I write this Conclusion in early April 2020. The population of Australia is locked down. We can only leave where we live for work, to shop, for medical reasons, to visit close family and to take exercise. On 3 April Italy reported over 115,000 cases of COVID-19, China had about 82,000 and the United States lead the numbers with over 242,000 infections. Trump’s early denial of the seriousness of the virus is having ramifying effects on how many Americans are infected day by day. Australia had somewhat over 5000, many of these were people arriving by plane and passengers on cruise ships. Air travel is now mostly limited to freight, returning Australian travellers, and emergencies. In late March Qantas stood down roughly 20,000 or two-thirds of its staff until at least the end of May. Across Australia cafes, bars, restaurants are only allowed to sell takeaways and deliveries. Many have had to close. Tens of thousands of casual workers have been laid off. Places of worship are closed and people may only meet in twos. We have no idea how long this will continue. The best estimate is at least six months but there is as yet no available cure and it is not expected that there will be a vaccine until sometime in 2021.

From this perspective it might seem that the pandemic has put a full stop on many of the concerns discussed in this book. This is unlikely to be the case. Indeed, at the present time the reverse is true. The governments, both state and federal, have arrogated to themselves more powers. The state of emergency has enabled many civil liberties safeguards to be overridden in the name of protecting the wider population. At the same
time there has been increased racism against many of the Othered groups identified in this book. The massive rise in unemployment impacts most the casuals who have no savings and no superannuation. The neoliberal gig economy is being shown up as offering no safe haven for those who worked as waitstaff, and who were self-employed, for example driving for the ride-share companies like Uber and Dido. Many of these people come from new migrant communities, East Asian, South Asian and African as well as international students, many of whom are Chinese.

**Surveillance and Control**

In the Introduction I distinguished between a state of emergency and a state of exception. Following Walter Benjamin and more recently Giorgio Agamben I argued that democratic states have been moving towards a permanent state of emergency since World War One and that Australia is no exception. The pandemic has provided a perfect excuse for instituting a formal state of emergency. The closing of places of entertainment and worship, indeed all places where people might physically gather together, coupled with the lockdown which requires people as much as possible to stay at home, suggests nothing less than the kind of curfew instituted during military coups. In an article on the experience of the lockdown in suburbia we find a reference to Margaret Mossakowska for whom ‘the scenario of social distancing is eerily familiar. Originally from Poland, the former statistician said in the early 1980s her country of birth banned large social gatherings during a period of martial law’ (Sas and Esposito 2020). This feeling of the militarisation of Australian society has been reinforced by the closing of borders. Over the last few weeks there have been increasingly strict rules about who is allowed into Australia and under what circumstances, and more recently these have been matched by the increasing regulation of the borders between the states and territories. Within Western Australia, the largest state in the commonwealth, there are now even severe restrictions about travel between the different regions of the state. Western Australia has been divided into nine regions, Kimberley at the top, below that Pilbara, then Gascoyne, Mid West, Goldfields and Esperance, Wheatbelt, Perth, Peel, South West and finally Great Southern. Travel outside of the region in which you live is forbidden unless it comes under the usual excepted categories like work, freight or a medical emergency. For the purpose of this new ruling Perth and Peel,
which are now one conurbation stretching along the coast, are considered to be a single region. Fines of up to $50,000 can be levied on people flouting this new, temporary law.

Perth Stadium, now known as Optus Stadium after the naming rights were sold, opened in January 2018. It has the most up-to-date communications technology in the city. At the beginning of April the stadium was commandeered to become one of four coronavirus crisis management centres. It is worth quoting the premier, Mark McGowan’s announcement of this development in full:

The centre has been established to police maintaining law and order and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on the community. Police will track workforce impacts and plans for essential services across Western Australia. They will turn the directions which come out of the state emergency committee meetings, which happen at least twice a week, into operational guidance for officers.

The police commissioner Chris Dawson amplified these remarks:

It is multi-sectorial, it covers both public service and private sector and other voluntary and community groups.

...There are many issues that will impact on people’s lives, on their businesses and, indeed, on the way you operate as a family and a community, but it is being done under a state of emergency declaration, which I have signed, in regards to restricting and firmly controlling access by people who wish to enter Western Australia. (News.com.au 2020)

At the end, the commissioner goes a little off message. In doing so he reveals the sense of overarching and detailed control implied in his and the premier’s statements about the setting up of the centre.

The last time a centre like this was established in Perth was for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2011. That centre was the Maylands incident Control Centre, opened in time to police CHOGM. Its operations integrated the four District Command Centres across greater Perth. In the present state of emergency the commissioner said that the Optus Stadium centre was one of four being set up to manage police work. Doubtless the District Command Centres were being repurposed in the present emergency. The Maylands Centre
cost five million dollars to build: ‘About 100 officers will continuously man the state-of-the-art facility, watching video screens spanning a 30-metre long wall and rolling CCTV footage from fixed and mobile devices throughout the city, during the three day event’ (Trenwith 2011). The present commissioner makes the repurposed Optus Stadium sound less ominous, this time it is the community which is being policed rather than a concern with a potential terrorist threat, but we can be sure that the facilities available to the police in the centre have even greater surveillance capacities than were available when CHOGM was being monitored and protected. Now it is the Western Australian population, benignly being constructed as a community, being protected from itself. The premier mentions law and order. What he and the commissioner are worried about is an incipient breakdown of society as a consequence of the increasing restrictions coupled with the sudden numbers of people being thrown into unemployment. Perhaps they have been watching Contagion, the film by Steven Soderbergh released in 2011, about the impact of a new virus on the United States in which the action takes place against a backdrop of increasing social disorder. In this description of what is happening in Western Australia we have a microcosm of the increase in surveillance, and police powers, being activated across Australia as a whole.1 What we do not know is how many of these powers, and how much surveillance, will be rescinded after the pandemic is deemed to have ended. We are living in a state of emergency, a step away from martial law.

A characteristic of the nascent state of emergency in modern democracies, in part a function of neoliberal political practice, was that the population lived in constant precarity. The more Othered a particular group was, the greater that precarity, the fear of being excluded from the state and, in Agamben’s term, transformed into bare life. I discussed this in the Introduction with reference to people who had been born elsewhere but lived their lives in Australia who then, having committed a crime, were sent to the country in which they had been born. If a permanent resident is identified as undesirable to Australia for any reason their permanent residency visa can be revoked. The way the pandemic has been managed in Australia, reinforced by how it has been reported in the media, has reemphasised that sense of precarity. It has become heightened into the experience of anxiety. Thus, for example, we have articles like ‘Coronavirus is causing “significant” anxiety. Here’s how to cope’ (Scott 2020). It is not so much the coronavirus that is causing the anxiety but the way it has been constructed by our political leaders and by the media.
Primarily, this construction has been in terms of war and death. We wage a war against the virus, in the United States President Donald Trump declared himself a wartime commander in chief (BBC News 2020), and we fear the death that COVID-19, the sickness that the virus brings on, may give us. The media lists the numbers infected and the numbers of deaths entailed. These figures are questionable. As the official figure for infections reached a million across the globe, Australia’s Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy suggested that the true figure ‘was likely “five to 10” times higher’ (ABC News 2020a). If the Chief Medical Officer is correct then the ratio of infections to deaths is far greater than we are continually being informed by the media. Death recedes somewhat as a potent source of anxiety. In the context of the state’s construction of precarity, death offers the final, absolute exit from Australia. At the same time we are rarely given figures, no matter how rubbery, of those who have recovered from the infection.

**The Rich and the Underclass**

In times of the outbreak of infectious diseases—the first bubonic plague pandemic in Europe, known as the Black Death, ran from 1346 to 1353—royalty, nobility, senior clergy and, later, the new wealthy and governing classes, would retreat from the urban centres to isolate themselves in castles, country houses and the like (see Naphy and Spicer 2004). In the present pandemic the super-rich have no doubt done something similar. The peasants and the urban poor were left to the tribulations of the plague which travelled rapidly through their overcrowded living spaces. The more obvious divide in the present pandemic is between those who can work from home and those whose work requires their physical presence. Working at a computer tends to be a better paid, more middle-class job. This is the kind of work found in the public service, in company offices, in bureaucracies and many self-employed architects, designers and the like. More manual, working-class jobs such as labourers, tradespeople, cleaners, supermarket shelf stackers and cashiers, all require the physical presence of the worker. Many of those who use computers can isolate at home while continuing to work. Those with manual jobs cannot isolate. They either have to continue to go to work, often using public transport where they are likely to be unable to maintain social distancing, or give up their jobs to self-isolate in the comparative safety of their home. For most, giving up their job is not an option. These people tend to be less
white, often they are members of groups Australians identify as Other, Indigenous Australians, people of African heritage, Muslims. Compared to the more middle-class workers who can work from home, these people inhabit a more dangerous environment where they are more likely to be infected by the coronavirus. In other words, the likelihood of becoming infected at work is to a significant extent related to class.

In Australia in the early days infection arrived by way of air travel and people returning on cruise ships. These people tended to be relatively wealthy, travelling for business, middle-class young people on gap years, or retirees on cruises. Reflecting this, the worst hit suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne were in richer areas. In Sydney by 27 March, the hardest hit suburbs were Waverley, on the well-off northern beaches, then Woollahra then Sydney City, the city itself where youthful, hipster backpackers would live. In Melbourne,

the Stonnington council area, which includes the affluent suburbs of Toorak, Malvern and Prahran, has the highest number of cases at 57. Next is the Mornington Peninsula (36), holiday hub and home to popular retirement spots for wealthy Melbournians such as Sorrento and Portsea. (Evershed and Boseley 2020)

All these affluent suburbs are predominantly white and, with the exception of Sydney City, return Liberal parliamentarians.

**BORDERS AND RACISM**

The Melbournian retirees may well have returned from cruises. Cruises are a popular holiday for older Australians who wish to go to other countries without the hassle and discomfort often associated with air travel. However, cruise ships have turned out to be an important problem in the time of coronavirus. Air-born infections spread easily in confined and overcrowded spaces. The case of the Ruby Princess is particularly egregious. After the ship docked in Sydney Harbour a decision was taken to allow the passengers to disembark. Since then, as of 5 April, 662 passengers and crew, mostly some of the 2700 passengers, are known to have become sick with COVID-19. Eleven have died. In one of several ironies cruise ships, with their complement of relatively well-off white, older Australians, function similarly to the living conditions of the poorer
members of Australian society who live in cramped apartments and overcrowded houses. These are the people most likely to be infected were there to be a wave of community transmission in Australia. These people are also less white and include many members of the groups Othered in Australian whiteness.

In another irony, where asylum seeker boats have been turned into objects of great fear, even, as was noted in the Introduction, having it suggested that they might contain terrorists, cruise ships have been welcomed by Australian port cities for the economic benefits they bring from their touristic passengers. However, as it became clear that some of these passengers were infected with the virus, Australia’s harbours started turning the boats away. In Fremantle, as the MSC Magnifica docked, a woman on the harbour-side held up a placard on which was written ‘Go Home [Go] Away’ (see Hondros 2020). Once more boats are unwelcome. This time, though, they carry predominantly ageing, white people. The rhetoric the woman’s placard uses is the same as that used by racists against non-white people in Australia: go home, or, in a phrase that became the title of an SBS reality series, go back where you came from. The passengers on the MSC Magnifica came from Germany, France and Italy. In an article for *WA Today* Nathan Hondros and Emma Young (2020) made the connection between the premier Mark McGowan’s threat to ask the navy to intervene to stop the ship docking and John Howard’s use of the navy and troops from the Special Air Service Regiment in 2001 to stop the MV Tampa, which had picked up asylum seekers from their sinking boat, from docking at Christmas Island. That was the beginning of the Pacific Solution.

On 1 February, restrictions were placed on people flying to Australia from China. On 1 March this decision was extended to those coming from Iran and on 5 March these were further extended to arrivals from South Korea. It was not until 11 March that the travel ban was extended again to Italy by which time Italy had over 12,000 known infections and was reporting that there had been 827 deaths from COVID-19. Why did it take so long to stop arrivals from Italy? The prime minister, Scott Morrison, gave a number of reasons, for example, ‘We have about five times... the number of people coming from Korea than we do from Italy’. Trying to stop the spread of a highly infectious virus this does not sound very convincing. Morrison went on to say: ‘The other issue is that with Italy, this more broadly feeds into the issue of Europe, and travel from Europe more broadly, and we will be watching those developments over
the days and weeks ahead’ (ABC News 2020b). Morrison’s point here is related to Italy being a member of the European Union and the complications involved when there is free travel between key members of the Union allowed under the terms of the Schengen treaty. This, too, is not a convincing argument. Could something else have influenced the late decision—China and South Korea are both Asian countries, Iran is identified as being Muslim and Middle Eastern. Italians are mostly Catholic and in Australia have been included in whiteness since the 1950s.

Everyday racism often functions through taken for granted assumptions, assumptions we don’t realise we are making or that are so naturalised that the discrimination that is a consequence is not apparent, at least not to the person or group making the assumption. This kind of racism is endemic in attitudes to Indigenous Australians and impacts on how these groups are treated during the pandemic. Thus: ‘One incident involving a patient identifying as Aboriginal took place in a regional hospital in New South Wales, where they were reportedly denied testing after being told that treatment would only be offered to “real Aborigines”’. Here the claim was that a non-Indigenous person was trying to rort a system specially put in place to advantage Indigenous Australians who, because so many have serious health problems, are at greater risk of dying from COVID-19 than the general population. The health worker involved presumes they can tell an Aboriginal person by looking at them. In another example a health worker claims to know that Indigenous Australians have less hygienic habits than the members of the hegemonic culture: ‘In a Western Australian hospital, a comment was made that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients “only get it [coronavirus] because they don’t wash their hands”’ (Tsirtsakis 2020). In these examples we can see how everyday racism is embedded even in the health sector’s response to the coronavirus pandemic. Such everyday racism can work the other way round, when a white patient interacts with a non-white health worker. Gold Coast surgeon Rhea Liang posted on Twitter that: ‘Today a patient made jokes about not shaking my hand because of coronavirus in front of my team. I have not left Australia’ (Young 2020). What the white patient regarded as a joke, and probably would not have thought it racist, Liang understood as both racist and that it demeaned her and the quality of her work as a surgeon, diminishing her in the eyes of the health workers who worked for her. What we have here is the power of white hegemony in Australia.
One manifestation of the racism against Chinese in Australia can be found in the fear of eating in Chinese restaurants. In an early February article about the decline in custom in Chinese restaurants Samuel Yang and Christine Zhou (2020) write: ‘Mr [Charlie] Men said the Gold Coast Chinese restaurant community had taken a battering with a 50 per cent drop in business on average’. Yang and Zhou go on:

Mr Men’s experience is a familiar story across Australia, with the coronavirus fear factor taking its toll on Chinese restaurants in the Sydney suburbs of Eastwood, Chatswood and Burwood as well as Glen Waverley, Doncaster and Box Hill in Melbourne.

What we seem to have here is a version of the ‘all Chinese look alike’ racism. The logic goes something like: coronavirus was first contracted from animals by humans in China, it is therefore, as Trump called it, a Chinese virus; Chinese restaurants are run by Chinese people, therefore we might catch the virus if we eat there. Indeed, we might catch the virus from the food served there. Such thinking groups all people of Chinese descent together whether they were born in China or Australia or elsewhere, and regardless of whether, as Liang points out, they have recently, or indeed ever, visited China. Chinese food is considered jeopardous because it is Chinese.

Jane de Graaff (2020) had a similar experience in Sydney in early March: ‘Yesterday I took a walk through Sydney’s Dixon Street. You might know it better as Chinatown, full of restaurants, spruikers, hustle-and-bustle, long queues for bubble tea, Emperor’s Puffs, hot pot and chilli crab’. She goes on: ‘Yesterday the place was all but deserted. At lunchtime. On a weekday’. Here we have the same drop off of custom that Yang and Zhou comment on. De Graaff (2020) asks: ‘Now the virus is in Italy (among other countries), will our local pizza joints start going out of business too?’ The answer is no. As I argued above, Italians are treated as individuals who happen to be Italian or of Italian descent. They are not treated as Other. Not any more, or at least not compared with groups who are now Othered like Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and, most importantly given the origin of the coronavirus infection, the Chinese. Australians, white Australians, will continue to eat pizza. Pizza is now Australian food—though perhaps still not quite as Australian as steak and chips.
Sometimes the racism becomes direct. People who are thought to look Chinese have reported a significant rise in racist behaviour since the coronavirus started to impact on Australia (see Fang et al. 2020). In early April in a Sydney suburb:

Police allege two sisters of Asian descent were at a pedestrian crossing on the corner of Illawarra Road and Petersham Road in Marickville yesterday when they were allegedly approached by the teen who was yelling obscenities about their race and the coronavirus pandemic.

‘Asian b______, you brought corona here’, the woman can be heard saying in video footage witnesses took. (Dinjaski 2020)

When she spat on the sisters a man intervened. ‘Asians’ is a highly emotive term in Australia. In the Introduction I discussed the background to Pauline Hanson’s claim in her 1996 maiden speech in the House of Representatives that Australia was being ‘swamped by Asians’. The teenage girl is making precisely the connections I have already outlined. She views the sisters as members of a group, in this case Chinese are subsumed into the category of Asians, and as members of the group which comes from where the coronavirus originated, and, as the sisters are in Australia, they are responsible for the virus being here. This kind of racism has become more common as people settle into outlast the pandemic.

**The New Normal**

There is much talk at the moment about the new normal, what society will be like after the pandemic. There are, for example, some utopian suggestions based on the opportunity to change radically the energy mix. The very large decrease in the use of fossil fuels because planes aren’t flying, cars aren’t being driven and many energy-intensive industries have been forced to close for the period of the lockdown, will enable a more rapid take-up of renewable energies as the lockdown ends and industry starts gearing up again (see Lynch 2020). In an allied argument some people suggest that the massive drop in carbon emissions which should slow global warming gives breathing space for reconstructing the tax system to encourage more production of climate friendly technology, more electric vehicles, more gadgets to help make our homes more energy efficient and so on. There is even an argument that there may be a further governmental distribution of wealth along the lines of the tax breaks and
moratorium on loan repayments being put in place as I write, along with the extra funds being directed to the suddenly unemployed (see Verrender 2020). A more dystopian idea is that the gradual social breakdown engendered by lockdown, the huge rise in unemployment, the loss of money in the economy which may go beyond the economic collapse of the Great Depression, will see a post-pandemic society so damaged that generations will struggle to recover what they can of the pre-pandemic social order.

What I have suggested in this brief conclusion is that the post-pandemic new normal will look much the same as the pre-pandemic normal. However, the rich will be richer and the divide with the less well-off will be more pronounced; there will be acceptance of greater surveillance and government management of the population; many people will continue to work from home; the unemployment rate will continue to be higher than before the pandemic not only because many small businesses, including cafes, bars and restaurants, will not reopen but because people have been finding new ways of doing things often involving the internet and communication technologies like Zoom. Out of necessity the gig economy is likely to get larger as more people get more purchases delivered, more people use web-based sites such as Etsy to sell creative work, more people use ride-share firms because it’s cheaper than, and almost as convenient as, owning a car. While some of this development will be through choice, because of the flexible working conditions and the opportunities for personal satisfaction, for others, the unemployed forced, through necessity, into harsh working conditions with no sick leave or superannuation, they become the late capitalist, indeed neoliberal, equivalent of the day labourer in a developing country living hand to mouth. Finally, racism will not disappear. As I have argued, it is already worse than before the novel coronavirus surfaced. Indeed, it may get more pronounced as the underclass constructed in neoliberalism increases in size and in relative if not absolute immiseration to the rich.

This may sound rather negative. It should be balanced with some of the utopian possibilities. For example, there will be more renewables in the energy mix if only because renewables are now cheaper than fossil fuels and the economic fracture caused by the pandemic provides an excellent opportunity for large energy companies to transform themselves into providers of clean and green energy in the process helping to diminish the effects of climate change. But, in this book, and in this Afterword, I have focused on the structure of race and Otherness in Australian society, and on the intersection with the underclass much of which is comprised
of members of the groups Australian society Others. This structure shows no sign of disappearing. The fight for social inclusion, indeed for a state which thinks in terms of inclusion, will remain to be won.

**Note**

1. It is perhaps a coincidence that Mark McGowan, the Labour premier of Western Australia, joined the navy in 1989 and served until 1996. He is quoted on his Facebook page from 24 February, 2017 as saying, ‘My life in the Navy taught me the importance of having a plan’.

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