

## **From International Borders to the Honeycombing of Internal Borders: Response to COVID-19 Pandemic**

**DAVID E. TOOHEY**

### **Abstract**

*This article looks at borders during the Covid-19 crisis. In particular, it looks at how internal borders have arisen following xenophobic and national responses to Covid-19. This rise of internal borders is referred to as the honeycombing of borders. This article takes a genealogical approach to understand how borders have arisen—despite not always favorable opinions about them. Therefore, this looks at Rancière's (1999; 2004) concept of the “police order” in the imposition of the sensible through Foucault's genealogical approach, both to show the temporary, haphazard nature of these borders and how they revert to less desirable things. This is situated within the moment of rightwing populism, where increased prejudice leads to violence against everyone. This article uses examples from two rightwing populist countries, Brazil and the United States, Australia, which currently has a center-right government and xenophobic policies. Japan has had a hegemonic rightwing conservative government. The similarities and varieties of these countries show how internal borders vary in different spatial and political settings as well as change or persist over time. While these internal borders might suggest power concentrating at the local and subnational levels, this article argues that these borders enable increased national power.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19, bordering, internal borders, identity-politics, police order, democracy, The United States, Brazil, Japan, Australia.

### **Introduction**

Between 2000 and 2012, 25 new borders were constructed or “substantially fortified” (Jones 2012, 11); however, nation-states, who worry about public opinion of these borders, have given them different names (Jones, 2912, 11-12). Similarly, something akin to borders, but with a different form, has arisen within national territories following the 9-11 attacks. These border-like practices control flows of people and counterterrorism through surveillance at non-official borders through biometrics (Epstein 2008) and promote the actions of everyday people, outside of work, to defend against international threats—terrorism (Amoore 2008, 113). The bordering that accompanies these non-traditional borders, while not consistent, relies on “inscription” of physical boundaries through “bordering” which “Operate alone upon human bodies, or even human consciousnesses with a view to constituting the spatially bounded entity” (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012, 782). Bordering comes at a contradictory time in national sovereignty. For example, Brown (2010) suggests that the proliferation of border walls suggests a response to nation-states’ “waning sovereignty.” The historian Greg Grandin (2019) argues that the United States managed its domestic problems by expanding its “frontier”—be it national borders or international wars of conquest. Trumpism is a response to how the United States has reached the limit of expanding frontiers (Grandin 2019). Others have focused on nation-states' internal

borders (Sassen 2006) for immigration control far from the national border (Shachar 2019). However, these often are not visible but symbolic (Schimanski 2015) or thetic (Amoore and Hall 2010). International borders may be places where the often softer domestic policies—relatively non-violent—meet a violent exterior (Bosniak 2003, 4). While exploring the normative value of the U.S.-Mexico borderland, Gloria Anzaldua (1987) also expressed these frontiers as places where people suffer.

While the potential for violence at borders is known, be it against undocumented immigrants or foreign countries, what does it mean for borders to spread internally? How might this affect the politics of inequality within nation-states? Can we separate this inequality within nation-states from the outside of borders? This article does not refer to internally spreading borders as metaphorical or too subtle to miss, but instead policed borders that are almost as easy to see as international borders. In this sense, this article departs from much of the previous scholarship on bordering. An early iteration of borders modern borders is arguably the quarantine (Foucault in Nail 2016) during the virus outbreaks, which created borders within cities, that is, borders that kept people in their home, in contrast to city walls, which usually kept invading armies out. Therefore, the Covid-19 crisis potentially enables a proliferation of borders within nation-states at the subnational, municipal, and local levels, which I refer to as a honeycombing of borders. This article explores that. The main argument is that there is an emerging aesthetic practice of bordering that enacts real borders within nation-states. Still, this bordering does not currently suggest a retreat of national power.

This article modifies Jacques Rancière's (2004) theory of aesthetics as used by rightwing governments to create internal borders. These subnational, municipal, and local borders change the distribution of the sensible, leading to new expectations of what is acceptable. However, in contrast to the more revolutionary arts, they do so in ways that ironically strengthen national, military, and police power. Therefore, they are similar to critiques of the use of the arts by fascism as a way to enjoy national suicide (Benjamin 1968; also see Deleuze & Guattari 1987). These borders give a misleading idea of solving Covid-19. This article will explore this through three levels of borders. Nation-state strategies moved from the 1.) international arena—that is, blaming other countries (Toohey 2020)—to 2.) the domestic arena in terms of welcoming citizens back from international areas of Covid-19 outbreak, to 3.) the local region in terms of an aesthetic of subnational, municipal, and local hard borders. The time frame of this article is limited to the first nine months of 2020 when Covid-19 spread despite the possibility of it containing. It is limited to four democracies with either long-standing rightwing national governments, rightwing populist hegemonies, or center-right governments with high levels of xenophobia: Japan, The United States, Brazil, and Australia. Examples found in media do not necessarily summarize or quantify the typical statements but rather illuminate openings for hard borders within nation-states.

### **Borders, Order, and Identity**

Borders can be conceptually related to quarantine. As Thomas Nail (2016) explains, borrowing Foucault's theories, the quarantine was a type of urban bordering which came before the nation-state's borders. Therefore, it is at least conceptually possible to move from the idea that people should remain within their homes' walls to the idea that a nation-state's walls would be an adequate quarantine measure. In February 2020, Giorgio Agamben claimed that Italy was suspending democracy, i.e., a "state of exception," when it restricted movement in areas with

Covid-19 (2020). Agamben's suspicions did not outlast the scant medical evidence given by the early, widespread Covid-19 pandemic in Italy. The problem with Agamben's work is it overgeneralizes the state of exception beyond its usually fictitious premises (see Agamben 2005). However, his short article foreshadowed the potential of rightwing governance through some form of internal borders. Slovac Zizek criticizes assumptions that quarantining within a home, or in the face of a medical crisis, imposes on freedom. For Zizek (2020a) "We live a paradoxical imperative: we are more solidary, not approaching each other." Thus, Covid-19 does not inevitably lead to a break up of community at the national or local levels as implied by bordering. If so, why are people choosing a spread of internal borders? Distance from borders provides safety from violence at borders' exteriors (Bosniak 2003, 4). Dangerous borderland existence is not something chosen out of privilege (Gloria Anzaldua (1987). Zizek (2020b) partially answers this through two continuities: 1) the near-identical stages of response to pandemics in Medieval times and now (including xenophobia) (51), and 2) "the lesson of ecology, which is that we unknowingly can contribute" to our extinction (52). Yet, given the increases in education compared to Medieval times, repetition does not make sense on its own. The degrading to less advanced times seems like it would need to be imposed to gain acceptance. Jacque Rancière's theories provide some idea of how things become normal, and in another time abnormally bad, hence unacceptable. The literature reviewed here explores: 1) Rancière's aesthetic and more macropolitical theories and 2) Rancière's theories' applicability to a functional political protest and anti-racist struggle.

Writing on Rancière has focused on the application of aesthetics to literature and film. This related more to how literature and film could intervene in politics by "repartitioning the possible" (Conley 2005). Vaughan (2014) explains that Rancière's later work looked at artworks as constrained by specific parameters, in ways similar to Immanuel Kant's theories, albeit with a difference in the political stakes of doing away with these seemingly unconscious constraints (102-103).

Rancière's concept of the police order implies a similar concept, albeit with inverse ethical implications. Common ideas about what is sensible can be changed or sustained without liberating people. This negative aspect of what is sensible is more applicable to explaining micropolitics than micropolitical analyses of film and literature. For example, Havercroft and Owen. (2016) use Rancière's theories of undoing the "police order" as a way to understand how The Black Lives Movement can empower black people without ignoring their identity. This focus on Rancière's "police order" as a conceptual step against oppression does not cancel out Rancière's work on aesthetics. Rancière saw a "messianic" role for film, which would lead to "dissensus" that would improve society (Conley 2005, 103). Instead, focusing on the police order allows us to illuminate oppression when there are few aesthetic objects about Covid-19 and when there does not seem to be many positive sources of repartitioning the possible.

Rancière's concept of the police as something mental also relates to how the past is sustained into the future without requiring overt government intervention. This relates Rancière's ideas to Foucault's idea of governmentality, which has been described as a way to use non-state actors to conduct the nation-state's agenda in ways that may promote racism (Gressgård 2019, 14). Thus the police order relates to how people may internalize things. Therefore, Rancière's theories fit with the context of governmentality and in a more nefarious way than Foucault may have meant. This article thus breaks some new ground by showing how people internalize modes of conflict that harm them.

Rancière's idea of the police order is also compatible with Foucault's genealogies. These genealogies have been argued to illuminate that ideas and practices are situated within specific time frames (Shapiro 2016). Like Foucault, Rancière sees aesthetics as determining the form and interpretation of arts (Vaughan 2014). The police order concept can foreground the process of these ideas and practices changing over time in terms of certain processes, e.g., media iterations, etc., while being part of a specific time (Shapiro 2016). Indeed, the police order concept illuminates why political potential has mostly enabled undesirable processes (see Berardi 2019).

Rancière has been criticized for interpreting identity in ways that assume that people of color should, or could leave their identity as assigned in the "distribution of the sensible" to become more powerful political subjects (Bromell 2019, 264). Perhaps focusing more on the top-down, albeit somewhat voluntarily accepted, distribution of the sensible imposed by the police order can leave room to understand how racial identities are not left behind at will. Thus, this article focuses on involuntary inequality, either due to racial disparities in the initial spread of Covid-19, or from the usually involuntary spread of Covid-19. Using some factual data that shows this can temper some of the problems of the idea that all identities can be left behind. Covid-19 thus assumes more of a need to understand the "police force" rather than a voluntary change in the distribution of the sensible. This does not mean that Rancière's work should be abandoned, even his criticized idea of identity. A big part of Rancière's work is how roles and potentials are not chosen. According to Ross, Rancière's "examples of political disagreement concern the struggle for comprehension in which the very questions of what is at issue in a dispute and who is speaking are themselves at stake. There needs to be a redistribution of social roles and functions for the disagreement to be visible. In particular, this understanding of politics makes it clear that any social order is an imposition of incapacities" (2009, 128-129). Thus, Rancière's aesthetics may lead us to be more conscious of who is speaking or not—that is oppressed minorities—and how what seems natural in a conflict is something forced upon us. Indeed, Rancière's aesthetics emerge from his anarchist thought (Perica 2019, 23). Thus, his work leaves room for a politics that does not have hierarchies such as race. Rancière's critique of identification results from his view that all of our identities are imposed upon us: "Whereas identification seeks recognition by identifying with an identity already in place within a given police order where all parts already are counted, subjectification disrupts the police order" (Bordg 2017, 459).

The effectiveness of Rancière's work in application to real-world events is debatable. Todd May situates Rancière's work within anarchist thought, but in a way that does not make political agenda, thus avoiding the trap of Marxism which creates oppression while trying to liberate (2007a, 21-22). Perica (2019, 23) makes a similar point. Laurence Piper (2017) has noted that while Rancière's idea of disruption influenced The Occupy movement and the South African #Fees Must Fall protest, these movements suffered from the lack of focus on politics. Perhaps here, the police order idea applies better than Rancière's other theories because it allows a focus on what is happening outside of disruptive politics without forcing an agenda per se. A plan can be decided later, albeit with more focus on policies and institutions than afforded by an analysis of film or protest disruption afforded by Rancière's other theories. Of course, I am not to say that analyzing film and disruption is not political and has nothing to offer, but to say that analyzing policy may offer some temporary resolve to some debates between scholars of Rancière. Within this temporary resolve, there is room to identify problems that lead to oppression and consider why people might accept them.

The literature reviewed here shows how Rancière's theories apply to understanding both aesthetics and politics and, to some extent, racism, though his identity concept merits caution. This article adds to this by applying Rancière's work to bordering during Covid-19 through a genealogical approach. While I am not the first to consider the possibility, the simultaneous application of Rancière and Foucault's theories to a detailed factual study of how people choose the negative aspects and realities of formerly international borders within their community breaks some new ground.

### Theoretical Approach

A significant concept in this article's theoretical approach is what Rancière (1999; 2004) calls the police order (which is different from a police officer or police department). This concept is similar to Galtung's (1990) "negative peace," i.e., the police force is manifest even when violence and authoritarian behavior are not so apparent. However, a significant difference is that the police force is likely to precipitate the worst excesses of governance. Within the police order's nonlethal calls for respecting consensus lurks a logic of unwelcoming the outsider that lurks at the philosophical heart of Western xenophobia and atrocities (Rancière 1999). As Rancière (2004, 89) explains: "Exclusion refers to "the police distribution of the sensible by the subjectivization of those who have no part in it" (85). This "police" exists "as a general law that determines the distribution of parts and roles in a community as well as its forms of exclusion, the police is first and foremost an organization of 'bodies' based on a communal distribution of the sensible." The crucial point here is that by being part of the sensible, problems caused by the police order may not be the type that ethical people would be able to identify and protest. These practices can operate at a level below normal perception. A conceptual task of this article is to expose some of these problems. To understand that the police order is a method of internal bordering during Covid-19 is to extend the timeframe of this bordering beyond the pandemic and to be able to link these problems conceptually to other problems.

This article follows the following conceptual framework: 1) there is a limited scale genealogy of how internal borders are discussed, and 2), there is an approach that looks at how spaces created by these internal borders determine some populations to be valid and others invalid, and 3) these problems are put into a short-term specificity using contemporary theories of rightwing populism, and 4) this article shows how these problems thought to be only of rightwing populism are persistent both in time and other types of government than democracy.

This article and a forthcoming article (Toohey 2021) conduct a limited scale genealogy of Covid-19. The newness of the Covid-19 pandemic prevents a longer timescale. In response to discourse, many may expect the accumulation of facts, i.e., a vast "corpus" (Foucault 1989a, 31), or mistakenly look for "resemblance or repetition" (Foucault 1989, 24). However, discourse is an unthought way of speaking that sets rules of conduct (Foucault 1989a). One might object that this article should have a quantitative set of a large number of actions or statements by the petit police or newspaper coverage related to internal borders. Foucault explains that we do not find discourse through an author's oeuvre (1989a)—in this case, journalists—and instead look for a "statement" and what it "excludes" (Foucault 1989a, 30-31). Discourse is not about infinitely repeating something with "an origin," but rather its occurrence in a particular time (Foucault 1989a, 28). "Regularity" is a crucial component (Foucault 1989a, 41). In other words, this article conducts a small-scale genealogy to understand what has become regular in reporting on Covid and the police-order. Therefore, this article explores how these unacknowledged rules are

communicated to effectively influence peoples' conduct (Foucault 1989a, 232), where we can go, who should go there, etc. However, this is mixed with Rancière's theories because these rules of conduct contain a process of setting divisions of populations—into dangerous or safe—based on a supposed consensus (1999). Moreover, the limited duration of the Covid-19 pandemic is augmented by the longer timeframe of bordering; studies mentioned earlier in this article help show the likely nature and impact of Covid-19 internal bordering

May (2007b, 135) argues that Foucault's genealogy is useful to determine how "dangerous" something is by situating it within its "history and character." While internal bordering as a response to Covid-19 presently lacks a long history—compared to Foucault's genealogies of prisons, madness, sexuality, etc.—there are two fixes to this. First, bordering, as outlined at the beginning of this article, has a long history. Therefore the general history and character can serve as a genealogy for Covid-19 internal bordering. Thus, we can expect violence, nationalism, and racism from Covid-19 internal bordering. Second, Rancière's theorization of the police force relies on more than two millennia of political thought. Thus, the police order aspect beginning with ancient Greek political thought, can serve as a long-term genealogy to determine the likely history and character of police-order internal bordering during Covid-19.

Regularity in heterogeneous situations can be found within authoritarian practices within democracies, but also in actual authoritarian practices. As per authoritarian practices within democracies, there is the persistent unwelcoming of the stranger (Rancière 1999) and the sometimes invisible borders that keep ethnic and racial minorities out of white parts of the city. As per authoritarian bordering, there is the unwelcoming of the stranger, equivocally both a citizen and a colonial subject. An example of this dual process is The Peoples' Republic of China continued detention, relocation, and forced abandonment of culture during the Covid-19 pandemic of Tibetans and Uighers (BBC 2020b). A similar process occurred as a continuation of authoritarian relations with indigenous people in a country relapsing into authoritarian rule. Brazil's policy to exploit gold in the Amazon, against indigenous peoples' wishes, has spread Covid-19 to Yanomami communities (Phillips 2020). None of these processes happened because of Covid-19. Still, the spatial bordering that devalues the voices—i.e., the police order—has become even more deadly with the pandemic's spread. Politicians will no doubt avoid taking responsibility for claiming it is accidental. But one could also see a similar process in the Dakota Access Pipeline in indigenous peoples lands both before and after Trump's presidency in The United States. Indeed, the simultaneous embrace and unwelcoming of strangers is familiar to immigrants in democratic nation-states before the current authoritarian turn (see Balibar 1991). Suffice to say, all of these processes go on, not always with citizens' acknowledgment or participation, but neither with the average non-affected citizens' opposition or rejection refusing to allow identification with perpetrators as fellow citizens over such atrocities. The latter is a solution that Rancière (1991) offers to the ills of democracy.

Rancière has critiqued using the term "populist" (2021); however, I use some contemporary work on rightwing populist to address a couple of things that Rancière's work does not help us see. The first is the top-down split between rural and urban people. While Rancière's work addresses this, he does so by discussing Classical Greek philosophy, with a notion of the city which is somewhat different from what is occurring. Thus, the idea of the countryside having power over some city residents authorized by wealthy elites in the city, not fully explored in *Dis-Agreement*. Indeed, much of Rancière's work in *Dis-agreement* focuses on contemporary France and may only conceptually apply to other countries. Despite these

differences, this article avoids the short-termism of many contemporary analyses on populism. Raancière's work is thus focused on more because he looks at "post-democracy" and its failings in neo-liberal France and the long-term fake-democracies that have persisted for more than two millennia. Yet, how may these ideas relate to the present and future?

Rancière (January 21, 2021) illuminated how racist violence intensified by Trumpism is intentional and part-and-parcel of preexisting desires to see others as inferior. Though it is my interpretation based on his work, this process could exist outside of democracy. First of all, by basing his theories on classical philosophy, Rancière shows that the problems of democracy that seem new are part of persistent violence: creating Others ineligible for fundamental rights (1999). This timeframe includes governments that were in no way modern pluralist democracies. The time frame would have to include The Dark Ages and Medieval Europe (though Rancière skips these eras).<sup>1</sup> Since the problems of anti-democratic politics that Rancière mentions span a timeframe that included other forms of governance, they could apply to other less than democratic nation-states—e.g., Hungary, Poland, Brazil, or India that often prioritize religious identity over democratic freedoms—and to authoritarian countries like The Peoples' Republic of China. This article does not mention all of these cases in detail. Still, it acknowledges them, which extends the scope of this article to future studies of the police order in authoritarian countries, thereby augmenting the genealogical approach by extending the discussion beyond the topical constraints of Covid-19.

Rancière's theories are useful for promoting peace for two reasons. The first is the police order concept spotlights how groups that are not rightwing populists may inadvertently aid rightwing populism during rightwing populism. Secondly, understanding the police order is to identify conflict practices that may be subtle and occurring before and after rightwing governance.

The police order identifies how society decides, somewhat unconsciously, which populations are influential and not and distributes them in space. However, unlike identifying only the most egregious spatial practices—segregation, apartheid, prisons, border walls, forced migration—the police order concept also can illuminate more subtle forms of discriminatory oppression. Resultingly, if we are aware of the police order distribution-of-the-sensible, we can see connections between the treatment of African Americans, women, Tibetans, Ainu, and LGBTQ people. The connection is that they are designated as not fully part of their respective societies and thus show that they correspond to denigrated spaces, if not outright exiled from their countries. However, the police order also shows things that people miss. As Rancière explains, under the guise of equality, this can be the designation and divide between women who nurture (boy) children who may become politicians—the implications being that women's exclusion from the spaces of democratic decisionmaking (1999, 41-42). But it could also detect something more subtle, sometimes less offensive, the idea that the professor only should speak in a classroom. In contrast, the student should passively listen and absorb knowledge. This latter example may or may not shape the students into passive, authoritarian roles later in life. What is important is how the police order concept links together modes of oppression with sharply contrasting amounts of severity; the student with a strict, unconcerned teacher is not as oppressed as someone forced to migrate from their country. However, both show undemocratic practices.

It is tempting to conclude that it is just rightwing or authoritarian politics that ruins democracy by enacting the police order. However, there is a danger of inadvertently participating in rightwing populism and other forms of authoritarianism. Some police order activities are more palatable, even desirable, but should not be accepted (Rancière 1999, 31). One example is how

mass media sometimes broadcasts rightwing messages, which this article explores. Fox News or fake news outlets that broadcast partisan news are unequivocally rightwing. Therefore, it is essential to monitor what they are doing. It is nevertheless crucial to recognize how “liberal” news outlets may aid oppression. Before rightwing populism, many U.S. liberal politicians and news networks gave into rightwing discourse. In search of a compromise consensus with rightwing politicians, their statements supported invading and occupying Iraq and Afghanistan, sacrificing civil liberties to fight The War on Terror, and accepting anti-immigration discrimination. Yet, the New Left has also accidentally participated in more subtle ways in conservative media spectacles by adapting to violent protest imagery, thus self-marginalizing the anti-war movement (Gitlin 2003). A lesson from the above is people more inclined to promote peace and civil rights may give in to oppressive power structures even in a more benevolent political situation. The police order helps us think through this inconvenient fact. The rightwing populist ideologies that arose during democracy—and with any luck—will fade away in democracies rather than through violent authoritarian governments and war. Therefore, it is crucial to know the fault-lines of democracy.

In order to search for these fault lines, this article looks for a heterogenous regularity. That is a regularity beyond resemblance (Foucault 1989a, 76). Instead of looking for examples of the police order that are overtly violent or subtly violent, this article looks for both. This regularity can be seen as an extension of bordering away from national borders and anti-immigration measures, to its fringe existence where it claims not to be: inside nation-states. Thus, this article is not merely about the Covid-19 pandemic but extends upon a long-standing problem: borders.

### **Welcoming Citizens Home from International Infection Areas**

When receiving citizens returning from Covid-19 hotspots, governments often eschewed medical science in favor of actions that promoted an idea of safety from infection within national borders. This process sometimes favored national citizens at the expense of foreign citizens, though it began with an initial distrust of returning emigres or repatriated. The quarantines operated somewhat like internal borders.

Little information about Covid-19 existed at the beginning of the crisis. The lack of information does not imply victimization on the part of national governments. In 2016, The Obama administration created a document, “Playbook for Early Response to High-Consequence Emerging Infectious Disease Threats and Biological Incidents,” which the Trump administration claims does not exist (Knight and Kaiser Health News 2020). Japan has a similar politicization of disease management. Despite experience handling large natural disasters, Japan has been unprepared for Covid-19 or other possible disasters: “nuclear, biological, or chemical hazards” (Egawa 2020). This lack of preparation mostly occurs because of governmental reliance on panels of experts who inform politicians rather than its equivalent of the U.S. Center for Disease Control, National Institute of Infectious Disease (Egawa 2020). The result is decisions mainly based on politics (Egawa 2020). However, this echoes scandals from the 1990s of the Japanese governments’ failed response to the 1996 Kobe Earthquake and 1996 notification of how hemophilia patients were given H.I.V.-tainted blood transfusions in the early 1980s (Gordon 2003, 318-319). The convergence of necessary procedures amidst nationalist rhetoric suggests a distribution of the sensible of national borders where the interior of the nation-state is assumed to be safe, whereas the exterior is assumed dangerous (see Bosniak 2003).

Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro initially hesitated to let Brazilian nationals in Wuhan, China to return. He cited their potential threat to spreading Covid-19 in Brazil, a potential lack of budget for an evacuation, and legal hurdles to having them quarantine in Brazil (Reuters Staff 2020). The plan was to keep evacuated Brazilians in military bases distant from Brazil's urban areas (Phillips 2020). Evacuated Australians were evacuated and sent to quarantine in Christmas Island, a notorious holding prison-like holding place for asylum seekers (B.B.C. 2020a). Citizens in both countries were treated as threats, even when arriving in their home countries.

Americans were evacuated by plane from Wuhan, China, the initial epicenter of the Covid-19 virus. This evacuation received considerable news attention. Initial footage of disembarking passengers from Wuhan, China shows workers in full hazmat suits assisting them from plane to bus (Sun and Abutaleb 2020). The same article alleges that workers were not wearing proper protective gear on at least three occasions when assisting evacuees (Sun and Abutaleb 2020). This disjunction between the photo and allegations portrays the distribution of the sensible of national space. Covid-19 is contagious in China, but not in The United States, as this picture would lead readers to believe. Put another way; The United States border is assumed to protect American citizens from Covid-19. The fact that the plane trip originated in Wuhan—an area hard hit by Covid-19—and U.S. officials knew enough to understand that people on the plane could have Covid-19 and transmit it anywhere. However, the act of U.S. citizens crossing the U.S. border obscured medical realities. Another news report on the same subject alleges that workers left the quarantined military base and returned “freely,” moreover, a worker left California using commercial aviation (Cochrane, Weiland, and Sanger-Katz 2020). An online C.N.N. report on the same allegations contained a video juxtaposing evacuees disembarking from the plane at night—that could elicit fear—and hospital footage of people being treated for Covid-19, which later in the movie later seems to be likely from China by Chinese writing (Holmes, Watts and Kelly 2020). News commentators simultaneously critique the Trump administration and say that the public would rather hear science than politics (*ibid*). This focus on Covid-19 as a Chinese threat would take on less subtle phrasing from the Trump administration.

Japan was slightly more careful with people coming into Japan on The Diamond Princess. Still, this caution followed a nationalist tone of not wanting to provide medical help for people who were not Japanese. Japanese people and foreign residents were kept on the ship, a place with a high likelihood of spreading the Covid-19 virus. The national and local governments were unwilling to test all the crew's passengers due to inexperience and cost, and then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihisa Suga's remarks of a general “toughness” (The Asashi Shimbun, February 21, 2020, paraphrased in Nakazawa, Ino, and Akabayashi. 2020). Overall, news reports may have promoted a sympathy with Japanese nationals and wealthy residents who could afford to travel on The Diamond Princess. Most of the crew members, forced to stay on after passengers left and provide essential worker services as the virus spread, were from “low and middle-income countries in Southeast Asia” (Nakazawa, Ino, and Akabayashi. 2020). Such countries may include The Philippines and Thailand, two sending countries for immigrants discriminated against and stigmatized in Japan. Ten workers who tested positive for Covid-19 were not quarantined from other workers (Denyer, Dutta, and Kashiwagi 2020).

However, the testing measures that international news media and studies criticize have become the norm for most Japanese citizens. Complaints about the handling of Covid-19 aboard The Diamond Princess include crew members not tested unless noticeably sick (even though Covid-19 often spreads with little or no symptoms) (Kakimoto, Yamagishi, Matsui, Suzuki,

Wakita 2020). This lack of testing has influenced Japanese experts and media outlets to speculate that Japan's Covid-19 infection rate may be significantly higher than national infection statistics (Wingfield-Hayes 2020; Ripley, Sidhu, Ogura, and Jozuka 2020). Japanese citizens there to help, doctors, and Self-Defense Forces soldiers, were allowed to enter and leave from the ship without quarantine. There were few taxis to take people to Tokyo, city buses had plastic dividers between drivers and passengers, and Japanese and international experts were skeptical that the virus would not spread from the ship to Japan (Rich and Yamamitsu 2020). This skepticism was despite the Japanese government saying that two weeks quarantine on the ship was sufficient (*ibid*). While this seems a courtesy to people who spent a traumatic time worrying that they might be catching Covid-19, it also shows a display of an idea that Covid-19 was a foreign threat that did not extend to Japanese people. The extension of Japan's domestic Go-To travel campaign to international tourists will not occur until after Covid-19 is completely solved (Japan Tourism Campaign May 28, 2020). In sum, the Japanese government decided that Covid-19 infection is dangerous in international, not domestic, settings.

Welcoming citizens back to their respective countries also set dangerous precedents and often enabled prejudicial bordering. In comparison with Japan and the United States, there was a bordering which assumed that national territory was immune to Covid-19 while people and lands outside of national borders were not. This bordering reinforces trends, old and new. But they also heighten nationalism too through aesthetic means. As an analysis of Rancière should state, the “distribution of the sensible” means making certain things sensible or possible (2004). Thus, prejudice against minorities becomes possible during Covid-19, after years of increased acceptance. In 2018, 64% of Australians, 59% of Japanese people, and 59% of Americans agreed that immigrants “make our country stronger” (Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey in Ana Gonzalez-Barrera And Phillip Connor 2019). With Covid-19 framed as an international threat to these countries, borders were closed. In Brazil, in March 2020, Jair Bolsonaro reacted to rising Covid-19 cases by promoted continued economic activity while shutting down Brazilian borders and not allowing non-Brazils to enter by air (Charner, Darlington, Hu, and Barnes 2020). In the United States, Aggressive prejudicial behavior against African Americans and Asian Americans rose during Covid-19 (Ruiz, Menasche, Horowitz and Tamir 2020). But also, ideas of a fictitious homeland, safe from a dangerous elsewhere, were reinstated. In sum, the police order reinstated national borders and subsequent marginalized populations as a desirable category. Therefore, national bordering became desirable, if not to a majority, to enough people to harm racial and ethnic minorities. However, as will be explored in the next section, this bordering was not merely with foreign countries but became acceptable as an internal matter.

### **The Honeycombing of Internal Borders to Unwelcome Citizens**

As international borders failed to protect residents of nation-states from Covid-19, at the time treated as an international, not domestic threat, governments offered a new solution: emphasizing subnational, municipal, and local borders. This internal bordering followed two main routes, both aesthetic. The first was map-making. In the second, mass media broadcasted police department actions. This seemingly new imposition of subnational, municipal, and local borders relied on a two-decade-old War on Terror strategy, the mobilization of police departments. This is a police order enforcement of new borders, not because police departments and police orders are the same things; they are not. Instead, these divisions functioned through the police order through

their attempts to reimpose an old category of subordination to police departments and other domestic displays of militarism.

Borders through the aesthetics of map-making did not arise from xenophobia. An early example of this aesthetic would be the John Hopkins University Covid-19 tracking map, created to provide medical information and inform people that there could be Covid-19 in their communities. In Japan, nightly national television news broadcasts currently display a map of the number of new Covid-19 infections by prefecture (sub-national unit). Much as some had assumed that The Peoples' Republic of China was a dangerous Covid-19 hotspot, whereas Japan was not, residents of prefectures with low infection rates could assume they were safe by merely avoiding prefectures like Tokyo and Osaka that have high infection rates. This appeal to subnational borders is unusual for contemporary Japan. Japan's premodern history was full of warring border states (Gordon 2003, 3). Japan's modern history contains calls to national homogeneity (Gordon 2003, 254-256) and attempts to keep Japan linked through the tourism of an idealized countryside (Gordon 2003, 307-308). A similar aesthetic exists within the United States. With more detailed information provided, that is concerning cities and counties, residents of rural areas could assume that Covid-19 was only a problem for urban areas. In light of the demographics, this takes on a racist tone. Rural areas are mostly white. In contrast, "U.S. urban cores, racial minorities (especially Black Americans), and those who cast votes for Hillary Clinton in 2016 disproportionately comprise counties where COVID-19 cases are currently clustered—a stark contrast to areas where there is a low level of coronavirus exposure." (Frey 2020). Therefore, while there is a supposedly neutral assumption about how to plan behavior in different places during Covid-19, there is a hidden racist logic.

In Japan, these distributions of the sensible of map-making helped inform Covid-19 policy. High-risk areas received simultaneously positive and damaging policies. High-risk areas were allowed to declare emergencies and encourage telework and restaurants and bars to shut down. However, when the Japanese government tried to boost the ailing tourist economy with the "Go-To" campaign, which commenced on July 22, 2020, Tokyo excluded itself over fears from "government officials and medical experts" of it spreading Covid-19 from Tokyo to the rest of Japan (The Asahi Shimbun 2020a). 74% of Japanese voters surveyed oppose the Go-To campaign (The Asahi Shimbun 2020b), and health officials warned that it was happening too soon amidst Covid-19 infections (Takahashi 2020.). At the same time, Okinawa, a hitherto low-risk area with a large indigenous population, was included. Though it is hard to tell if this resulted from holiday travel from places like Tokyo during Covid-19—at a U.S. military base, there was a no-mask party—the number of Covid-19 cases shortly after the Obon holiday period, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The Okinawan Prefecture declared a State of Emergency on August 13<sup>th</sup>, though it did not discourage out-of-prefecture visitors (The Asahi Shimbun 2020c). While many cases were untraceable, less than 2% of traced cases were outside visitors, and the United States government has not provided enough information on military members to trace how they may be impacting the prefecture's infection rate (The Asahi Shimbun 2020c). One way or another, as an oppressed minority, Okinawans suffered the brunt of racism during the Covid-19 period.

In other countries, internal borders took on a more policed and militarized response. In Australia, temporally banned cross-prefectural travel in some prefectures (BBC. 2020b). Australia has a long history of quarantines to infectious diseases involving international and subnational borders (Moloney and Moloney 2020). As per a semiotics of bordering, the Australian government has a picture of the Coronavirus in blue—a color often not found in edible foods. To the left of this is a caption reading, "Each state or territory has their own entry

requirements" (Australian Interstate Quarantines n.d.). Therefore, the medical danger of Covid-19 is highlighted simultaneously to a matter of fact statement that subnational units should be authorized to control Covid-19. Therefore, the proliferation of quarantine borders is naturalized as a response to a biological threat. An international representation of Australia's response to Covid-19 shows a different response. The BBC shows young people drinking in a restaurant without protective masks in Australia's "virus-free" Northern territory (BBC 2020a). The photo of multicultural, supposedly Covid-19-free youth, partially obscures the inequality of non-white refugees and immigrants banned as a Covid-19 threat by Australia. The article details how the Northern Territory of Australia has closed its borders with other parts of Australia to deter the spread of Covid-19. Thus, borders are blocked as a threat and to protect privileged subnational sectors.

In Brazil, economically prosperous border towns have been allowed exceptions to strict national borders and negotiated Covid-19 mitigation policies with Paraguay in towns located on both sides of the Brazil-Paraguay border (Arnson, Gedan and Prusa August 7, 2020). Argentina has made areas within Argentina for Brazilian truck drivers to stop without contacting Argentinians (ibid; Associated Press 2020). However, indigenous people in border areas closer to Brazil's northern border have been hit hard by Covid-19, and those countries have shut down border crossings (ibid). Thus, while Brazil has typically mismanaged Covid-19, there are internal borders that mark the difference between dysfunctional and effective policies. There is a different price on human life, which varies within countries rather than simply across countries, as Balmford et al. (2020) say. The Associated Press (2020) shows a picture of an open grave with text about how Brazil's neighbors are worried about its "open borders" during Covid-19. The spread of Covid-19 is used in neutral mass media to justify the spread of borders.

On the East Coast of the United States, two popular tourist destinations, North Carolina's Outer Banks (Elassar 2020) and the Florida Keys, had police prohibit off-island visitors (Lazo and Shaver 2020; ). While Dare County, which includes the Outer Banks, banned all non-local residents, including out-of-state property owners, this ban assumed that people within the county were not Covid-19 risks (ibid). Also, policed roadblocks in Texas and Florida required promises of out-of-state travelers to quarantine (ibid), as well as considerations of doing so on the subnational border between Kentucky and Tennessee, and coastal communities popular with New York City residents (McDonnell Nieto del Rio and Ellis, 2020). These bans assume that only people from outside of jurisdiction were threats. Subnational and county borders were promoted as barriers that protect against Covid-19 premised upon an unscientific assumption that Covid-19 cannot spread within borders. Lazo and Shaver's (2020) *Washington Post* article visually illustrated the semiotics of militarism and policing with police, aided by military Hum-V trucks stopping cars in Rhode Island and police checking peoples' papers that verify Dare County North, Carolina residency. Since these are actual pictures of procedures, they go beyond simple media-bias as things that happened. The media repeat the distribution of the sensible provided by the military and police.

While some of the subnational and county-level border checkpoints pertain to people regardless of class, race, or ethnicity, they also reveal problematic issues about more oppressed people. At face-value, these border checkpoints and police surveillance of people from other subnational entities are quite similar to how law enforcement has been positioned along borders to stop the immigrants. The door-to-door checkups in Rhode Island somewhat resemble The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) raids on undocumented immigrants. However, in The Florida Keys, The Outerbanks, and tourist towns in Rhode Island, the people targeted were

economically privileged. They did not have to be there. In some ways, the articles lament something that has been happening to people of color and immigrants but shows victimization of the U.S. population's economically privileged sectors. They are not the people who are getting Covid-19 because they have to work in a grocery store, drive a bus, or work as a nurse. The people targeted do not seem to come from over-crowded, working-class urban areas with a higher Covid-19 infection rate. People in such communities, mostly African-American and Latina/o, would benefit from being able to leave. Readers are left with, if not a white victimization narrative, an upper-class victimization narrative. In this way, readers' sympathies may momentarily shift away from people of color and immigrants who are harder hit by Covid-19. Therefore, rightwing populism has promoted a racist narrative within relatively liberal news sources.

While rightwing populism has promoted a mass media forgetting of people of color's plight, it also does so while reporting on another group who it disfavors: the urban elite. While the urban elite—the upper middle class and wealthy people who can afford to leave cities for vacation houses—are better off during Covid-19 than others, they are also economic elite from predominantly pluralist cities, a political target of rightwing populism. As Mudde (2004, 561) puts it, "In the populist mind, the elite are the henchmen of 'special interests'. Historically, these powerful, shady forces were bankers and international financiers (often alleged to be Jewish). But in contemporary populism a 'new class' has been identified, that of the 'progressives' and the 'politically correct.'" Internal borders thus group this "elite" with the means to escape Covid-19 hotspots are in the enemy category with immigrants and people of color who are not and contrasted with "the people" who are often rural whites. Thus, news reporting leads to a potential to divide these political groups, to promote jealousy and competition between them. To critique the newspaper articles for ignoring white privilege also strengthens a claim of rightwing populism about the corrupt elite. In the United States especially, this potentially splits the Democratic Party's main constituencies. Not reporting on it also strengthens a claim of rightwing populism: people should ignore race and ethnicity.

In both Australia and The United States, a police order distribution of the sensible of bordering was applied to citizens, not immigrants, to give an illusion that effective policy was underway to stop Covid-19. Just like in the case of borders, this was a mere display that made peoples' lives uncomfortable rather than halted the spread of Covid-19.

If these borders are spreading internally, often at the request of local, not national leaders, it might be reasonably expected that this means an increase in localized power. However, the spread of these borders may replicate the former nation-state's relationship to foreign countries, this time applied to smaller states and municipalities. Whereas The United States has coerced influence in Latin American countries south of the U.S.-Mexico border, it does so with areas demarcated as almost separate in subnational and municipal boundaries. For example, the Trump administration has frequently tried to get states to open up their economies early despite having higher Covid-19 rates. In other countries, a similar process has occurred. The national government declared a state of emergency that included Osaka and Nagoya. Aichi prefecture, located between the two cities, declared a state of emergency independent of the national emergency. While Aichi Prefecture's state of emergency was not legally binding for its businesses and residents, it enabled it to use private property, medical or food supplies if needed to fight a mass Covid-19 outbreak (Kyodo News 2020). In Brazil, Bolsonaro has forced municipalities to reopen despite high Covid-19 infection rates (Al-Jazeera 2020). Thus, a seeming devolution has elicited a harsher nation-state crackdown rather than an increase in

subnational power. But this comes through a media repetition of the distribution of the sensible of subnational and municipal leaders who are facing off with ineffective national leaders. This distribution of the sensible makes it seem as if some portion of these governments had an effective policy. However, by assuming the logic and distribution of the sensible of bordering, these subnational and municipal units have—intentionally or not—reproduced national bordering.

In sum, map-making has morphed from a way to share information about Covid-19 to a reality and a partition of possibility of internal bordering that makes these borders appear sensible, whereas, at other times, they would not. This internal bordering initially diminishes subnational and municipal power by reproducing a subordinate relationship that smaller nation-states have with larger, more powerful nation-states. However, a police order distribution of the sensible of borders obscures this subordinate process. Subnational and municipal units either use words and images or police intimidation to dissuade cross-subnational-border travel, making them look like nation-states enforcing national borders. Yet, as national borders have hardly stopped global threats—climate change, vote manipulation, wars, etc.—these subnational borders do not stop threats from other areas of their respective nations. These subnational borders replicate national borders’ violence. The main difference is that nation-states direct violence to subnational and municipal units. An often misleading sense of government dealing with Covid-19 distracts from this violence. This distracting illusion is aesthetic because it offers one thing, to be consumed through viewing and accepting a sensibility—in Rancière’s (2004) terms—of borders. During this police distribution of the sensible, people forget that governments are doing little to help underlying problems.

To call this a distribution of the sensible of bordering misses one important temporal issue addressed better in genealogical terms. This internal bordering is occurring during a global situation of rightwing populism. In many cases, the urban areas excluded assume the role of the Other rightwing populism. The rural areas consist of “the people” who are usually white, whereas urban areas consist of the Other, the corrupt elite, racial and ethnic minorities, and immigrants. Therefore, to border off urban areas as dangerous to Covid-19, whereas rural areas are safe, mirrors the racialized aspect of rightwing populism in The United States, Europe, and Brazil. In Japan, the issue is slightly more complicated, given the low visibility of Identity politics. However, areas that are more relevant to the Japanese nation-state, such as Tokyo, are more protected, whereas peripheral areas, such as Okinawa, are not. In Okinawa, issues of identity are present given the Okinawan peoples’ differing ethnic identities. However, Covid-19 is still spreading in Tokyo despite the honeycombing of borders.

## Conclusion

The main argument has been that there is an emerging aesthetic practice of bordering that enacts real borders within nation-states. This emerging aesthetic emerged through three seemingly different, albeit linked processes: 1) scapegoating of foreign countries (Toohey 2021), which existed before Covid-19, 2) welcoming home citizens from Covid-19 hotspots without proper precautions, which elicited a nationalist idea of borders and territory, and 3) the honeycombing of borders to deal with certain unwelcome citizens. All three processes contain various forms of inequality—that is, criticizing the Peoples’ Republic of China also harmed Asian-Americans. Similarly, the idea of welcoming back citizens assumes that non-citizens are not welcome during crises. The third category, the honeycombing of borders, appears to merely unwelcome

somewhat wealthy people. However, it elicits a militarized policing and reinforces rightwing populist ideas of the urban elite as dangerous to rural people (see Mudde 2004). Ultimately, this third category is a boomerang effect of xenophobia and inequality inherent in rightwing populism. Rightwing populists may think that strong leaders have taken action to control urban elites. However, these anti-elite actions obscure how rightwing populists have failed to protect them from the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 is now spreading in rural areas where many rightwing populists live. This failure is especially apparent in states like Texas and Florida.

The internal borders, what I refer to as a honeycombing of borders, and its resultant failure to stop Covid-19 might seem to be a weakening of national power. However, this honeycombing of borders seems more to assert national power over subnational units. This reassertion of sovereignty differs in the countries studied. Subnational entities and municipalities in the United States and Brazil that resisted national Covid-19 policies were treated like unfavored foreign countries beyond territorial borders. In Japan, subnational entities with high Covid-19 rates are excluded from Japan's image as a country that has succeeded in containing Covid-19 without harming its economy. In Australia, a similar thing occurs with some subnational entities. An intensely violent version of these above processes occurred in the Brazilian Amazon with indigenous people and The Peoples' Republic of China with the Tibetans and Uyghurs who bear the brunt of Covid-19 and national policies to destroy their cultural and physical existence. The amount of suffering and oppression in these examples varies considerably between these situations; however, they conceptually relate in a discursive way through a "regularity" of "heterogeneous" practices (Foucault 1989a).

Though not phrased as national, subnational, or municipal borders, precedents exist for this type of bordering. Bordering of property into quantifiable land helped expand the U.S. frontier across land occupied by Native Americans and Mexicans (Grandin 2019). Yet, what is surprising is that this type of border expansion began with land often not considered to belong to the United States or different forms of land use protected by treaties. Moreover, the honeycombing of borders during Covid-19 troubles an idea of "bordering" as symbolic or subtle by following a logic usually observed for the external operations of borders directed against foreign countries and non-citizens, especially immigrants. This process, therefore, poses some thorny problems for studies of inequality.

On the one hand, a new group is subject to subnational and municipal borders in the United States. On the other, this group is often economically privileged and differs from people whose status as people of color, indigenous, low income, female, or too young suffers more deaths or job-loss from Covid-19. This is part of a complicated process of rightwing populism, which takes attention away from people who have suffered some form of internal bordering. African-American and Latina/o neighborhoods in New York City suffered from physical borders by another name—Parkways that cut through urban areas—cordoning them off into economically depressed areas (Caro 1975) full of police violence. The generalization of this process to other people living in urban areas, who rightwing populism lumps into an undesirable category along with people of color—needs to consider these long histories of oppression. Mass media analyzed in this article does not, but instead presents internal borders as isolated incidents affecting mostly well-off urban residents who can afford to flee urban areas during the Covid-19 crisis.

1. A premodern example of pandemics influencing long term affects on other marginalized groups is how, as European hospitals for leprosy brought back from The Crusades eventually became the inane asylums for the newly created category of people suffering madness (Foucault 1989b, 5).

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