Slow emergencies: temporality and the racialised biopolitics of emergency governance

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Abstract

How lives are governed through emergency is a critical issue for our time. In this paper, we build on scholarship on this issue by developing the concept of 'slow emergencies'. We do so to attune to situations of harm that call into question what forms of life can and should be secured by apparatuses of Emergency governance. Through drawing together work on emergency and on racialization, we define 'slow emergencies' as situations marked by a) attritional lethality b) imperceptibility c) the foreclosure of the capacity to become otherwise d) emergency claims. We conclude with a call to reclaim 'emergency'.

Keywords: Emergency, Harm, Damage, Governing

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Slow emergencies: temporality and the racialised biopolitics of emergency governance

I. Introduction

In 2016, the Governing Emergencies Network gathered in South Australia to discuss emergencies[11]. While the state has had its share of 'classic emergencies', our primary focus was something that no longer fulfilled the normal emergency criterion of a spectacular event, if it ever had; the legacies of atomic tests carried out in the 1950s and 1960s at Maralinga, the traditional homeland of the Pitjantjatjara Anangu people. Part of a military testing regime, these tests were set in the shadow of the violence of settler colonialism and ongoing British imperial power. They had a devastating effect on the traditional custodians of Maralinga Country. Not only were many killed immediately and subsequently, the survivors continue to live with its violent embodied and spatial effects, including high cancer rates, loss of cultural connections, forced dispossession and estrangement from their Country, exposure to radioactive contamination if they return, and the depleting effects of continuing to fight for justice (Borg 2017, Mattingly 2014, Haywood and Smith 1998). The 'black mist' that Yankunytjatjara elder Yami Lester, an indigenous survivor of the tests and leading advocate for justice and recognition, describes as hovering over his family's camp after the *Totem I* test in 1953 (Lester 2000) was only intensified by the policies of official secrecy adopted by both the Australian and British governments, and the complacency of military authorities about the presence of indigenous peoples in the test sites and subsequent clean up operations.[2]

We met with relatives of some Maralinga survivors to hear about the ongoing impact of the bombs on their everyday lives, including the stress of not knowing whether or how the radiation was going to manifest in their bodies or children, whether they will ever be able to return home, and where their ancestors' bones now lie. In such a context, the normal notion of Emergency as a punctual event inducing an immediate response was starkly inadequate. At the same time, the ongoing effects of the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Intervention in indigenous communities to the north of Maralinga - where the Australian federal government mobilised the military to occupy 73 Aboriginal communities under the guise of protecting children and addressing crime and delinquency - were a chilling reminder of the limitations and abuses of "emergency" claims (e.g. Watson 2011). Writing in the context of the

intervention, Tess Lea (2012) argues that "indigenous people sit in the *slow-burn category* of inexplicable and permanently ongoing state interference" (p. 119, emphasis added).

The conditions Australian indigenous communities face in their everyday struggles to get by forced us to re-examine the relation between the state - or any institution that governs (Duffield 2007) - and those individual and collective lives variously rendered in/secure through contemporary techniques of emergency governance. It led us to what we call *slow emergencies;* a concept at the intersection of two largely disparate bodies of literature. The f*irst* is a rich literature from feminist, postcolonial and critical race theorists on what is variously called slow violence (Nixon 2011), crisis ordinariness (Berlant 2011), quotidian disaster (Sharpe 2016), slow disaster (Knowles, 2015), everyday terrorism (Pain 2014), chronic urban trauma (Pain, 2018), institutional violence (Cooper and Whyte 2018), continuous ruination (Stoler 2013; Ureta 2016) and structural violence (Galtung 1969). Each of these concepts responds to a fraying and breaking down of the geo-historical promise and hope that the everyday or ordinary can be separated from emergency/disaster. As this work emphasizes, this promise and hope was only ever available to certain valued lives, came at a cost to other racialised, gendered, and classed lives, and has ongoing (after)lives embedded in the persistence of colonialism and other material and affective infrastructures of violence (see also McKittrick 2006; 2016; Krupar 2013).

Second, the biopolitical mobilization of "emergency" resonates with literature on governing formally recognised Emergencies (with a capital E), which cautions against an unthinking embrace of the emergency term. In particular, it unpacks how individual and collective life in liberal societies is increasingly governed through a variety of techniques, strategies and rationalities of emergency. Far from a transparent and objective category describing situations of impending social breakdown and disorder, emergency signals one problem-space amongst others where liberal order has become structured *through* an uncertain and dangerous future (Foucault 2008; Collier and Lakoff 2015).

In bringing these literatures into conversation with each other, we seek to address two key problems: *first*, work that draws attention to racially and gendered differentiated experiences of harm and suffering allows us to rethink emergency as a biopolitical category. In particular, this work destabilizes the equation between liberal life and an anticipatory temporality that work on governing Emergencies often takes for granted. We argue here for the importance of *racializing emergency:* to focus on the way emergency claims emerge out of, and reinforce, a racially uneven distribution of temporality *within* modern societies. The (white) liberal subject that anticipates a future of growth, change, development and becoming

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emerges through techniques of racialization that *also* produce (black and Indigenous) subjects suspended in a durative temporality of decline, stagnation, decay, *and* a repetitive temporality of recurring plantation violence.

Second, thinking emergency as racialized emergency destabilizes the biopolitical relation between liberal governance and emergency that work on governing Emergencies has often taken for granted. Attending to the multiple temporalities of liberal order opens onto a terrain of political struggle about the ability to claim an emergency *and* have this claim recognized as ethically and politically relevant. The concept of slow emergencies points to those situations of harm and suffering that question what forms of life can and should be secured by Emergency governance. It helps translate un- or barely-bearable conditions inseparable from ordinariness into something demanding urgent action. A slow emergency is thus marked by the disjuncture between an emergency claim and the racializing assemblages (Weheliye 2014) that structure which subjects may claim a future in need of protection. The concept lays bare the racialized foundations of Emergency governance and introduces an unresolvable ethical demand for withheld recognition, exposing the line between the endemic and eventual in a way explicitly oriented to the racially uneven distribution of harm, suffering, death, and futurity within late liberal societies.

Below, we develop this argument over three main sections. First, we describe how geographers have unpacked processes of 'governing through emergencies' that blur the lines between everyday life and emergency. Second, we review research on environmental racism and critical race theory that explicitly engages with themes of slow violence and the racialized distribution of everyday violence within liberal social formations to think through the ways liberal biopolitics – and thus Emergency governance – are structured through techniques of racialization that produce uneven distributions of anticipatory, durative and repetitive temporality within the population. Third, we elaborate the concept of slow emergencies to explore how racializing emergency renders the relation between Emergency governance and the anticipatory temporality of liberal life contingent to the prior production of racialized difference. To conclude, we summarize these arguments and consider their relevance for geographic research on race, biopolitics and emergency.

II. Governing Through Emergency

A range of work in geography and allied fields has traced the work emergency does in the advent and (re)production of existing and new forms, practices and relations of power.

Stimulated by the 'war on terror', research has shown how contemporary liberal order is secured by governing through the logics of Emergency with a capital E (Adey 2016; Amin 2013; Agamben 2007; Anderson 2015; Aradau 2015; Cooper 2008; Dillon & Reid 2009; Grove 2013; Graham 2011; Massumi 2009). On the one hand, events or situations which are designated as emergencies are governed in ways that are designed to contain and curtail classes of events, and people that are designated as threats to an existing order. Governing through emergencies primarily hinges on draining an event of its eventfulness, by reducing its potentiality to disrupt, end, or overturn. On the other hand, liberal order governs through emergency in the sense that claims to an emergency - sometimes strategic declarations that an emergency has happened, is happening or will happen - can justify actions that (re)order bodies and relations for pre-existing reasons. Within this broad emphasis on 'governing through emergency', two main lines of research have developed.

First, a line of research concerned with *emergency as exception* has unpacked the work that the 'state of emergency' as juridical-political category and instrument does in the (re)making and (re)ordering of spaces and bodies (Neal 2006; Coleman 2007; Braun & McCarthy 2005). Here the emphasis is less on the materialities and affects of the event designated as an emergency, and more on what is enabled through the act of formal declaration and the acts that follow. Building on Agamben's (1998) neo-Schmittian engagement with sovereignty and the exception, research has disclosed the intensely uneven geographies of exclusion that are founded through the 'state of emergency', and the myriad ways in which people suffer and are damaged in the name of emergency. This emphasis on the 'state of emergency' reflects the fact that emergency declarations and subsequent actions often reveal the relation between democratic life and its authoritarian others as fractured and fragmented (Ophir 2007). In a 'state of emergency' visible impacts and effects of power manifest in and through bodies, typically framed in terms of the production of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998). Research into racial violence following Hurricane Katrina (Braun and McCarthy 2005) and the 2010 Haiti earthquake (Mullings et al 2010), for instance, shows how action in a state of emergency draws on and reproduces black disaster victims as disposable lives (Giroux 2006) while pursuing a goal of sustaining the existing socio-ecological order.

A second strand of work troubles this emphasis on the 'state of emergency' by approaching emergency as one *technique of liberal rule* amongst others. Governing through emergencies happens through innumerable mundane techniques designed to enable either the continuation or swift return of the non-emergency everyday. These techniques include

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exercises (Anderson & Adey 2012; Schoch-Spana, 2004; O'Grady 2016), shelters (Fredricksen 2014), scenarios (de Goede 2008; de Goede & Randalls 2009), and participatory activities (Grove 2014a). This research examines: the problem that situations designated as emergencies pose for governance; efforts to grasp such situations and render them actionable as emergencies; and how the practical operation of particular techniques of governance change what an event is and might become (de Goede & Randalls 2009; Lakoff & Collier 2008; Lentos & Rose 2009). Governing through emergencies is shown to involve a set of disparate, partially connected activities that happen through spatially distributed networks of anticipation including: forms of preparedness, preemption and precaution action (Amoore 2013; de Goede & Randalls 2009; Cooper 2008; Lakoff 2007; Massumi 2009)); detection-diagnosis (Luque-Ayala & Marvin 2016); and response and recovery (Anderson 2015). Rather than a juridico-legal category confined to the spaces and topologies of the exception, governing through emergencies appears here as simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary, materialising in scenes and situations of emergency, before returning to the background life of otherwise unexceptional spaces (see, for example, Barker (2012), Hu (2018)).

Despite important differences, work on emergency-as-exception and emergency-as-technique emphasize how emergency as a juridical-political category, set of governmental techniques, and atmosphere functions to sustain liberal rule. Following MacIntyre's (1989: 345) assertion that liberalism's teleological goal is "no more and no less than the continued sustenance of liberal and social order," emergency is at once an occasion in which liberal rule is placed in question *and* (re)consolidated. Governing through emergency promises to bring events to an end by attempting to (re)produce recognizable cyclical or linear sequences of, for example, order-growth-development, disruption-stabilization-recovery, or disruption-adaptation-transformation. The goal is to drain an event of its eventfulness, making it into a recognized, completed happening and bringing the potentiality that the term emergency gestures towards to an end. This forclosure of potentiality is by no means always a problem; as Povinelli (2011) reminds us, the burden of becoming-otherwise is often unevenly distributed. But it becomes a problem as it is harnessed to the goal of perpetuating liberal order, and emergency and disaster management are transformed into forms of "institutionalized anti-action" designed to "ward off unexpected novelty" and "block contingency rather than exploit its opportunity" (Hu 2018: 103).

Work on 'governing through emergencies' offers and rests on a critique of how governing through emergency ends, forecloses or redirects potentiality and thus (re)produces harmful or damaging conditions in the name of securing existing order. While it has mainly

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focused on liberal democracies in the Global North (exceptions including Hu 2018 and Grove 2013, 2014a, 2014b), we take four key points from this literature. First, 'governing through emergencies' orientates inquiry to *how* and *with what consequences* events or situations are claimed and thereafter related to as 'emergencies:' Claims of emergency demand action from those who govern and it is important to attend to how subsequent *in*-action generates its own harms. Second, *how* certain events and situations become more perceptible and actionable than others is an important line of inquiry. Activist, public and artist claims of emergency often go unheard, ignored, or are dismissed by the state and other apparatuses through which emergencies are governed. Third, how everyday lives are partly composed through the techniques, objects, institutions and practices of governing through emergency requires exploration. Emergency techniques, objects and so on, are encountered and become palpable with the atmospheres and moods that give everyday lives a particular feel.

Finally, work on 'governing through emergencies' reminds us that the relation between emergency and the everyday is at stake in emergency governance. Everyday habits, practices, and events *may* be governed as a source of potential or proto emergencies, with governing happening as a dispersed phenomena across multiple sites and scenes in addition to visible, punctual scenes of emergency. This final point importantly connects to longstanding questions on what counts as a time-space of emergency when the line between exceptional and everyday becomes blurred. Walter Benjamin's (1968: 157) observation that 'the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule' has shaped anthropologists' and geographers' studies of banal forms of violence throughout the global South (e.g. Taussig 1992; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Das 2005; Rose 2014). More recently, geographers and other critical theorists have turned to concepts including 'slow violence' (Nixon 2011) and 'slow death' (Berlant 2011) to examine how racially and economically uneven processes of environment (in)justice fold harm, suffering, risk and premature death into the fabric of everyday life, particularly among poor and marginalized communities. Taken together, this and other research highlights that emergency is not only a dry juridical category, but signals a form of life structured through biopolitical techniques and mechanisms of racialization that delimit what lives can and should be exposed to banal forms of exceptional violence. The next section explores the multiple time-spaces of this form of life - what we are calling here *racializing emergency.*

III. Racializing Emergency

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One of the more influential literatures in geography on everyday violence comes from work on environmental racism. Drawing variously on, *inter alia*, black geographies, political ecology, and feminist geography, this body of research reflects Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2007: 28) definition of racism as the "state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death." In contrast to interpretations of racism as subjective prejudices, Gilmore's approach directs attention towards structurally-produced forms of violence that have created and sustained capitalist political ecological order and continue to do so in the present day. Illustrating this approach, Katherine McKittrick (2013) demonstrates how colonialism operated through a geographic language of racial condemnation that created both difference and value in colonial economies: the figure of the black slave that embodied the possibility of violence without limits. Here, blackness is less an indicator of phenotypic difference than a political, juridical and philosophical category that constructed certain spaces as unlivable and marked those inhabiting these areas as less-than-human. This racialized designation formed the material and discursive foundations for the emergence of the uniquely European experience of finitude. The temporal experience of the future as an open-ended domain of progressive change, growth and betterment, amenable to human intervention and calculated improvement (Dillon 1996) emerged literally on the backs of enslaved peoples from the African continent designated as 'black', whose forced labor and premature death in plantation economies created previously unimaginable sources of wealth and prosperity for European slave traders and slave owners (Thomas 2016; Smith and Vasudevan 2017).

These "racialized imaginative geographies of the uninhabitable" (McKittrick 2013: 7) continue to shape the present. McKittrick (*ibid.*) stresses that, "in our present moment, some live in the unlivable, and to live in the unlivable condemns the geographies of marginalized to death over and over again. Life, then, is extracted from particular regions, transforming some places into inhuman rather than human geographies" (*Ibid.*). Geographic work on environmental (in)justice has unpacked how this "geographic management of blackness" plays out in contemporary liberal societies. For example, Pulido's (2000) seminal study of environmental racism in Los Angeles demonstrates how the urban landscape has been shaped by historical trajectories of white residents' movement away from both polluted industrial areas and minority neighborhoods. Whiteness – and white privilege – is produced in this relational movement *away* from spaces and communities marked as 'black' and thus subject to greater levels of hazardous material exposure. The exposure of black bodies to harmful contaminants, and their resulting poor health and premature death, operates not only through

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direct and intentional means, but also through more insidious and banal practices that produce the toxic environments these bodies inhabit (Bullard 2000; Tse 2007; Mohai and Saha 2015).

This literature has increasingly drawn on Rob Nixon's (2009, 2011) concept of *slow violence* and Achille Mbembe's (2003) concept of 'necropolitics' to unpack how power differentials unevenly distribute risk and harm in late-modern capitalist societies. Nixon deploys *slow violence* to think through the subtle transformations in the spatial and temporal organization of violence under conditions of what Ulrich Beck refers to as 'reflexive modernization.' Beck foregrounds how the institutions that structured modern societies throughout much of the twentieth century, such as the territorially-bounded nation-state, full employment, and the male-dominated nuclear family, have increasingly become destabilized in recent decades (Beck et al 2003). While these institutions formerly provided the (white, male) modern individual with a sense of security and stability, their gradual erosion creates qualitatively new experiences of insecurity. Reading spectacular catastrophes such as the 1983 Bhopal chemical explosion and 1986 Chernobyl meltdown against the grain, he argues that the violence of these events is not confined to the immediate time-space of the event itself. Rather, the effects slowly reverberate across affected spaces and populations, gradually producing mutations, diseases, and debilitating injuries that erode vital capacities. But these drawn-out, attritional after-effects fail to receive the media attention and public concern these disasters initially received. Instead, they produce new subjectivities striving to survive in and through risky, inhospitable landscapes. Thus, while some adherents to Beck's risk society thesis maintain that late-modern societies can be characterized by the democratization of catastrophic risk (see Bougen 2003), Nixon demonstrates how the slow violence of advanced modernity is not evenly distributed across the population.

Environmental racism scholars have begun to articulate Nixon's arguments alongside Mbembe's (2001, 2003) sense of *necropolitics* to understand how this uneven geography of slow violence is shaped by racializing assemblages, or various legal and extra-legal techniques that produce differences within the population and expose some segments to premature death (Pulido 2017; Davies 2018). In short, Mbembe offers necropolitics as a corrective to Agamben's formulation of bare life and sovereignty. For Mbembe, the colony, rather than the camp, is the paradigmatic scene where exceptional violence – the sovereign decision on the state of exception that brings the figures of both the sovereign and bare life into being – is contingent on banal practices that sustain colonial rule. Necropolitics names those techniques and practices that produce death-spaces inhabited by colonized subjects

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whose lives carry no juridical or theological value. Thus, for some researchers, slow violence signals "a form of late-modern necropolitics, where communities are exposed to the power of death-in-life" (Davies 2018: 1540). For example, Thom Davies' research into the lived experience of toxic environments in the US's so-called 'Cancer Alley' is rooted in a recognition that, "just as Mbembe's colonialized bodies were kept in a state of gradual injury through processes of imperial domination, Nixon's interpretation of slow violence shows how the uneven spread of globalization and pollution also keeps marginalized groups in situations and spaces of wounded subjugation" (*Ibid.*). Similarly, Randi Gressgard's (2019) innovative approach to urban resilience juxtaposes research on the necropolitics of colonialism with urban splintering to understand how practices of urban securitization are situated in anti-black racism and settler colonialism. These engagements with necropolitics draw out how contemporary forms of rule enact a subtle form of death-politics: the production of necropolitical geographies that render some places death-worlds whose slow forms of violence do not elicit shock or emergency response.

However, Jared Sexton (2010) cautions against Mbembe's tendency to blur qualitatively distinct forms of racialized violence. In Sexton's reading, Mbembe effaces the distinction between contingent violence that maintains colonial rule and the structural violence of slavery. He argues that by positioning slavery as one instance of a general phenomenon of modern terror, Mbembe loses track of "the singular commodification of human existence (not simply its [instrumentalized] labor power) under racial slavery, that structure of gratuitous violence in which a body is rendered as flesh to be accumulated and exchanged" (*Ibid.*: 38). *Flesh* is key to Sexton's insistence that the experience of blackness is irreducible to that of other paradigmatic figures of modern death-politics in Agamben and Mbembe's thought, such as the colonized subject or the refugee. Flesh is not biological; it materializes through racializing assemblages that inscribe racialized imaginaries onto human physiology (Weheliye 2014). It thus offers an alternative to both the representational understandings of race *and* the abstract, ontological understandings of bare life that undergird Mbembe and Agamben's readings of death-politics. It highlights the contextually-specific social formations – such as the New World plantation society – that, for African and indigenous peoples, are scenes of *actual* rather than potential mutilation, dismemberment and exile. For Sexton (2010), the *social death* that results from this "theft of the body" (Spiller 1987) distinguishes slavery's structural violence from the colony's contingent violence: the terror-formation Mbembe attributes to colonialism is already institutionalized in the structure

of chattel slavery that denies the black subject kinship ties and mandates total submission of the enslaved before all whites.

While these arguments on racialized violence appear somewhat removed from work on governing Emergencies, they point to the racialized foundations of modern biopolitics that both Agambenian- and Foucauldian-inflected work bypass. If, as we saw above, the contextually-specific transformation of persons into mere "flesh" precedes any biopolitical division of the population into decontextualized categories of bare life (*zoe*) and valued life (*bios*), then the *bios* – the valued life in need of security and development – always carries with it the anti-humanist negation of black flesh as its historical condition of possibility. Saidiya Hartman's (1997) influential genealogy of freedom in pre- and post-Civil War US offers an alternative account of how biology and politics intertwine. As she details, the definition of the slave's legal status *also* established the scope of rights and liberties of the freed. This system of rights, liberties and privileges in white supremacist societies gave rise to particular experiences of daily life for white subjects that shaped normative expectations for how "valued life" as such should unfold. Thus, post-emancipation and post-war legal struggles to eradicate discrimination revolved around the question of how to delimit black 'freedom' in a white supremacist society that continued to be structured around the exclusive privileges and value of whiteness. Biology – in the form of blood – became the means for managing life through the Jim Crow-era 'separate but equal' doctrine. The subject's bloodline determined their capacity to claim the rights and privileges of whiteness, and determined the capacity of the state and other white subjects to legally deny those privileges to subjects marked as black. Thus, the expectations and comforts of whiteness were secured by white subjects *through* the continued classification of racialized subjects and the definition of the limits of their freedom.

Hartman's analysis thus shows how the valued life that modern biopolitics takes as its object is an effect of racializing assemblages that extend the violence and deprivations of slavery into the present day. The possibility for specifying and managing various forms of collective life through techniques of emergency governance are thus founded on a "corporeal politics spanning the divide between slavery and freedom" (Hartman 1997: 9) that makes possible the experience of the future as open-ended and in need of securing through *denying* the possibility of this future to black spaces and subjects.

This argument offers an important corrective to work on governing Emergencies and slow violence by revealing that modern biopolitics carries within it *multiple* temporal registers that express uneven and shifting economies of harm, suffering and insecurity within

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liberal societies. The anticipatory and open-ended temporality of the liberal subject is constitutively conjoined with at least two additional temporalities. First, the durative temporality of slow violence is not confined to contemporary late-modern societies, but defines the black experience of modernity since its inception in racialized slavery. The temporality of blackness as social death is not growth and development, but an incalculable, endured time with no interval or break. This "stalled present" of "arrested movement" (Scott 2014: 6) offers no promise of transformation, betterment or improvement, only the exhaustion that comes from striving to endure unlivable worlds. As Sexton (2010: 64) emphasizes, "to be black in an antiblack world… is to be inundated and under assault at every turn, pushed into an endlessly kinetic movement; which is to say subjected to an open and absolute vulnerability."

This persistent "open and absolute vulnerability" encompasses and exceeds both slow violence and necropolitics. But at the same time, we do not read blackness as an absolute, ontological category – following McKittrick (2016), we do not reduce black lives to death. Instead, Weheliye's (2014) attention to racializing *assemblages* directs attention to the way the structural violence of racial capitalism hinges on topologically pliant and contextually-specific configurations of different racializing techniques whose precise arrangement conditions the specific content of *blackness* as such. In this sense, the slow violence of late-modern societies is thus a topologically recalibrated form of the exposure to harm, suffering and premature death that has structured blackness since the slave plantation. As McKittrick (2013: 4) emphasizes, the plantation "uncovers a logic that emerges in the present and folds over to repeat itself anew throughout black lives." This *repetition* of plantation violence - the recurrent demand for black social death as the possibility for liberal freedom - signals a second alternative temporality of modernity: the *simultaneity* of past, present and future that collapses open-ended futurity into a stalled present of enduring the violence of social death (Thomas 2016). Christina Sharpe (2016) characterizes this simultaneity in terms of *living in the wake* of slavery. As a metaphor, *wake* signals an ongoing disturbance that folds the past into the present. Sharpe emphasizes that "living in the wake on a global level means living the disastrous time and effects of continued marked migrations, Mediterranean and Caribbean disasters, trans-American and –African migration, structural adjustment imposed by the International Monetary Fund that continues imperialisms/colonialisms, and more" (*Ibid.*: 15).

Taken together, stalled time and disastrous time allow us to rethink the biopolitics of emergency governance in a way that situates liberalism's anticipatory temporalities in relation to its constitutive racialized temporalities of duration and simultaneity. The life that

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emergency governance takes as its object carries with it multiple temporalities: the open-ended futurity of the white liberal subject *and* the repetitive and durative temporalities of black and indigenous subjects enduring the wake of slavery and genocide that denies these subjects the possibility of a future (Smith and Vasudevan 2016). In this light, the biopolitics of emergency governance revolves around the uneven re/distribution of these distinct temporalities of modernity throughout the population. In clear distinction from all-encompassing visions of emergency and violence found in some Agambenian- and Foucauldian-inspired research, this reframing of biopolitics encourages us to look *beyond* the foreclosure of potentiality that work on governing through emergency details, and instead attend to expressions of *actually-existing difference* in the present that emerge out of and against contextually-specific racializing assemblages. The challenge here is to practice what we might call *racializing emergency:* Racializing emergency involves situating emergency claims in particular socio-spatial contexts to examine how they contest the distribution of anticipatory, repetitive and durative temporalities and the forms of harm and suffering that are exercised through these uneven spatio-temporal geographies.

Explicitly recognizing the racializing assemblages that structure liberal biopolitics foregrounds the centrality of blackness to the modern category of emergency, and thus points to the need for critical analyses of emergency governance to take on board the coexistence of anticipatory, repetitive and durative temporalities. This decentering move radically opens up the relation between power and life that has been a central concern of research on governing Emergencies. As our review outlined above, geographers commonly read this relation in terms of governmental apparatuses that attempt to strategically control individual and collective life processes (a power *over* life) and an ontologically prior constitutive power *of* collective life. But this vision of a pluripotent life capable of generating new becomings must be radically expanded in light of the multiplicity of unevenly distributed temporalities that structure liberal order. In particular, analysis needs to account for a prior political economy of racialization that produces this uneven distribution in the first place. This opens the question of the threshold between different forms of modern life that are differentially governed through emergency logics and techniques. Importantly, this is not an ontological threshold that ultimately resolves into a clear Agambenian distinction between a valued life of the polis (*bios*) and the expendable life of *homo sacer* (*zoe*). Rather, this is a *mutable and mobile* threshold that is continually re/produced and challenged through the contextually-specific interplay of force relations, techniques, knowledges and strategies that differentially inscribes racial categories onto specific bodies, which are then open to being governed in some ways

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rather than others (Baldwin 2012). In short, governing through emergency hinges on a prior politics of racialization that renders some lives governable through liberal techniques of emergency rule, and others not.

As Hartman (1997) patiently details, this politics of racialization allows some (white) subjects to claim protections from the state (or, we could add, any institution that governs) on the basis of an expected future of growth, security and development, and withholds the possibility of this claim from other (black/Indigenous) subjects (see also Povinelli 2011). Racializing emergency allows us to approach Emergency as one sphere among others of liberal rule in which subjects may advance these claims. Emergency claims draw on and reiterate the racialized distribution of temporalities that structures liberal life. In doing so, racializing emergency opens a space of indeterminacy between emergency and life foreclosed by accounts of Emergency governance that equate liberal life with a purely anticipatory temporality. To rethink the spatio-temporal structure of liberal life thus also demands that we rethink the spatio-temporal structure of emergency as one terrain of liberal biopolitics. In the penultimate section, we articulate the concept of *slow emergency* to think through emergency governance in relation to a racialized understanding of emergency.

IV. Slow Emergencies

Just as work on environmental racism, black geographies and critical race theory destabilizes the equation between liberal biopolitics and anticipatory temporality, so too does the concept of *slow emergency* attempt to destabilize the relation between emergency governance and the (white) liberal subject's open-ended futurity the techniques, institutions and practices of emergency governance attempt to secure. To define this concept, we emphasize four characteristics of slow emergency, bridging the literatures on governing Emergencies and critical race theory we have reviewed.

First, if work on environmental racism emphasizes how slow violence involves forms of what Nixon (2011: 2) calls 'attritional lethality,' then slow emergencies are likewise defined by forms of harm and damage that are not punctual and acute but rather occur "gradually and out of sight." Whilst Nixon primarily focuses on a series of 'unfolding environmental catastrophes' (Ibid: 2), his mention of domestic violence and post-traumatic stress indicate that 'attritional lethality' is not restricted to environmental processes. We find a similar emphasis on the incremental and the accretive in Berlant's (2011) conception of 'slow death.' Like Nixon, Berlant stresses the indistinction between ongoing existence and

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the (re)making of predictable lives and psychic and physical attenuation. She describes 'slow death' as "the condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life" (Ibid.: 100), later emphasizing how the term points to "deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence" (Ibid.: 205). Her repeated use of the word 'condition' is important, in part because it orientates to a durative present, but also because of how it refuses to distinguish between what she calls "the extreme" and "zones of ordinariness" (Ibid.: 96).

An emphasis on how psychic and physical attenuation and deterioration are part of the ongoingness of ordinary life allows us to decouple the concept of slow emergencies from the concept of the event, or more precisely one particular mode of eventfulness associated with the sensational and the spectacular. Different vocabularies are required to think through the diverse registers of impact through which slow emergencies become palpable in the midst of racializing assemblages, or what Berlant (2011: 101) calls "the problem of the forms that heightened threat can take as it is managed in the context of living." Contributing to such new vocabularies, Berlant (ibid.) distinguishes between 'environment' and 'episodes,' where the term 'episodes' reminds us that "most of what we call events are not of the scale of memorable impact but rather are episodes, that is, occasions that frame experience while not changing much of anything." Povinelli (2011: 13) offers another term through her emphasis on 'quasi-events' that persist or subsist without attracting attention such that they "never quite achieve the status of having occurred or taken place. They neither happen nor not happen." Our aim here is not to legislate between these different ways of thinking beyond the evental and endemic, but to highlight the emergence of a shared problem of how to understand the intertwining of 'attritional lethality' and living in and through what Berlant (2011) calls 'spaces of ordinariness.'

Second, slow emergencies are often rendered imperceptible as events, even as they emerge, surface and are endured as a series of palpable bodily and psychic effects. Whether deforestation (Nixon 2011), or the cumulative wearing down of marginalized peoples by repeated ordinary acts of police violence (Fassin 2011), the forms of gradual change and indeterminate presence that characterize slow emergencies means that they sit uncomfortably with the genres that organize what is felt and attended to as an event and thus target of Emergency governance. As Povinelli's (2011) sense of 'quasi-event' or Berlant's (2011) 'episodes' conveys, slow emergencies do not register as exceptional events demanding a collective political or ethical response, in part because the intense, dramatic, vocabulary of emergency often does not fit with how people live through slow emergencies at the interface

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of stalled and disastrous time in a durative present. Moreover, the orientation of governing apparatuses and public attention to the punctual event, a genre that we argued above is central to the anticipatory temporality of Emergency governance, means that slow emergencies cannot be recognized as such. Slow emergencies thus push against both the limits of established modes of representation and categorization that enable us to sense harm and suffering, and how inattention reproduces stalled and disastrous times. Despite lacking a recognized scene of impact, or clear beginning and endings or causes and effects, slow emergencies are always-already palpable for those enduring them and living on through them as a dispersed series of seemingly disconnected effects. For example, Murphy (2013) documents in her work on 'chemical infrastructures' how chemical and toxic residues remain latent in landscapes, built environments and atmospheres, becoming "part of everyday American life" (p. 5), a form of ordinary trauma that shapes daily life in what Mitman et al. (2004) term 'landscapes of exposure.' Murphy (2013: 106) deploys the term 'the lag' to characterize the pace of chemical infrastructures, and the protracted temporal horizon of toxic emergencies, as "the period of time between a stimulus and a response, the gap between one event and another." In this lag, "to be latent is to be dormant, a potential not yet manifest" (Ibid.). It is the ever-presence (and racially uneven distribution) of the original stimulus in the present – and its ongoing dormancy into the future – that defines not simply the slowness of the emergency, but also how the emergency and ordinary life become intertwined. Whether through sickness in the body or complications in ordinary logistics, these accumulative inhibitors of life are not only slow to emerge, but manifest in ways that render exposure imperceptible as a collective condition.

Third, as the everyday and emergency blur and become indistinct, and as attritional lethality wears bodies down while remaining imperceptible as an event, slow emergencies are situations in which liberalism's promise of a future of progress and betterment is no longer, if it ever was, on offer. Returning to our discussion of temporality, what is at best barely present and more often absent in slow emergencies is the form of anticipatory temporality which underpins not only emergency governance, but also the future-orientated projects and hopes of improvement that some forms of life are still just able to organise their attachments around (see Berlant 2011; Pettit 2019; Raynor 2019). If liberal governmental rationalities have, since their inception, recognized the future as the risk-filled sphere of becoming-otherwise (Foucault 1989, 2008; O'Malley 2004; Tsing 2015), then slow emergency indexes forms of life that are at once indeterminate and whose possibilities for growth and development are withheld, foreclosed or ended. Slow emergencies are situations where the intersection of

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stalled time and disastrous time foreclose capacities to become otherwise. Povinelli (2006, 2011) illustrates how becoming-otherwise – by which we mean attempts to create and live a different future than liberalism's individualized, open-ended futurity of limitless growth – becomes a constant, cruddy striving within and against liberalism's demanding environments. Her ethnographic work with Aboriginal friends demonstrates how the rollback of Australian state social protections leaves Indigenous communities with few options for gainful employment, little in the way of welfare provisions to make up the gap, and few resources to address violence, harm and poor health (Ibid.). Cast beyond the margins of liberal order – beyond the anticipatory temporality that structures both emergency governance and promises of better futures – becoming-otherwise is a perilous venture that does not extinguish but can slowly erode the capacity to sustain forms of life that are irreducible to liberalism's series of inclusions and exclusions (Povinelli 2011). Happenstance occurrences like a used washing machine lid coming loose and falling off as a family drives the machine home can spell disaster: without the lid, the washing machine cannot operate, and without a functioning washing machine, clothes cannot be cleaned of bacteria that create debilitating diseases. Indigenous communities are already striving to make life out of the ruins of the past and the emergency of the present – but the enervating environments in which this striving occurs steadily erode rather than accentuate this capacity to become-otherwise (Ibid.; see also Simone 2004). Here, relations and practices of future-making take place in material-affective situations of attritional lethality that slowly erode determinate possibilities to create new forms of life.

Fourth, situations become slow emergencies through projects by publics, artists and activists that attempt to make situations of attritional lethality into events that demand some form of urgent response. In the absence of the promises associated with anticipatory temporality, emergency becomes a resource and tactic to claim a future. A poignant example is the ongoing activism surrounding British open-air nuclear testing on Indigenous lands in Maralinga, Australia from 1956-1963, the event we began the paper with. In recent years, artists and activists have used the tests' 50-year anniversary to stage a number of exhibitions and conferences to draw attention to Indigenous peoples' continued suffering and to demand action from the state. In this example and others like it, a slow emergency concretizes through an emergency claim issued from an affected group (or on behalf of an affected group) addressed towards some kind of public or recognized governing authority that have yet to act in a satisfactory manner. For us, an event/condition becomes a slow emergency through the presence of claims that a situation of attritional lethality should be felt and related

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to as an emergency. These claims transvalue 'emergency' into a resource affected groups use to intervene in the uneven distribution of temporalities that structure existing situations of harm or damage. A claim of emergency carries the fragile promise that a different future is possible; like 'crisis' or 'catastrophe,' it is one of a cluster of genres for drawing attention and galvanising action. The wager is that if only someone or something recognised a situation as an emergency and acted with the urgency the situation demanded, then harms and damages can be ended, ameliorated, or compensated for, even if only temporarily. Emergency claims function, then, by opening up an 'interval' (Anderson 2015) in which action can make a difference, even as the risk remains that present harms and damages will continue or even intensify. The 'interval' is a temporality that interrupts, even if only momentarily, the 'stalled time' and 'disastrous time' of emergency as a form of life constituted through racialising forms of bio- and necro-politics. 'Intervals' of/for action are equivalent to the electrifying 'spark of hope' that Taussig (2002), after Benjamin, talks about when musing on the indeterminacy of hope: occasions where other possibilities surface in a present no longer wholly determined by durative or repetitive temporalities. What often also characterizes slow emergencies, though, are the feelings that cluster around non- or in-action, or the refusal to recognize what has become ordinary as an emergency. Often, emergency claims or statements are rejected, ignored, or greeted with indifference precisely because of who makes them, how, and to whom. A slow emergency often involves, then, the non- or mis-recognition of a situation of emergent harm or damage, mediated through racialized techniques and procedures that produce that mis- or non-recognition.

Part of the effect of emergency claims is to assemble into a determinate thing what is otherwise spatially and temporally dispersed. The aim is to make a situation - to transform an episode, to use Berlant's phrase, or a quasi-event, to use Povinelli's – into something that attracts and holds the attention of a public and/or governing authority. We could understand attempts to create events that require urgent ethical or political response in an 'interval' of action as a reversal of how some governing apparatuses function. As we saw above, to govern emergencies is to drain an event of its eventfulness – to re-establish an anticipatory temporality of maintenance or improvement. Slow emergencies are constituted as such by the opposite move. Emergency claims hope to attach the affective registers of emergency – urgency, necessity, exceptionality – to an situation/condition that has become ordinary. They strive to make everyday harms and damages into extraordinary events that demand response to alleviate or end them.

Reviewing the full set of techniques and strategies through which marginalized peoples, activists, or artists issue emergency claims in the midst of racializing assemblages is beyond the scope of this paper, folding as they do into the many ways people have of keeping hope alive in enervating conditions. Nevertheless, we can point to how emergency statements vary in addressee and form. Consider just some of the emergency statements issued in the context of the 'BlackLivesMatter' movement and how they vary in addressee (including leaving the addressee ambivalent) and in form, as well as becoming entangled in other acts of politicisation; 'taking the knee protests', interruptions and interventions in particular scenes, gatherings and assemblies in public, and so on. Likewise, the emergency statements issued as part of movements for action in relation to climate change are similarly various, but animated by a similar hope of recognition and action - ecofiction, rallies, artistic experiments and interventions, collective action, and so on. In the slow emergencies of the environment and of racialised inequality, emergency claims are a technique - one of perhaps only a few available given the combination of attritional lethality and the absence of the promise of the future - to render slow emergencies sensible and accountable.

V. Conclusions: In Hope of Recognition

To develop the concept of 'slow emergencies' we have drawn together two literatures that normally remain separate. On the one hand, we have argued that ways of governing in, by and through emergency are based upon a modern form of 'anticipatory temporality'. Claiming and naming a situation as an emergency opens up an 'interval' in which action promises to make a difference. As emergencies are governed, the hope remains that the non-emergency everyday can be returned to. Ways of governing through emergencies are, then, founded upon the geo-historically specific distinction between the everyday and the emergency – a distinction that has only ever been available to some forms of life. On the other hand, we have followed a long lineage of feminist, postcolonial and environmental justice scholars in underlining the existence of forms of harm and damage that unsettle the categories habitually used to think about order and disorder; events and conditions, the punctual and the endemic, the everyday and extraordinary or exceptional, and so on. From this research, in particular recent work on racial violence, we have argued that the very distinction between the everyday and emergency that ways of governing emergency (re)enact is founded upon the 'stalled time' and 'disastrous time' of racialized forms of life. Combining these two bodies of scholarship, we offer the descriptor and concept of slow emergencies to

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understand situations where an emergency claim is made by people who are living through a protracted situation of harm where distinctions between events and conditions no longer hold. Specifically, we offer the term as a means of attending to situations defined by four dimensions; a) attritional lethality; b) imperceptibility; c) foreclosure of the capacity to become otherwise; and d) some kind of emergency claim or statement issued in a context of in or non-action and non or mis-recognition.

We offer the concept of 'slow emergencies' in part, then, to shift emphasis in work on emergency from how life is governed through emergency towards the emergency statements, claims and acts made by marginalised people from within situations of attritional lethality. Doing so requires we think again about how critical work relates to uses of claims of emergency to demand attention and mobilise ethical and/or political action. Unlike the prevalence of the term 'crisis' (Roitman 2014), critical work is more circumspect around the term emergency. The emphasis is often on exposing what power plays are enabled through emergency claims or statements. Scholarship in this vein usefully highlights that in many cases emergency statements/acts are antithetical to democratic life because they function to foreclose the possibility of opposition and dissensus. From this perspective, the work of critique is to make possible responses other than endorsement, acceptance or acquiescence of the emergency claims issued by the state or that which governs. In relation to slow emergencies, we start from a different orientation: listening and responding to claims of emergency issued from marginalized peoples within racializing assemblages. As such, the concept opens up a set of tasks and challenges that are at once political, methodological and theoretical. First, to describe forms of attritional lethality and the ordinary dynamics of enervating conditions. Of course, the effects of slow emergencies are palpable, but the lines of causation are complex, they blur with other ordinary hurts and sufferings, and they are lived with in all kinds of ways. Some of this difficulty in perception reflects that the changes involved are not only slow to emerge, but are obtuse, obscured or even officially refuted. The challenge, then, is to explore where processes of harm are folded into and become inseparable from the cross-cutting processes that sustain and enable life to go on and to determine how to best describe and witness phenomenon. The second task is then to listen to and hear the different forms that emergency claims or statements can take, and follow how those claims or statements are encountered by publics and states and other governing assemblages, made sense of, and translate into forms of in/non action. How do emergency statements come to have an affective force, and how might critical work amplify emergency claims, whilst remaining vigilant about how emergency claims can sometimes be used by

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states or other governing assemblages? Finally, to cultivate a 'response-ability' (Haraway 2007) to how people live in and foster liveable lives through enervating conditions. Potentiality is foreclosed in a slow emergency, but it is not wholly absent. How do emergency claims intervene in the uneven distribution of temporalities that structures potentiality in liberal order? Underpinning these three tasks is the hope that work on slow emergencies can help bear witness to the emergency statements and acts that marginalised peoples issue from within racializing assemblages in a way that renders slow emergencies visible and political and finally generates productive action.

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[1] Funded by the Leverhulme Trust, the Governing Emergencies network gathered together researchers from the UK, Netherlands, U.S.A and Australia to explore how and with what consequences particular forms of life were governed in, by and through emergencies.

[2] 'Black Mist, Burnt Country' was also the title of an exhibition coordinated to mark the 60th anniversary of the first atomic test at Maralinga (blackmistburntcountry.com.au/). It is one of a number of recent artist-activist collaborations exploring the legacy of nuclear testing. See also the transborder *Nuclear Futures* initiative (nuclearfutures.org).

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