of affective environments that absorb banal, quotidian forms of violence, harm, and suffering into the timings and spacings of daily life in contemporary liberal societies. Hartman (1997) similarly has detailed how the norms and expectations of White subjects in Jim Crow US were shaped by the legal and practical delineation of what privileges and claims could be denied to Black subjects. Indeed, for Mills (2008), despite liberalism's avowed belief in universal equality, in practice, the development of liberal theory and its institutionalisation in the formal and informal political life of liberal polities has always been tied to divisions between White, male subjects of liberal rule who can claim full personhood, and non-White, non-male subjects who remain subjugated under racialised and gendered hierarchies. The liberal doctrine of moral equality reflects only the narrow, White and male experience of modernity—a 'White abstraction' (Mills 2008: 1387) that institutionalises ignorance of the way modern cultural, political, and economic life has been founded on African slavery, Aboriginal expropriation, and genocide.

Scholars in Black studies and related fields have extended these arguments on the racialisation of modernity to modernist temporality. The temporal imaginary of the modern, liberal subject—an anticipatory temporality that grasps the future as open-ended potential for self-styled improvement—is always doubled by the durative temporality of suspension, the extended present of getting by (Povinelli, 2011; Sexton, 2010), and the repetitive temporality of recurring

forms of racial violence that, in the case of African Americans and others in the African diaspora, link the plantation and the present day (McKittrick, 2013; Sharpe, 2016; Thomas, 2016). The result is a form of time and temporal experience that scrambles the relation between present and future presumed in both the linear time of future progression *and* the cyclical time of return. Instead of these clear temporal divisions, political life in liberal social orders, the valued life of the *bios*, is conditioned through an uneven distribution of futurity that promises a future of growth, development, change and becoming to valued (White) life *through* the denial of this same futurity to instrumentalised (Black) life.

The institution of emergency management, as a technique of liberal governance that seeks to secure the conditions for the modern subject's promised future of growth and development, is thus implicitly structured around this racially uneven distribution of futurity (Anderson et al., 2020).[4] Radical disaster scholars and critical geographic researchers have long recognised that emergency response measures have uneven racial, gender and class effects that reinforce existing inequalities. For example, United States government responses to the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the 2010 Haitian earthquake marked marginalised African American and Haitian peoples, respectively, as security threats, justifying a militarised response that withheld humanitarian aid from the most impacted populations (Mullings et al., 2010). Similarly, the Canadian government's response to Toronto's 2003 SARS outbreak reinforced racialised imaginaries of Chinese citizens and communities as the source of disease (Keil & Ali, 2006). However, our argument here points to a distinct ontopolitical relation between emergency management and racialisation, for it draws attention to the way emergency management, as a biopolitical technique of liberal governance, is always already organised around a racially conditioned experience of futurity. The problematic of the future as a problem of thought and government rests on a history of racialised, (de)futuring violence whose contours come into sharp relief during the event of emergency. At stake in emergency management is *how* the emergency event, and emergency response, intervenes in the racially uneven distribution of temporality that structures modern liberal societies. Whose claims on a future of growth and betterment are worthy of care and attention through emergency management actions? Whose claims on this future are denied, devalued, and bypassed within emergency management procedures? How do these socially and spatially uneven denials of futurity to Others secure (or challenge) the possibility of futurity for the liberal Self?

Acknowledging the racialised biopolitics of emergency governance thus focuses attention on how COVID responses intervene in a racially uneven distribution of futurity. In some contexts, the pandemic has sparked a reassessment of the welfare state. Some emergency logics enacted in the context of COVID-19 have provided the pretext for broad—if temporary—interventions designed to secure employment and shore up the foundations of the welfare state. As Matthewman and Huppatz (2020, p. 1) have reported, "welfare reform, progressive taxation, nationalisation and universal basic income now seem more politically palatable," reflecting the persistence of Keynesian economic doctrines and an apparent (albeit momentary) crisis in project of economic restructuring (Adkins & Ylöstalo, 2020). At the same time, other responses—and

reactions to these responses—are recalibrating the norms and institutions of contemporary governance in ways that extend and intensify the uneven distributions of futurity that structure everyday life in liberal societies. In the following two sections, we examine how specific COVID responses in Australia and the United States, respectively, have been *intensifying* rather than ameliorating contextually specific slow emergencies.

3 | SNAPPING BACK FROM COVID: AUSTRALIA'S "GAS-FIRED RECOVERY"

One of the paradoxes of COVID-19 response is that the imperative to return to 'normal' typically entails reconstituting patterns of social, ecological, and environmental change that created the conditions for the pandemic and its uneven socio-spatial outcomes. As commentators have recognised, COVID-19 is a pandemic appropriate to the Anthropocene (Searle et al., 2021). Rather than an exceptional, one-off event, it is instead a harbinger of disaster-filled futures precipitated by infrastructurally-mediated human transformations of earth system processes. Zoonotic diseases will likely continue to increase as petrochemical and other development pressures decimate niche habitats and create new vectors for human-non-human viral and bacterial transmissions. Concurrently, a global economy reliant on international travel and exchange, mediated by the burning of fossil fuels, will continue to hasten their transmission, despite public health-related border restrictions states are already enacting.

One of the much-discussed 'silver linings' of the pandemic was a drop in the rate of greenhouse gas emissions (Le Quéré, 2021). Far more influential upon climate change than this temporary dip, however, are governments' fiscal recovery policies. The potential for governments to pour investment into initiatives that help their economies 'bounce back' and decarbonise (Hepburn et al., 2020) to reduce the 'threat multiplier' of climate change has made COVID-19 a potential turning point for climate change action. Many governments have chosen to use their COVID-19 fiscal responses to advance greenhouse gas mitigation through strategies such as increasing their renewable energy capacity (Khanna, 2021; Piantra et al., 2021). In contrast, Australia's right-wing Morrison government (like pre-Biden USA) has defiantly gone in the opposite direction, not only failing to invest decisively in decarbonisation (reinforcing the nation's position as a laggard in renewable energy investment) but investing directly and heavily in the fossil fuel industry. In this way, COVID-19 has reinforced and not disrupted Australia's (un)sustainable energy politics. Whereas "for most states, investing in the low carbon transition is a win–win strategy that both stimulates economic recovery and reduces the cost of future fossil-fuel imports" (Kuzemko et al., 2020, 3), Australia's relatively light dependence on the latter and its status of one of the world's main exporters (including being the largest exporter of liquid fossil gas) means its fossil fuel focus is the question of production. While this focus on production too could generate win-win outcomes, Australian government policy is to *grow* its fossil fuel production capacity. Thus, more than simply 'crowding out' decarbonisation efforts as Piantra et al. (2021) fear, the Australian government's fiscal pandemic response has actively tried to derail them, using the near-term COVID-19 emergency as an excuse to tackle what it considers the true long-term emergency: the social and economic devaluation of the fossil fuel regime.

The ways in which the pandemic disruption has been co-opted in Australia into a rear-guard action by the fossil fuel regime and used to help secure a 'carbon revival' (Palmer & Carton, 2021), is evident in the government's framing of its response, which strongly echo the hegemonic discourses about fossil fuels in the country identified by Wright et al. (2021). In particular, the fiscal COVID response has been used to support the powerful 'fossil fuels are in the national interest' discourse, notably the arguments that fossil fuels underpin 'economic prosperity and high living standards' and 'jobs and growth' (Wright et al., 2021).

It is important to note here that the centrepiece of the conservative government's response has been what Prime Minister Scott Morrison calls a "gas-fired recovery," which is "about making Australia's gas work for all Australians."[5] More specifically, the gas-fired recovery strategy refers to 'unlocking gas supply' and delivering 'more Australian gas where it is needed' at a competitive price to thereby 'fire our economic recovery' as a nation. As the press release puts it: "This commitment will encourage investment to unlock Australia's vast resources potential—boosting exports, jobs and energy supplies." It is a vision that reflects the influential role of the extraction and sale of coal and national gas reserves to emerging Asian economies in Australia's macroeconomic growth of the past decade. To secure this ongoing growth and "return to normal", the government argues, more gas must be 'opened up.' In addition, a gas-fired recovery is argued to generate trickle down benefits to consumers in the form of lower gas prices. Moreover, it is justified as a climate action measure, albeit one of a deliberately conservative type. In this way, the pandemic aligns with what Wright et al. (2021, p. 7) call the "acknowledging CC" discourse in which the marginally lower greenhouse gas intensity of gas relative to coal means "the rapid expansion of gas extraction and export … was promoted by the industry as a major solution to global emissions mitigation." As the CEO of a major lobby group, the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association put it: "Australian LNG is doing its bit in addressing the global challenge of reducing emissions while also growing the Australian economy". This statement was made six months before COVID-19 but it has been continually reinforced since the pandemic through the 'gas-fired' response.[6]

Undermining the Australian Government's claimed concern about emissions is its further justification of a gas-fired recovery on the basis that more gas is needed to secure the electricity grid against blackouts—playing on an existing discourse about the side-effects of introducing renewable energy to the grid, and seemingly at odds with the governments purported commitment to technology neutrality in energy policy, and the general assessment of declining demand for gas-fired energy over the next thirty years (AEMO, 2021). "Our plan for Australia's energy future is squarely focused on bringing down prices, keeping the lights on and reducing our emissions" states the Prime Minister in the media release on the Government's plan for a gas-fired recovery. A specific sense of 'normal' is at stake here. It is about protecting modern electrified, consumptive ways of life, securing gas's future in the economy, and reinforcing existing economic distributions and an associated petro-masculinity. It is about further normalising the already dominant cross-national 'fossil fuels forever' climate imaginary identified by Levy and Spicer (2013) that envisages the future as one of never-ending economic

growth enabled by abundant fossil fuels, speculated technological solutions to climate change (carbon capture and storage), and the resiliency of nature. It is a deeply historical vision of the future. As Jolley and Rickards (2020) note about another contemporary manifestation of the 'fossil fuels forever' climate imaginary—the pro-Adani coal mine campaign—the dominant temporality it invokes is 'backwards looking.' While the COVID-19 recovery plan has "progressed" from coal to gas, it retains this backwards orientation, both to try to conserve the existing distribution of power and status, and to turn society's back to the threats that lie ahead. Armed with the STEM graduates the government is trying to reprogram universities to produce, it is a plan that aims to secure the dominance of the fossil energy elite against emerging criticism.

The Australian Government's economic recovery plan was presented as a 'snapback.' While the terminology has since evolved to 'comeback' the defensive politics and focus on returning to a prior world remains (Bongiorno, 2021). The decision to originally focus on snapback—which Bongiorno (2021) has suggested reveals 'the spirit of the Morrison government'—is also telling. As argued by Chandler and Reid (2016, p. 1, italics added), under neoliberalism—and we could add, openly authoritarian governments—a snapback notion of resilience is "the fundamental property that peoples and individuals worldwide must possess in order to become *full and developed subjects*" (see also Grove, 2018). Failure to be resilient forfeits one's right to the future. In the post-COVID 'normal' the Australian government's response is constructing, futurity is offered to others, but only on the condition that they are resilient to the demands, pressures and dislocations of the Anthropocene. As people stumble on the many obstacles that the 'externalities' of the fossil fuel economy throws at them, including but not limited to climate change and its associated threat of more frequent pandemics, not only do they suffer the immediate effects of their particular and likely unseen emergency, they face a loss of political status that threatens to delegitimise their right to support. In an analysis of the Morrison government's pandemic response, Sean Kelly (2020, no pagination) has diagnosed the worldview it has revealed: "you can judge people by how their lives turned out." For those involved—which is a growing proportion of Australians—the repetition of the process of stumble, struggle, slip in status, deepens the slow emergency of everyday survival.

We come then to a final aspect of note about the centering of gas in Australia's pandemic response. Despite the Australian government's rhetoric about jobs, once gas infrastructure is constructed, it employs relatively few (Stanford, 2020). In contrast to coal (Mitchell, 2009), and in keeping with the other liquid fossil fuel—oil (Bridge & Le Billon, 2013), the gas industry has a physical form, geographic character and employment structure that does not encourage unions, democratic management or decentralised energy. Instead, it is top-heavy, reliant on highly controlled specialist access and knowledge. Combined with the embedding of gas into the Australian economy as an industrial and domestic energy source and manufacturing feedstock, and the embedding of gas industry advocacy within the federal government (Knaus, 2020), this geo-economic organisation bolsters the gas industry's ability to control not just the economy but the political discourse and associated material and symbolic distribution of futurity. It is no coincidence that the financial support distributed through the Australian governments' fiscal

recovery package has flowed along the lines it had etched out far earlier, reinforcing a history of subsidising the fossil fuel industry and distributing public money to business. As Kelly (2020, no page) has put it, this is:

> the story of much of the government's response: those who are already accustomed to receiving help from this government—the gas industry, homeowners, shareholders, business owners—are those who have done best out of the government's response to the pandemic.

Such support helps immunise the fossil fuel regime and its supporters against hardship and reinforces their claim to futurity, even as the carbon intensive, ecologically degraded Anthropocene they perpetuate calls all of our futures into question.

4 | RECALIBRATING WHITENESS: ANTI-LOCKDOWN PROTESTS IN THE US

The question of who and what has a right to the future underlies national government economic policies during COVID-19 and plans for the 'post-COVID-19 recovery,' with conventional notions of economy intersecting with existing distributions of futurity to highlight and generate uneven outcomes. In Australia, the United States, and other countries, those most likely to deny climate change and resist mitigation efforts, and to cast climate change in terms of identity politics, are conservative ('system justifying') White men (see, for example, Krange et al., 2019 on Norway, Milfont et al., 2021, on New Zealand). As seen again in COVID-19, studies repeatedly indicate that relative to other groups White males tend to downplay environmental risks, especially those that threaten human health and safety, in part because potential social responses threaten their privileged identity and autonomy (Marshall et al., 2006, p. 31). Just as public health interventions on COVID-19 constrain people's 'right to exhale' (wherever and however they want), climate change mitigation interventions generally constrain people's 'right to pollute.' As such, it is unsurprising that both are aggravating conservative White men, and those who identify with the norms, values and hierarchies of White, male, authoritarian patriarchy.

Whiteness, like race generally, does not refer to phenotype, but rather to a structural position in White supremacist societies. Whiteness is defined here by the expectation of futurity: the expectation of limitless self-authoring freedom, or the capacity to act out the world according to one's individual will and desires (Baldwin, 2012; Smith & Vasudevan, 2017). These expectations also stake a claim on the futurity of non-White others: rather than recognising others as equally Human, with equal expectations of futurity, Whiteness carries with it the expectation that non-White others are instruments in the realisation of White desire. Racism, as Gilmore (2007) reminds us, is about the dehumanising exposure of others to premature death—an exposure that instrumentally conditions White futurity in the first place (Pulido, 2017; Ranganathan, 2016). Blackness, on this understanding, is a paradigmatic position within White supremacist societies that designates instrumentalised life constitutively excluded from the category of the Human, an object in and for others' world-making projects (Sexton, 2010; Weheliye, 2014; Wilderson, 2020).

The White capacity to expect, claim, and inhabit a future which underpins and animates the use of emergency to govern life is predicated on the calculated and violent denial of the Human capacity to become otherwise for Other, non-White peoples. COVID-19 response procedures thus hold in tension two competing biopolitical demands on emergency governance. The demand to secure "the population's" well-being through a mix of public health and emergency response activities sits uneasily alongside the racialised demand to secure the privileges of Whiteness implicit in the temporal imaginary that animates emergency governance. While the history of public health has been closely tied to a racial and colonial violence (in the United States, see Domosh, 2015; Trujillo-Pagan, 2013), in important ways, COVID-19 public health guidelines and expectations directly challenge the privileges of Whiteness. In contrast to the (neo)liberal vision of the self as an atomised, deracinated, and responsibilised, resilient individual whose decisions fully determine future outcomes, the pandemic immerses the self within a wider system, or functional environment, cast in terms of population-level health outcomes. There is an implicit ethical comportment towards the Other here that is irreducible to a calculative, instrumental logic. Acting responsibly does not involve pursuing an optimal, individually rational outcome, but rather acting in a manner that takes into account the health and well-being of others: it is to adjust what the subject does, how they do it, when they do it, and who they do it with, by reflecting on how the subject's actions will impact the immediate and long-term life chances of others. This practice of acting responsibly entails rethinking the self as part of a wider system, connected to others across space and time through vectors the disease brings into sharp relief, in large part through epidemiological technologies of visualisation and surveillance outlined above.

This implicit challenge to limitless White desire has shaped the contours of popular responses to COVID-19 emergency measures in settler colonial states such as the United States and Australia. In the former, popular news media quickly replaced coverage of closed schools and businesses, cancelled conferences, and scenes of professional sporting events being halted mid-match, with scenes of angry, unmasked protestors, many armed with automatic rifles, surrounding locked entrances to statehouses in Michigan, Ohio, Washington, and other states whose governors had introduced strict lock-down measures. The timing of these protests is revelatory: throngs of spittle flecked White protesters did not materialise until public health experts began warning that COVID-19 mortality rates were far higher among Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations than among White populations. Whether expressed through a demand for sacrifice to secure national economic performance—illustrated by one federal US politician's assertions that elderly Americans would be "willing to take a chance on your survival in exchange for keeping the America that all America loves for your children and grandchildren" or protestors' demands for the return of their enjoyment, to "open our bars," "sacrifice the weak—reopen TN [Tennessee]," "don't cancel my golf season," or simply "I want a haircut," the pandemic became a political issue once it became clear that pandemic mitigation required limiting White desire to protect non-White (and, in this case, elderly) populations.[7]

The racialised response to COVID-19 public health measures, and the growing calls to reopen the economy, no matter the human cost, signal a subtle recalibration of White privilege in response to the ethical demands of pandemic response. As Hartman (1997) emphasises, the experience of White privilege, a claim on modernity's promised future of unlimited growth, is achieved by continually demarcing what rights, privileges, expectations, and claims can be legitimately denied to non-White others (Hartman, 1997). Scholars working in Black studies have been careful to emphasise that Blackness is not an ontological condition, but rather is contingently assembled through a variety of techniques of racialisation that structure geo-historically specific privileges of Whiteness and forms of anti-Black violence (McKittrick, 2011). Importantly, these techniques are calibrated against a backdrop of what Berlant (2011) calls "environmental" conditions: affective atmospheres that absorb those everyday micro-violences into the rhythms, timings, and spacings of daily life in White supremacist societies. COVID-19, and subsequent efforts to institute various pandemic mitigation restrictions, disrupted those rhythms in a way that triggered folk across a wide range of political economic positions whose identity and sense of self-worth hinges on their ability to identify with the privileges of Whiteness. State-mandated school and business closures, cancellation of conferences, concerts, sporting events, political rallies, and so forth, introduced new limits on White-identifying individuals' actual and potential abilities to act out their desires, at times and places of their choosing. And importantly, these limits on White desire and White comfort were introduced in the name of protecting primarily non-White populations most susceptible to the disease. These limits on White desire and comfort are an inversion of the biopolitical calculus of White supremacy. Black death has never been an impediment to White privilege in White supremacist societies. Rather, it is what fuels the insatiable thanatophilia of White desire (Wilderson, 2020), for it reinforces the instrumentalisation of Black life and thus affirms the privilege and freedom of Whiteness.

Anti-lockdown protests, in this light, arose as part of a panicked White response, an attempt to reassert the privileges of Whiteness through forcing open the economy. Attempting to force the removal of public health restrictions during a pandemic represents a novel twist in racialising technologies, for they express, through the threat of mass violence, White demands on the state to withhold protections that public health regulations could provide to minority and at-risk populations through the law, and law enforcement. A new racialised distribution of futurity in the time-space of pandemic emergency emerges here. Whether the demand to reopen the economy no matter the cost in human lives comes from denizens of corporate boardrooms, right-wing politicians, or from shaggy-haired rifle-toting protestors, its racialising effects are the same: it reconfigures emergency apparatuses, recalibrating law, emergency response, and public health regulations in ways that force at-risk populations to expose themselves to the possibility of infection and premature death in order to preserve the privileges and comforts of Whiteness.

5 | CONCLUSION

The forms of de-futuring violence evident in some COVID-19 responses in Australia and the United States can be understood as ongoing topological recalibrations of Whiteness in reaction to the arrhythmic event/disruption of COVID-19. Read together, the reactionary hyper-individualised White supremacist imaginaries fuelling US anti-lockdown protests resonate with the hyper-individuating affective environment that suffuses post-COVID-19 recovery planning in Australia. At stake in both is the possibility for recalibrating liberal order in settler colonial societies—and specifically, the racially uneven distribution of anticipatory, durative and repetitive temporality that structures this order—to the arrhythmic disruptions COVID-19 introduced.

In this sense, we can recognise how a racialised *uneven distribution of futurity* that sustains liberal order in settler colonies such as Australia and the United States is at stake in public health emergency responses to COVID-19. As we have detailed, interlinked slow emergencies such as climate change and the socio-spatial inequalities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic are situated within wider structures of racialised violence that create uneven experiences of temporality and futurity (Anderson et al., 2020). The event of COVID-19 destabilises the racially uneven distribution of futurity that sustains both the political economy of capital circulation in the Anthropocene and the libidinal economy of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence that sustains White privilege. The human and economic losses of COVID-19 undermine the convenient fiction of the deracinated, resilient, self-authoring subject that sustains liberal fantasies of the good life, while also calling into question the continued viability and feasibility of continued fossil fuel-based capitalist development. For these reasons, the pandemic has been heralded as an occasion that might initiate new ways of living otherwise. And yet, the transparent (cf. McKittrick, 2006), linear temporality of pandemic emergency management that orders and organises pandemic response and recovery initiatives interferes with these uneven distributions of futurity in constructive and destructive ways, amplifying and intensifying slow emergencies of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence, poverty, neoliberal abandonment, biodiversity loss, patriarchy, and climate change. Rather than a promised return to normality, the intersection of COVID-19 emergency response and recovery with the uneven distribution of futurity in liberal societies is creating new geographies of futurity. Those we detail in this article, concerned with the reassertion of fossil fuel economies and White privilege, intensify the racialised instrumentalisation of the Earth and humanity.

Perhaps the most common reading of the relation between named emergency events such as COVID and neglected slow emergencies positions the former as a window onto the latter: the named emergency reveals or exposes and renders perceptible an ongoing slow emergency which would otherwise remain hidden (or perhaps is trivialised or responded to as spectacle). The relation between named emergencies and slow emergencies is a tensed one, however, which this hopeful emphasis on revelation or exposure does not quite get at. As we have detailed, while the named event reveals or exposes, the attention given to it and the action generated around it can also render the ongoing slow emergency imperceptible in new ways. The relation is one of revelation *and* concealment, with named emergencies therefore serving as occasions of both

opportunity and danger for activists, NGOS and other affected or interested parties attempting to generate attention and galvanise action around ongoing harms and suffering. What is intensified as slow emergencies and named emergencies intersect is, we argue, the *uneven distribution of futurity* that structure liberal governance. Thus, while the spectacular emergency of COVID-19 has indeed opened a window that reveals multiple slow emergencies, in the cases of the responses detailed in this article this revelation is not leading to meaningful change to address underlying forms of structural violence. Instead, the unfolding response and recovery are laying bare the extent to which settler colonial societies are thanatophically invested in maintaining racially uneven distributions of futurity—even if these lead to post-COVID-19 genocidal and planetary catastrophes.

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[1] We acknowledge here the diverse forms of care—and caring—that characterise multiple experiences of COVID-19, alongside the often-intense policing of who is cared for and how. The vocabulary of care in this context evokes, for example, the populist sentiments of 'clap for carers'—oriented toward the affective veneration of "those occupying more visible and more 'elite' roles within health services" (Barnes, 2020, p. 1)

[2] For one example of this biopolitics in action, see the consulting firm BCG's website, which closely ties its pandemic response operations to both business resilience and racial inequality and vulnerability: https://www.bcg.com/en-us/featured-insights/leading-in-new-reality/win-the-covid-fight/overview

[3] See also: http://waitingtimes.exeter.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Waiting-Care-in-Pandemic-Times-The-Waiting-Times-Project.pdf.

[4] We recognise, following Spillers (1987), Weheliye (2014), Sexton (2016), and others that this racialised Other to the modern Self is in practice marked by their body, and thus incorporates multiple axes of difference, including race, gender, sexuality, age, and abilities.

[5] https://www.pm.gov.au/media/gas-fired-recovery

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[6] https://www.appea.com.au/all_news/lng-exports-sustaining-australias-economic-growth/

[7] See, respectively, https://nypost.com/2020/03/24/texas-lieutenant-governor-says-seniors-would-rather-face-coronavirus-than-kill-economy/; https://www.fox13news.com/news/bar-owners-employees-say-state-unfairly-left-them-out-of-plans-to-reopen; https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/sacrifice-the-weak-sign-real/; https://www.buzzfeed.com/mjs538/signs-from-covid-19-reopen-protests-across?utm_source=headtopics&utm_medium=news&utm_campaign=2020-04-20.