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– INVITED COMMENTARY –

HOME SAFE? POROSITY, PRECARITY, BORDERS:
AN AUSTRALIAN CRISIS DIARY

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ABSTRACT

The porosity of our bodies and our planet are palpable in the conjoint crises of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Our shared atmosphere is increasingly toxic for all life with greenhouse gas emissions causing global heating, the rising and acidification of the oceans and increasing the frequency and severity of what are no longer 'natural' disasters. COVID-19, caused by a novel coronavirus that in late 2019 crossed the porous border of non-human and human life, has spread rapidly between permeable human bodies through touch and breath, and animated inanimate surfaces with its fatal potential. Both crises have occasioned resort to borders. But what is 'home': the household, the nation, the planet? And is it safe? For whom and under what conditions? Asking these questions exposes the fault lines of late capitalism – with tectonic shifts and widening inequalities on the basis of gender, race, and class. This essay explores these questions through personal vignettes and experiences of the twin crises in Australia.

Keywords: climate change; COVID-19; crisis; porosity; borders; precarity

PRELUDE: FROM BLACK SUMMER TO PANDEMIC IN AUSTRALIA

In December 2019 as Australia burned, our national capital Canberra, where I live, was engulfed in smoke. Coming from devastating bushfires to our east and our west, the smoke was trapped in the bowl of our city, surrounded by mountains. The hazardous smoke levels were off the charts; views were foreclosed by the miasms (Figure 1).[2] Public health authorities told us to stay inside, to stop using evaporative coolers to ward off the stifling 40°C heat, and to seal off any other vents and crevices through which the smoke might seep into our homes. When we ventured outside health authorities advised us to wear N95 face masks to protect ourselves from the hazardous airborne pollutants. Hardware stores

Figure 1. Smoke pall in Canberra as seen from Pearce, December 2019.
Source: photo by Darja Hoenigman (permission granted).

ran out of the masks as soon as new supplies arrived, and surgical masks did little to filter the choking air.

I could barely breathe; my asthma was provoked. On the evening of 20 December, sitting in my office at The Australian National University (ANU) with thick smoke swirling around outside, I decided that I would fly to Melbourne where, despite the bushfires devastating that state, pollution levels were much lower and dissipating more quickly. As the jet soared over Canberra's southern suburbs and the Snowy Mountains, a pall of smoke covered vast swathes of the country below, only thinning on approach to Melbourne. As I checked into a comfortable apartment hotel in the CBD, I recognised my privilege to have the resources and the right to work remotely. Yet I kept an anxious watch on the air quality across Melbourne – observing smoke swirling and dissipating from my elevated window and regularly checking online monitoring sites. En route to visit friends in Sunshine, I went to a local hardware store where they had the elusive N95 masks for sale. When the sales attendant found out I was from Canberra, he quipped: 'Did you come to Melbourne just to get these masks?'

Then ten days later, my extended family at Malua Bay on the south coast of New South Wales (NSW) suffered a harrowing New Year's Eve. Together with hundreds of neighbours and their animals, they sheltered on the beach, trapped in a terrifying red haze, as bushfires threatened their homes, incinerating many but leaving theirs standing, without power, water, or mobile communication (Figure 2). Some made a long, dangerous drive to stay at my home; my immediate family returned from overseas to help traumatised relatives. My cocoon of privilege continued. Returning to Canberra well masked, I did only what was needed (buying a cooler/air purifier for my smoke-infused house, getting more powerful anti-asthma medicine), packing my bags for flights to Hawai'i for research and then to Aotearoa New Zealand for a holiday. There we heard news of a fire devastating Namadgi National Park near Canberra. Coming home through Auckland and Sydney in mid-February, I was surprised to see a proliferation of masks – some surgical, some N95 – mainly being worn by Asian travellers. I wondered why.

Later, on airport television screens, we saw the news that a novel coronavirus was spreading in Wuhan Province, China. Mere weeks later the world wit-

Figure 2. Australia's Black Summer, Malua Bay Beach, NSW, New Year's Day, 1 January 2020. Crowds of people taking refuge with their animals. *Source*: photo by Alex Coppel (permission granted).

nessed the global spread of the novel coronavirus (named SARS-CoV-2, causing COVID-19), as case numbers and deaths surged. The Australian Government responded swiftly and dramatically to this novel threat. This response was in marked contrast with the inept and belated one to the bushfires of our Black Summer that killed 36 people, entire forests, and likely three billion creatures, wild and domestic (Magnusson 2021; see also Jolly 2019, 2020b; McDonnell n.d.).[3] While it ignored the warnings of environmental scientists and expert fire chiefs about anthropogenic climate change (Jolly 2020b), the government listened closely to the epidemiologists and public health experts about how best to respond to COVID-19. Perhaps a threat coming from beyond our borders rather than from the homey heartland of Australia's bush more easily harmonised with the government's securitised insular border mentality, palpable in the illegal and inhumane detention of refugees seeking to come to Australia by boat.

Significantly, the national response concentrated on shutting borders – first on the national scale and then increasingly on several scales: states, regions, cities, and suburbs, right down to the home. Australia effectively shut its international borders to all but homecoming Australian citizens, permanent residents and their immediate families on 20 March 2020.[4] Yet, for twenty months after the pandemic started, tens of thousands of Australians remained stranded overseas, their returns constantly blocked by cancelled flights, exorbitant fares, and caps on weekly arrivals into hotel quarantine systems. Only from November 2021 did international travel reopen, for the fully vaccinated only and only for certain states.

The experience of 'lockdown' was visceral for all of us. But not equally so. I return to my own experience. In early March 2020 my daughter decided to leave Bali urgently with her two daughters because of news that the Australian International School in Denpasar was closing due to concerns about the pandemic. Her husband followed two weeks later on one of the last flights out. Knowing they would have to isolate for two weeks, I stocked up on their needed supplies, which I left in the garage along with an improvised 'Welcome Home' banner. When they arrived, they waved from the garden and then, fully masked, came to blow kisses, gesticulate, and shout greetings through my front window, safely sealed. No cuddles, no hugs, no touch. They drove home to the coast through bush devastated by the Black Summer fires mere months before.

From the third week of March 2020, partly because of my age and health, I was Zooming into ANU seminars and meetings. The ANU campus effectively closed from April to July 2020 for all but those working directly on the COVID-19 response.[5] We learnt to 'work from home' as all education, research, and meetings

moved online. I was again one of the privileged ones. My teaching was concentrated in winter intensive sessions. With a large house and garden, and no domestic dependents to care for, I could readily work from home and concentrate on research and writing. But chosen solitude is one thing, imposed isolation is another. When I ventured out for 'essential purposes', I was scrupulous about not touching inanimate surfaces that might be animated by the virus: petrol pumps and buttons at pedestrian crossings, on carpark machines, and in lifts. Gloved hands, tissues quicky binned, or clothed elbows supplanted touch. My N95 masks bought in Melbourne now had a new purpose. Touch is crucial to our wellbeing, and I missed it terribly. Like many I tried to compensate with more distanced communication – epic telephone calls, Zoom meetings and gatherings, shared political satire, rousing communal choruses, and a nosedive into Netflix and novels. And I wrote and wrote.

Family, friends, and colleagues were not so privileged. Although many are middle-class professionals like me, their experience of lockdown was vastly worse. Home offices were set up in small houses or apartments; parents struggled to do their paid work while dealing with housework, home schooling, and care. Tight regulation of time and space became a new quotidian demand. The gendered inequalities of everyday life were exacerbated as male paid work too often took priority and women assumed yet more domestic labour. Frictions and tensions emerged. Some allayed the challenges with increased alcohol consumption. And, beyond my own personal circle, domestic violence escalated (Guardian 2020). So, despite the worthy public health mantra 'Viruses do not discriminate', they clearly do. Pre-existing inequalities of gender, class, and race were exposed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These inequalities intersected and compounded, moving between domestic and public spaces.

I trust my personal prelude has exposed my privilege in confronting these conjoint crises of climate cataclysm and the coronavirus pandemic.[6] Their co-presence is poignantly evoked by Mel Chen writing of how, in California's summer of 2020, COVID-19 and wildfires were 'two airy phenomena that dance together, aloft, touching' (2020). I now situate my embodied experience in a more analytic reflection on how our shared planetary atmosphere and the porosity of our bodies have led to the reinscription of borders on several scales. Moreover, their co-presence and interaction is exposing and exacerbating the inequalities of race, class, and gender. In what follows I consider how both crises separately and in interaction have relied upon and reinscribed borders – of states, households, and bodies. In the trajectory of these crises and, too often, in the policy responses to them, inequalities have been intensified. This is clearly witnessed in Australia.

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS: THE INEQUALITIES OF 'WE'

> What can we do when the patient needing emergency care is the earth? (Dunk *et al.* 2019)

In the context of anthropogenic climate change, the language of 'shared humanity' obscures both the inequalities between peoples and inequalities between human and non-human life. The stress on the 'we' of the human species acts as a fig leaf that covers up gross disparities (Jolly 2018, 2019). The idea of a shared human fate has been pivotal in the writing of environmental scholars from the time of James Lovelock's evocation of the Earth as Gaia, through images of our blue planet that emerged from space exploration, to the notion of the Anthropocene as a new epoch in which human actions are transforming the 'nature' of our planetary system (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Steffen *et al.* 2011). Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009, 2014, 2021) suggests that the concept of the Anthropocene negates the distinction of natural and cultural histories. Others have argued that the idea of the Anthropocene is both anthropocentric and Eurocentric (Davis and Todd 2017; Whyte 2017). Donna Haraway (2016) protests the hubris in the label Anthropocene, preferring the Cthulucene, whereby humans are but part of the earthy compost of all life. She explores the relations of humans and non-human 'critters', from companion species like dogs and horses to micro-organisms such as bacteria and viruses that live with and through our human bodies. She does not separate but conjugates 'natureculture' (see also Perret this volume).

Indigenous Australians speak of 'Country' in a way that unites ancestors, living humans, non-human beings, and the land itself (McDonnell n.d.; Provost n.d.; Yunkaporta 2019). Oceanic peoples celebrate Indigenous notions such as *vanua* (uniting people and place) and *vā* – the space between 'that holds entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All' (Wendt 1996, 18–19; see also Koya Vaka'uta 2010; 350.org 2020). Native Americans speak of 'renewing relations' with non-human kin and of how climate change is the latest phase in the catastrophic consequences of a colonising capitalism (Whyte 2017). Marisol de la Cadena (2015) speaks of 'anthropo-not-seen' to evoke how Andean worlds did not distinguish between humans and non-humans, how imperialists destroyed such worlds, and how contemporary environmental guardians are struggling against extractive development and militarised state violence.

Such ontological inequalities between worlds where nature and culture are one and worlds where they are divided, are imbricated with geopolitical inequalities between peoples, often the contemporary consequences of centuries of

colonialism and capitalist extraction. These divisions between rich and poor, overdeveloped and underdeveloped nations, and the so-called Global North and the Global South have been critical in the global fora of climate change negotiations.[7] Like all UN processes this is basically a *state-based* machinery of diplomacy in which nations are the fundamental parties. Grounded in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC 1992), an annual Conference of the Parties (COP) is held, and scientific reports are released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The agreement reached at COP21 in Paris in December 2015, at a meeting of representatives of 196 state parties, specified a long-term goal to keep global temperatures well below 2 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees centigrade. It urged the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, their removal in carbon 'sinks', and sought to increase the abilities of parties to adapt to adverse impacts and to finance pathways to low emissions and 'climate resilient development' (UNFCC 2015).

The implementation of this agreement is dependent on a process that is predicated on the *borders* of sovereign states. Our toxic, worsening atmosphere may be shared, but states must separately determine, plan, and report on measures to mitigate emissions. There is significantly no international mechanism whereby transnational fossil fuel companies are held accountable for the emissons they create. Moreover, there is no mandatory mechanism for nation-states to set a target of reducing emissions by a set date, although targets should exceed those previously set.

Let us consider the parlous example of my country, Australia, which, although it contributes only 1.3 per cent of global greenhouse emissions, is the second largest emitter per capita after Saudi Arabia (Brett 2020, 6). Australia has been beset by crippling 'climate wars' in national politics for decades (Butler 2017). These 'wars' not only engage the current national government, a Coalition of the Liberal and National parties against opposing parties – primarily the Australian Labor Party and the Greens. There is also a war *within* Coalition ranks about continuing support for the fossil-fuel industries of coal, oil, and gas. In late 2020, PM Scott Morrison proposed a 'gas-led' economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In late 2021, just days before the COP26 meeting in Glasgow, Morrison finally secured an agreement with the National Party for a commitment to 'net zero by 2050'. Dubbed 'The Australian Way' (Cole 2021), it did not offer a detailed plan nor offer more ambitious or earlier targets to mitigate emissions despite the urgency of the latest IPCC report, dubbed a 'code red for humanity' (IPCC 2021). Most Australian states and territories, including those led by Liberal Premiers, have announced far more ambitious targets

for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The debate in Glasgow was focused on the next decade, adjudged as critical in trying to avert a worse-case scenario of climate catastrophe. The final statements that emerged from COP26, diluted in the closing hours by India and China, agreed to 'phase down' rather than 'phase out' unabated coal mining and production (Jacobs 2021). This agreement and negotiations about climate finance and loss and damage disappointed hopes of more urgent action, but a pact between China and the United States to collaborate in reducing emissions gave some hope, and the huge subsidies provided by states to fossil fuel companies globally were widely condemned. Yet Australia's pavilion at Glasgow promoted the interests of the fossil fuel company Santos and its controversial programmes to develop carbon sequestration and storage (Figure 3).

Australian Government policy is increasingly remote from the centre of urgent climate action with zero-emission targets being set by major trading partners like China, Japan, South Korea, the UK, and the United States of America under President Biden (Finkel 2021). This inaction poses the imminent risk of future tariffs on major Australian exports by the EU and the US because our plans to reduce emissions are still so undeveloped while the development of coal mines and gas continues (Kilvert 2021). At Biden's Climate Summit for World Leaders on 22 April 2021, Morrison stood firm in insisting on 'technology rather than

Figure 3. A photo of the Australian pavilion at COP26, out the front of which sits a model of a new carbon capture project from Santos. *Source*: photo by Polly J. Hemming (permission granted).

targets' (a false dichotomy), promising to fund hydrogen projects (but still using fossil fuels) and forms of carbon capture and sequestration promoted by energy companies that are both hugely expensive and unproven in reducing emissions.[8] Only green hydrogen offers a credible promise for clean and cheap future energy alongside renewables like solar, wind, and water (Finkel 2021, 65). Australia's national stance is bewildering given the extraordinary evidence of anthropogenic climate change in Australia itself, viscerally felt in the devastating bush fires of Black Summer.

Despite the inadequacies and quirks in the global computation of emissions based on national borders, this system of accountability has created a moral topography of responsibility and blame, whereby countries with high per capita emissions (like Australia) are especially culpable compared to countries with low emissions (like Pacific countries). In the early stages of global climate change negotiations, such as the Kyoto Protocol of 1997, there was a policy of common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities based on the level of economic development in a country, thus placing greater demands on developed countries more historically responsible for the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The Paris Agreement of 2015 blurred that distinction somewhat and diffused responsibility across all states party to the agreement, although the Global North/South distinction persisted in reference to Annex I and Annex II countries (UNFCC n.d.).

There are many contexts where global inequalities between high-emitting countries and low-emitting countries come into sharp relief. Such inequalities are palpable in the relation between Australia and the Pacific. At global and regional fora, Pacific countries have consistently proclaimed that they are contributing the least and suffering the most from the effects of anthropogenic climate change. The focus is often on the iconic images of sea-level rise on the low-lying atoll states of Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands. Yet, as many scholars and regional leaders have stressed, the present threat is pervasive throughout the region with coastal erosion on high islands, the salination of freshwater sources and food gardens, the acidification of the ocean, changing patterns of seasonality affecting food crops and fish, and the increased frequency and severity of cyclones, storm surges, and droughts (Barnett 2017; Jolly 2019, 2020b; Nunn 2013). The Pacific leaders of the Pacific Island Forum countries who met in Tuvalu in August 2019 issued the staunch Kainaki II Declaration that climate change was the most important threat to their future security, more important than the geopolitical tensions that outsiders usually privilege (Jolly 2021b). The dissonance between this robust regional consensus and Australia's current

climate change policy was highlighted yet again and undermines Australia's continuing influence in the Pacific region.

The national computation of greenhouse gas emissions and the state-based diplomatic machinery of climate change negotiations are thus clearly predicated on the *borders* of sovereign states. Although our atmosphere is shared, national borders are presumed, as are the global geopolitical contours of Global North and Global South. While calibrations grounded in national borders and geopolitical terrain do enable a moral cartography of responsibility, they also hide important disparities *within* states, on the basis of race, class, and gender. In disasters worsened by anthropogenic climate change like Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Californian wildfires, the intersecting disadvantages of race and class have proved critical in both the experience of disaster and the process of recovery (Hutson 2018; Robinson 2018).

Gendered inequalities are too often unacknowledged both in the experience of anthropogenic climate change itself and in the masculinist state machinery of climate change diplomacy. The figures of 'virtuous' consumers reducing their household carbon footprint through decarbonising energy sources and recycling waste are often concentrated on women as domestic agents (deflecting attention from the harms caused in the processes of production). Many analysts suggest that women are more vulnerable because they assume the primary burden of provisioning food, water, and primary care for households, and because they are more likely to suffer the consequences of disasters attributed to anthropogenic climate change, including death, disability, and gender violence (Alston 2013, 356; Arora-Johnson 2011, 744; James 2016; Pearse 2017). In opposition to the ubiquitous figure of woman as vulnerable victim, some have promoted the figure of woman as resilient agent. Yet, as Maria Tanyag (2018) has persuasively argued in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, the discourse of women's 'resilience' on household and community scales relied on oppressive norms of female altruism, which place even greater burdens on women and divest the state of responsibility in processes of recovery (Jolly 2020a, 2021a). And, as Bernadette Resurrección (2013) avers, we should be wary of shuttling between these two reductive tropes – of women as vulnerable victims and resilient agents – since both fail to deal with the complexity of women's subject positions.

This warning is also relevant in considering the gendered character of climate change diplomacy. Sherilyn MacGregor (2010) highlighted how, despite an intimate relation between feminisms and environmental movements in the 1980s and 1990s, the establishment of formal meetings of the UNFCC marked a

move to masculinist domination in both presence and values. Men dominated as state delegates (eighteen per cent were women at the first COP in Berlin in 1995). There have been continuing critiques of women's under-representation at COP meetings and the marginalisation of women and gender diverse people, despite their prominence in NGO and activist networks such as The Women for Climate Justice Network and 350.org (Rose 2017, n.d.). George Carter and Elise Howard (2020) suggest that Pacific women, though rarely state delegates, have still played a crucial role in global climate negotiations, for example, as technical negotiators and coalition co-ordinators for the Paris Agreement. Yet women's presence does not automatically translate into the promotion of women's interests or a transformation of gender relations in the context of climate change. MacGregor (2010) suggests that in UN negotiations there has been a growing emphasis on technical and scientific solutions to climate change and a stress on climate change as a threat to 'security' conceived in national and militaristic rather than human terms.

PANDEMIC: BORDER CLOSURES AND INTENSIFYING INEQUALITIES

> To guarantee fair and equitable access to every country in the world. (COVAX 2020)

> Differential bodily burdens, differential state resourcing and differential state securitizations under terms that create bifurcations between care and murder. (Chen 2020)

Many scientists suggest there is a close, even causal relation between climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. In mid-2020, the United Nations Environment Programme (2020) and the International Livestock Research Institute issued a report suggesting that the world was treating the health and economic symptoms of the coronavirus pandemic but not its environmental cause. The report predicted that a steady stream of zoonotic diseases would jump from animals to humans because of environmental stresses caused by deforestation of tropical environments and the large-scale industrial farming of animals, especially pigs and chickens for meat. It said a 'one health' approach, uniting human, animal, and environmental health, was vital (Carrington 2020).[9] Moreover, although our experience of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is much briefer than that of climate change, very similar dynamics can be witnessed in how borders have been created or strengthened to counter the porosity of our bodies to this easily transmissible virus and in how the pandemic has amplified pre-existing inequalities of race, class, and gender on macrocosmic and microcosmic scales.

As with climate change the porous border between human and non-human life has been breached by the pandemic. Like other zoonotic diseases, COVID-19 is thought to have been transmitted from a bat through an unidentified intermediary animal source to the first human cases in Wuhan, likely in mid-November 2019 (WHO 2021a). As with earlier pandemics like HIV, speculations and contestations about the origins and vectors of transmission of this novel coronavirus have become highly politicised, with state borders and geopolitical tensions reinscribed. State media in the People's Republic of China countered the pervasive suggestion that the Wuhan 'wet market' was the origin point with several claims: that there were precursors in Europe, that it arrived with frozen food imports, or that it was created in a laboratory in the United States. Some news sources in the US speculated that it may have been inadvertently created in the Wuhan Laboratory of Virology, amplifying the label 'Wuhan flu' circulated by then President Trump. Although the 'lab-leak' theory was widely discredited early, President Biden later ordered an investigation by US intelligence agencies of the available evidence, and speculation continued about the origins of COVID-19 amid calls, including by Australia, for a fuller and more transparent investigation than that conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2020 (Jaivin 2021; Kormann 2021).

Such national labelling continued as the biomedical and epidemiological response became more sophisticated and the virus mutated. Genomic testing of the virus revealed a spectrum of variants – the UK variant (B.1.1.7), the South African variant (B.1.351), the Brazilian variant (P.1), and the Indian 'double mutation' variant (B.1.617) – with each successive variant seemingly more transmissible, more deadly, and potentially more able to elude extant vaccines. To redress the xenophobic, discriminatory potential in such labels, on 31 May 2021 the WHO changed the nomenclature to follow the sequence of the Greek alphabet (WHO 2021b). Thus, the 'Indian' variant became the 'Delta' variant, most prevalent globally at the time of writing.

Yet, as with climate change, although the global statistics of total cases and deaths are constantly updated, the usual reporting of the arc of the virus in successive waves relies on the *borders* of nationstates. Since late 2020 there has also been global reporting of the status of vaccine rollouts across different countries (Figures 4 and 5).

National borders and geopolitical differences have thus been underlined by both the trajectory of the pandemic and the rollout of vaccines. These differences are palpable in both vaccine nationalism and vaccine diplomacy. Wealthier states like the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and the countries of the European

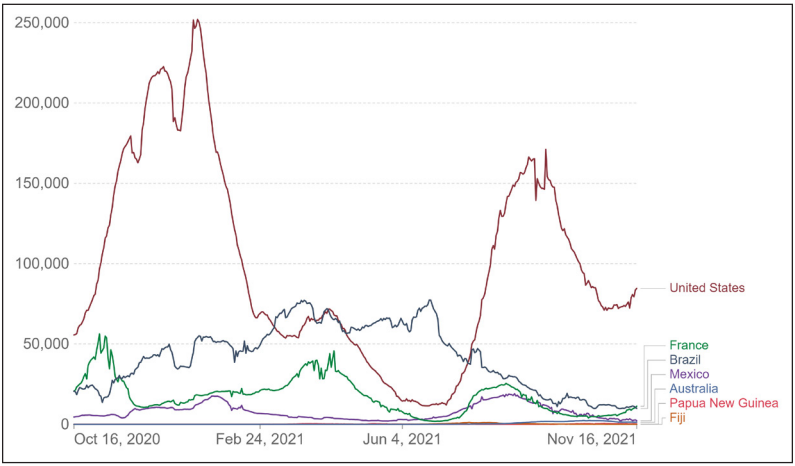

Figure 4. Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases: 7-day rolling average, 16 November 2021. *Source*: Our World in Data. 'Daily Confirmed COVID-19 Deaths, Rolling 7-Day Average'. Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data. Accessed 18 November 2021 from https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/daily-covid-deaths-7-day?tab=chart. Our World in Data is free and accessible for everyone.

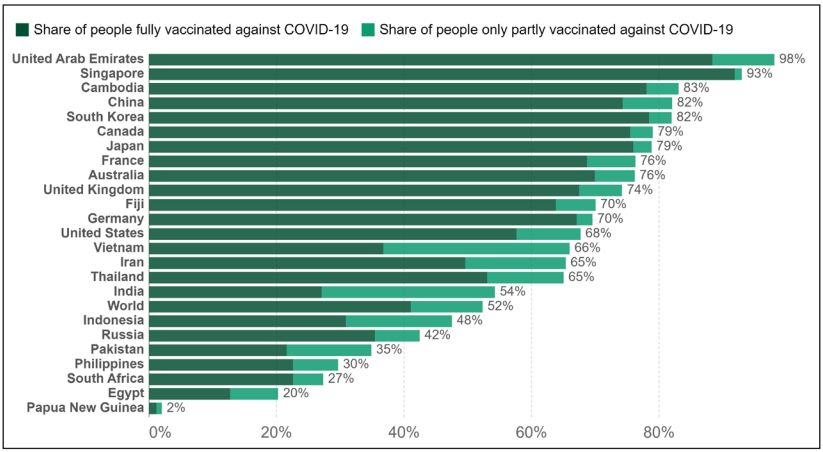

Figure 5. Share of people vaccinated against COVID-19 from selected countries, 16 November 2021. *Source*: Our World in Data. 'Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations: Statistics and Research'. Accessed 18 November 2021 from https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations. Our World in Data is free and accessible for everyone.

Union moved quickly to secure supplies of the most approved and most efficacious vaccines: Pfizer, AstraZeneca, and Moderna, often contracting for far in excess of what was needed to inoculate all the adult population with the required number of doses. Gross disparities between states in securing supplies of the vaccine were anticipated, leading to the COVAX initiative, co-led by the World Health Organisation, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and GAVI (The Vaccine Alliance), and partnering with UNICEF for delivery. This initiative aims to accelerate development, production, and equitable access to tests, treatments, and vaccines 'to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world' (COVAX 2020). Its efforts to have 'one world protected' have faced the prevailing patterns of vaccine nationalism and vaccine diplomacy and the patent mechanisms of the big pharmaceutical companies that produce the vaccines and protect their profits.

The coronavirus pandemic has occasioned more than the closure or reinscription of national borders. It has also occasioned closures of public spaces on different scales, the closure of bodies through social distancing, and the wearing of masks.[10] Such closures of spaces and bodies, though absolutely necessary for public health, have often intensified pre-existing inequalities of race, gender, and class (Zine 2020). I concentrate on how this has developed in the body politic of Australia. Australia is a federation of states and territories that constitutionally are individually responsible for public health in their region while the federal Australian Government is responsible for aged care, quarantine, and vaccination. Although Morrison formed a National Cabinet to try to create a united national approach to the pandemic, there has been considerable friction between the Australian Government and the states/territories and between the eight states and territories as to how to respond to the pandemic – with a differential repertoire of border closures, degrees of lockdown, rules about social distancing, mask-wearing, and the rights of the fully vaccinated as against the unvaccinated. During the first waves of the pandemic, the overall Australian policy was one of elimination of the virus, and case numbers and deaths were low by global standards. However, the combination of a delayed vaccine rollout and the arrival of the more readily transmissible Delta variant from May 2021 led to a shift in the public health response to 'living with the virus' and, as vaccination rates increased from August 2021, different trajectories of 'opening up' (ABC News 2021).

As we have seen, Australia closed its international borders early and decisively to all but Australian citizens and permanent residents seeking to return (with some exceptions for seasonal workers, sports and media professionals, and business people).[11] Then, in late April 2021, it stopped flights for around 9,000

Australian citizens and permanent residents seeking to return from the pandemic catastrophe in India for two weeks and initially threatened anyone who broke that ban with five years in jail or a $66,000 fine under the terms of the Biosecurity Act.[12] Accusations of racism in denying the legal rights of Indian Australian citizens to return provoked a reversal by the PM, suggesting that criminal changes would be likely 'near zero' (BBC News 2021). Early debacles, such as that of the *Ruby Princess*, had led to the early adoption of a state-based hotel quarantine system whereby those entering the country from overseas were required to isolate for fourteen days in specified quarantine hotels, initially at government expense and later at their own expense.[13] In April 2021, as positive cases from India dramatically surged in hotel quarantine, there were strong calls for the national government to assume their primary quarantine responsibility by setting up sites in regional areas: opening pre-existing army bases, like the one operating at Howard Springs near Darwin (from which there had been no 'leaks'), or rapidly building new quarantine accommodation outside major cities as Labor politicians at both federal and state levels claimed the government should have done at the outset of the pandemic.

Although Morrison created a novel National Cabinet and controversially claimed confidentiality for its discussions, political differences were often publically aired. Labor state premiers in Western Australia and Queensland closed state borders despite protests from the Australian Government and sailed to landslide electoral victories in 2020 for keeping their 'home' states safe.

The national government's approach relied on the privatisation of aged care and quarantine, which exposed precarity along the axes of age, race, class, and gender. In every state there were early concentrations of cases in aged care homes, and, although this sector was expressly the responsibility of the Australian Government, the blame was very often deflected onto local operators of aged care institutions and their nurses and other staff (Alcorn 2020). Aged care was already the subject of a Royal Commission, whose interim reports revealed its woeful inadequacies – with pervasive elder abuse and inadequate nutrition and care across a privatised system where profit rather than care was paramount (Royal Commission 2021). Frontline staff in these aged care homes – often women migrants from the Pacific or Asia – incurred blame for not being well trained, not effectively implementing pandemic protocols, and for potentially spreading the virus by working across several locations due to their economic precarity (Wallace 2020).

Another major vector of the pandemic's spread was the hotel quarantine system – from which cases regularly 'leaked' – seeding community transmission.

Such cases occurred across the country with an early outbreak in quarantine hotels in Melbourne, where private security guards were employed rather than police. From March 2020, the virus spread between guests and guards and between guests in two CBD hotels. Several concerns were raised in the media and in a Victorian state investigation: the inadequate training of the guards, their failure to follow regulations, inadequate personal protective equipment, and their working across several sites (Schneiders 2020). These men were, like frontline aged care workers, often poor and dealing with greater precarity in the pandemic. As Chris Wallace observes, 'The pandemic has highlighted how many workers stitch together jobs at multiple workplaces to earn enough to survive' (2020). Without paid sick leave they have to keep working, sick or not. Precarity is 'flexibility's flipside' (Wallace 2020). The casualisation of work in Australia, and the privatisation and outsourcing of government services, had dire consequences for public health.

The escalation of cases and deaths in Melbourne led to a lockdown for 111 days (ending on 28 October 2020), the longest and strictest instituted across the country to that date. The lockdown effectively confined people to their homes, allowing only short local trips to seek food, fuel, or medical care and only one hour of exercise a day. Masks and social distancing were mandated in public spaces. It closed schools and universities and all 'non-essential' businesses. Night curfews were policed, and public housing towers in the city, which accommodate many poor migrants or refugees, were blockaded by police. The Labor Premier Dan Andrews was constantly criticised by Liberal and National Party politicians at national and state levels and in right-wing media and social media for the devastating economic effects of this draconian action, some labelling him 'Dictator Dan' (Purtill 2020). But Andrews stayed staunchly committed to lockdown and ultimately achieved the desired effects, bringing new daily cases of community transmission from a peak of 700 to zero by November 2020. When the Delta variant was seeded from NSW in May 2021 and case numbers surged to new records, Premier Andrews, unlike then Premier Berejiklian in NSW, did not delay in locking down the city again, so that Melburnians by late October 2021 had endured the longest cumulative period of lockdown in the world – 262 days in six successive lockdowns (Jose 2021).

In the later stages of the pandemic in Australia, closures were more targeted and shorter, with lockdowns around emergent clusters in certain regions or suburbs on the basis of testing and contact tracing. As the virus spread in greater Sydney, there were lockdowns of specific parts of the city – successively in the northern beaches, the eastern suburbs, and, as the Delta variant spread in August–September 2021, the heaviest and longest lockdowns in the

western and southwestern suburbs where migrant communities and poorer working-class people are concentrated. There were claims of class and racial bias in a heavier police response complemented by the military in those suburbs. Residents and local leaders protested that the pandemic revealed a 'tale of two cities' (Butterworth 2021).

As the Delta variant spread vaccinations also became more targeted. The Australian Government relied on distribution through aged care facilities and GPs complemented by vaccination hubs set up through state and territory governments. In 2020 the Australian Government had devised a staged vaccination rollout whereby those seen as most vulnerable were categorised as 1(a) and 1(b). Category 1(a) included quarantine and border workers, frontline health care workers, aged and disability care staff, and aged and disability care residents, and 1(b) included the elderly, Indigenous Australians over fifty-five, and those with pre-existing health conditions (see tables in Australian Government n.d.). The Australian Government had invested heavily in the Astra-Zeneca vaccine (it was cheaper and could be produced locally) and had secured far fewer doses of Pfizer. As early supplies were insufficient, dramatic disparities emerged between the envisaged phases and the actual rollout of vaccines. In particular many residents and workers in aged care homes, disabled people and their carers, and Indigenous Australians were still unvaccinated while those in less vulnerable groups had received a first dose. When news emerged of cases of rare blood clots caused by AstraZeneca and doses of Pfizer were insufficient, the vaccination programme and the pandemic response were seen to be in such disarray that a military commander, Lieutenant General John Frewen, was appointed to oversee it in early June 2021 (Clun 2021).[14] Some of the worst failures affected Indigenous Australians, whose rates of vaccination were in general far below those of non-Indigenous Australians. When the Delta variant spread in the western regions of NSW from August 2021, Indigenous Australians living in Wilcannia were dramatically affected, with seventeen per cent of the population succumbing to the virus. Aboriginal leaders had warned government authorities a year before of the risk of a catastrophic spread in crowded public housing, without spaces to isolate, and at large regional funerals and had even requested a blockade. Yet there were no specific plans for vaccination or care nor processes to work with Indigenous health practitioners (Gerathy 2020). An emergency response and vaccination rollout had to be mounted by NSW Health.

Both the pandemic itself and the public health and economic measures used to deal with it have revealed and exacerbated not just class and racial inequalities but underlying gender inequalities overseas (Al-Ali 2020; Enloe 2020; Schuster 2021) and in Australia (Jenkins 2020; Schuster 2021; Wallace 2020). In Australia,

women were typically on the frontline as health workers in hospitals and aged care facilities and constituted the majority of staff in schools and childcare. Their work thus disproportionately exposed them to the pandemic. Moreover, women are far more likely to occupy low paid and precarious jobs than men and thus suffered earlier and more from pandemic job losses, especially those concentrated in hospitality and retail (Wallace 2020). As elsewhere unemployment and recession patterns due to the pandemic suggested a 'shecession' (Gupta 2020).

Such gender inequality in the paid workforce was compounded by strict lockdowns that required people to stay in the 'bubble' of their household.[15] This image of a fragile bubble that could be easily burst is at odds with the disproportionate hard work and the gendered violence reported from some households where men and women lived together. In pre-pandemic Australia women still shouldered an unfair share of domestic labour (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2016). This problem was compounded during lockdowns, especially with home schooling of children, which was primarily done by mothers. If both women and men were pursuing paid work from home, the man's paid work typically was given greater priority (Jenkins 2020; Wallace 2020; but see also Craig 2020). This difficulty affected those working across a wide range of jobs – in government, corporations, non-government organisations, and academic institutions.

Moreover, the rates of domestic violence in Australia surged during the pandemic, with calls to helplines escalating (Guardian 2020). The rates of domestic violence in Australia were already very high with one woman being murdered by her male partner or ex-partner every week (Our Watch 2021). But the enforced physical proximity and the anxieties created by the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing conflicts and fostered novel tensions. Women who were abused by domestic partners were unable to escape the perpetrators, who sometimes even prevented them from seeking help.

In the Australian context Fiona Jenkins (2020) observes how the long-standing ideological separation of domestic and public life has been breached by 'work-from-home' measures. She suggests that employers have effectively requisitioned our homes, as if the home is a 'costless resource' free for appropriation and a 'largely frictionless site of personal relations', rather than a space of unequally gendered care and labour. As Jilly Kay (2020) observes, the idyllic image of the home and of the heteronormative couple has been pervasively perpetuated during the pandemic. She witnesses the resurgence of mystificatory images as domesticity has become hypervisible and the media have celebrated the

aestheticised homes of rich celebrities. The injunction to 'stay at home' affirms the family as the private place of safety and stability in a capitalist world, but conceals the gender inequalities and cruelties hidden within. Kay reanimates earlier feminist critiques of the family in the context of the pandemic, insists on alternative family and household formations, and imagines 'how much better home could be'.

In Australia the various schemes devised by the national government – JobKeeper, JobSeeker, and JobMaker – to redress unemployment had a masculine cast. Many policies seem predicated on the presumption not just of a heteronormative household but that men are the primary 'breadwinners'. Early in the emergency the Morrison Government provided free childcare. But when government support started to be rolled back in mid-2020, this provision was the first to go. Its sudden ending 'doubly impacted on women as workers as well as parents, given the overwhelming bulk of childcare employees are female' (Wallace 2020). By contrast, many businesses continued to receive massive support from JobKeeper until it was ended in March 2021. This support was to keep workers attached to employers who were experiencing a specified downturn in profits. As recent analyses have shown, some employers rorted the system, while many large corporations so assisted made huge profits in 2020 (Conifer 2021; Morris 2021), adamantly refused to return this taxpayer money, and rather rewarded shareholders with large dividends. The evidence from Australia echoes the global trend that billionaires and the super-rich got even richer during the pandemic.[16]

Australian Government policies directed at recovery and job creation strongly favoured industries dominated by men – such as roads, trades, and the construction industry, supported through the HomeMaker scheme for homebuilding and renovations. As Wallace (2020) suggests, this pattern of pandemic policy-making reflects a 'men first' perspective, which accords with the overall dominance of men in the Federal Parliament and especially within the ranks of the Liberal and National Parties. While 73.2 per cent of Morrison Government MPs are men, the Labor Party is almost at gender parity in the Federal Parliament, after the introduction of targets in 1994. This demographic dominance is matched by a masculinist culture, recently exposed in a full-frontal way with allegations not just of casual sexism but of rape and a masturbatory excess on the desk of a female MP inside the walls of Parliament House. Gender-biased responses to such events and broader scandals were progressively revealed in early 2021, and protests crystallised in the large 4 March Justice assemblies outside Parliament House in Canberra and across the country (Gorman 2021).[17] Although Morrison claimed to be 'listening to women' and arranged

to move more women into posts in his Cabinet and dedicate them to women's issues, effective policy responses to redressing gender inequalities supported by robust budget measures still appear a remote hope in these times of crisis (despite the budget corrections of 2021). Even the far-right Senator Pauline Hanson suggested that Morrison's tax-payer-funded 'empathy training' had failed. His attempts to redress entrenched gender inequality were compared to his tendency to 'over-promise and under-deliver' in regard to the rollout of the vaccines to combat the pandemic.

CONCLUSION: BORDERED-LANDS OR BORDERLANDS

Many feminists have expressed hopes for alternative political imaginaries in these challenging times. These notions have been given diverse monikers like 'borderlands' or 'commons'. As the editors of this special issue emphasise, the notion of borderlands has been a powerful one in feminist visions that have emerged from the 1980s, especially in Chicana feminist perspectives like that of Gloria Anzalduá (1987) that aimed to decolonise white feminism, undo imperialist dualistic thinking, and privilege a hybrid mode of consciousness, of dwelling 'in between'. Emanating initially from the experience of the borderlands between Mexico and the United States, these perspectives became generalised as a form of feminism that stresses everyday life and embodied experience rather than the genealogies of white, abstract scholarship, too often privileged by the academy. They highlighted not just the violence of life on the border but also its vitality, 'the unpredictable emergent possibilities that take shape in the borderlands, born out of an embrace of ambiguity' (Meher *et al.*, this volume, 1).

Rather than reinscribe borders by dwelling 'in between', Miriam Ticktin (2020) proposes that we build a feminist 'commons' in these challenging times. She observes how the borders of nations like the enclosed heteronormative nuclear family are so often imagined as 'safe', while outsiders – immigrants, foreigners – are rendered unsafe. She suggests that the pandemic poses questions about the forms of connection to attend to and cultivate, in new horizontal forms of sociality that acknowledge our porosity. The 'commons' can mean many different things, but for Ticktin it is primarily a struggle against enclosures, against the privatisation of spaces of freedom, against exclusion and private property, and for reciprocity, respect, and responsibility.

I affirm Ticktin's insight about the resonance between the 'safe homes' of nuclear families and nation-states and the extrusion of unsafe strangers/others. Yet I wonder whether such horizontal collectivities of care will prove enough or even

be possible on our planet, increasingly damaged by the environmental crisis and while our lives are still dominated by being careful about connections in the successive waves of a global pandemic. I wonder especially whether those of us who have experienced novel, policed closures – of our states, of our households, and of our bodies – through social distancing, mandated masks, and vaccinations, have thereby developed greater empathy for those of us who are routinely living 'in between', in states of radical uncertainty, like migrants or refugees or Indigenous people, displaced and dispossessed. The editors wisely ponder whether the pandemic has entailed an experience of 'borderlands' or rather 'bordered-lands' (Meher *et al.*, this volume). Will those who, like me, are privileged to be able to move freely within and between countries, travelling for work and play rather than refuge, come to see 'opening up' as a welcome expression of our individual freedom? Will we consider how our travels contribute to heating our planet or spreading a deadly disease to the unvaccinated? The editors hope that 'this experience must sensitise some of us to the experiences of those of us for whom the borderlands are no new proposition' (Meher *et al.*, this volume, 2). Both the climate crisis and the pandemic have revealed the fault lines of late capitalism and the tectonic shifts of widening inequalities on the basis of gender, race, and class. Their simultaneous, interactive presence will require not just radical hope but urgent action to redress their catastrophic consequences on the global, national, local, and intimate scales of our lives.

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NOTES

1 Margaret Jolly, AM FASSA is an Emerita Professor in the School of Culture, History and Language in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. She was an Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow (2010–2016) and has written extensively on gender in Oceania, exploratory voyages, missions and contemporary Christianity, maternity and sexuality, cinema and art. She is currently focused on gender and climate change and decolonial and intersectional feminisms in Oceania. She has taught undergraduates at the ANU, Macquarie University, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and the University of California at Santa Cruz and supervised over 60 PhD students and many Postdoctoral Fellows. She held a Poste Rouge (Visiting Professor) at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in France in 2009. Her list of publications since 1997 is available at https://researchers.anu.edu.au/researchers/jolly-ma

2 Canberra was for a time the most polluted city on the planet with PM2.5 readings topping 3,000 on some of the worst days and even exceeding 7,700 at one monitoring station; above 200 is considered hazardous (Remeikis 2020).

3 An estimated 3,094 homes were lost in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, ACT, Western Australia, and South Australia, and seventeen million hectares burnt (Magnusson 2021). In addition, bushfire smoke killed about 450 people and affected eighty per cent of the population.

4 Migrants, tourists, and international students were unable to enter. There were exemptions for New Zealand citizens living in Australia and those transiting to New Zealand and for Pacific Islanders (including seasonal workers) transiting to their home countries. Exemptions were also allowed for sports and media professionals, business executives, and for compassionate reasons on a case-by-case basis.

5 After the Delta variant finally reached Canberra in August 2021, the ANU campus effectively closed again for several months.

6 Auto-ethnography has been pervasive in feminist writing and especially so during the pandemic. See, for example, 'Pandemic Diaries' edited by Manley, Dougan,

and McGranahan (2020) and the special online symposium Signs Symposium: Feminists Theorize COVID-19, including articles by Chen (2020), Enloe (2020), and Ticktin (2020).

7 See Connell (2007) on Southern Theory and Jolly (2008) for a critique of the Global North/Global South distinction.

8 Finkel describes hydrogen power as the 'backbone of the future fuels industry' (2021, 65), but only if it is 'clean hydrogen' made with electricity created by renewable energy sources, not by fossil fuels that produce carbon dioxide as a by-product and would need to add carbon capture to the process.

9 This approach has also been called 'planetary health'. See Anderson and Dunk (2020) and Vettese and Blanchette (2020).

10 I do not have space to elaborate here, but Schuster (2021) has an excellent appraisal of the politicisation of masks, especially in the US where pro-Trump supporters often refused to wear them as an expression of 'freedom' and of macho forms of masculinity. See her excellent bibliography of articles on gender and COVID-19 in the US, Europe, and Asia as well as Australia.

11 The Australian Government also instituted tight controls on Australians leaving the country, with permission granted only on compelling compassionate grounds or for those leaving to take up long-term employment overseas.

12 See the compelling essay by Arundhati Roy (2021) as the pandemic spiralled out of control in India and the Modi Government refused a national lockdown and suppressed frank reporting on the collapse of the health system and the massive death tolls.

13 Early, the bungled arrival of the infamous Ruby Princess cruise ship in Australian waters and the failure to effectively quarantine 2,700 passengers and staff (many of whom were sick) who disembarked in Sydney on 18 March 2020 was seen as the source of 900 cases and twenty deaths in Australia.

14 AstraZeneca was rebranded as Vaxzeveria in Australia in mid-2021.

15 The 'bubble' metaphor has been extended to include safe passage between countries, *e.g.*, Australia and New Zealand, but that bubble burst several times as new cases and variants emerged.

16 Andrew Leigh, a Labor MP, continues to criticise the way in which JobKeeper transferred huge amounts of taxpayers' money to companies that remained profitable during lockdowns and how the government does not seek to have that money refunded (Conifer 2021). By contrast individuals who as workers were overpaid by small amounts are being pursued for refunds. The global increase in wealth disparities and billionaires' wealth is clear in Australia: witness the mining magnates Andrew Forrest, CEO of Fortescue Metals, whose wealth increased by 120 per cent to $A17.6 billion, and Gina Rinehart, Executive Chairman of Hancock Prospecting, whose wealth jumped 53 per cent to $A21.2 billion in 2020 (Bailey and Sprague 2020).

17 While a Liberal MP was allowed to remain in his seat after harassing female constituents, the Coalition government at one point suggested that women who were the victims of gender violence might seek support by raiding their superannuation accounts.

I cannot resist commenting on the way in which billionaire entrepreneurs like Richard Branson, Elon Musk, and Jeff Bezos have been engaged in priapic celebrations of private space travel and even missions to Mars during these times of climate and pandemic crisis. There is no Planet B for me.

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