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Saltwater cowboys: life in a time of death and destruction

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Saltwater cowboys: life in a time of death and destruction

Abstract

This paper begins at the Derby (western Kimberley, WA) bull rides, where young Aboriginal men compete to be champion bull riders - with the prize of a social status akin to an AFL football star. The abundance of life performed in this arena lies in stark contrast to the too often rehearsed appalling health and social statistics, which has produced policies such as the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, Shared Responsibility Agreements and 'Close the Gap'. Too many Indigenous Australians are in a state of relentless poverty, which is responded to with shortsighted instrumentalist policies. Achille Mbembe argues that the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die - the creation of death worlds (2003). Notably, above the Tropic of Capricorn 90% of the prison population is Indigenous, leading some to contend that we are in a state of war. The wounded Indigenous body is represented as an aberration - outside of the healthy civic body - and in need of mainstreaming. In the political moment there is a focus upon the war on terror, but what of the war at home? War upon Australian soil seemingly has been consigned to history. Is it productive to consider the ongoing death and destruction in Indigenous Australia as forms of state based terrorism? The challenge as a postcolonial scholar is to not only critique our time but to also think relationally and trace paths of decolonization - to create models of thinking that renew life.

Keywords

time, saltwater, death, cowboys, life, destruction

Disciplines

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[< back](#)

Rethinking the Postcolonial in the Age of the War on Terror

Abstracts and speaker information

16 & 17 September 2010, University of South Australia

The International Centre for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding (ICMNMU), in conjunction with the UNESCO Chair in Transnational Diasporas and Reconciliation Studies, are holding a joint Symposium titled: Re-Thinking the Postcolonial in the Age of the War on Terror, at the University of South Australia, on the 16th and 17th September, 2010.

Postcolonial thought was for the most part consolidated during the era of the Cold War and as such its critiques and interventions were implicated in the narrative and institutions of that global conflict. The stealthy emergence of a new grammar of international politics centred around the logic of the 'war on terror' demands a reconsideration of some central themes associated with postcolonial thinking. The violent hierarchy between the West and the Rest which characterised much of postcolonial interventions and critiques seems at once inadequate to the contemporary complexities of modernities, societies and cultures, yet at the same time necessary as campaigns of pacification, racisms and exploitations point to the continuities of coloniality.

The aim of this Symposium is to explore the postcolonial condition in the era of the 'war on terror' and to rethink in order to reformulate or reinforce its critical insights. This Symposium will be the first in a series directed to re-thinking the postcolonial.

Day 1: Thursday 16 September

Session 1

9:30 am

Professor Pal Ahluwalia, Pro Vice Chancellor: Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, UniSA

His main research interests lie in the areas of African studies, social and cultural theory, in particular, postcolonial theory and the processes of diaspora, exile, and migration.

10:15 am

Dr Ashis Nandy, Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, India

A trained sociologist and clinical psychologist, his body of work covers a variety of topics, including public conscience, mass violence, and dialogues of civilizations. He will be undertaking a Fellowship with the Hawke Research Institute in August/September 2010, and will present the UniSA Nelson Mandela Lecture, jointly presented by the Hawke Centre and School of Law at UniSA and the Festival Centre's 2010 OzAsia Festival.

[Back to full program - Day 1](#)

Session 2

11:30 am

Dr Jan Ali, University of Western Sydney

His expertise lies in sociology of religion, migration, ethnicity and globalization.

Dr Jan A. Ali, is a Sociologist of Religion (Islam). He lectures in Islamic Studies in the School of Humanities and Languages and simultaneously holds a post as the Community and Research Analyst in the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies at the University of Western Sydney. His principal sociological focus is the study of existential Islam. He has written several papers on Islam in International Journals and recently a chapter entitled "The Tablighi Jama'at in Australia" in Muslims in Australia: The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion. He is also the author of the book Islamic Revivalism Encounter's the Modern World: A Study of the Tabligh Jama'at, published by New Dawn Press (Under Contract).

Muslim Terrorism: Causes and Consequences

Terrorism in the most general sense is an act of violence intended to create fear and terror in people and society for differing ends. It has featured in human history for millennia and continues to be perpetrated by people of varying social, economic, cultural, political, and ideological backgrounds. In this sense, terrorism is not unique to a particular people or culture.

However, especially in the last ten years dubbed as "the Age of the War on Terror", terrorism almost exclusively has been attributed by the media and some intellectuals and academics to Muslims to denote Muslim predisposition to terrorism and Islam as its abode. Yet, there is no support for terrorism in scriptural Islam and a vast majority of Muslims are law abiding decent citizens of their respective countries. Importantly, there have been numerous incidents of terrorism in the same period perpetrated by non-Muslims highlighting the cultural diversity of terrorism.

This paper will explore terrorism not as a religio-cultural but a sociological phenomenon. It will look at some of the pivotal causes and consequences of it using social categorisation theory and the Bourdiean framework of habitus as tools of analysis. Social categorisation theory demonstrates causal relationships between the processes of group identification and the types of conflict situations. Habitus denotes an inclination towards a particular way of behaving. It is almost a natural world view that embodies individuals and to what they are beholden. It locates individuals as social beings in a particular context which acts as a reference point and against which individuals evaluate all life experiences. These two frameworks will be employed to redefine the contours of terrorism by removing it from its surrogate abode in Islam to its rightful domicile in the postcolonial crisis situation of Muslim everyday living.

My argument is that Muslim terrorism is a response to the consequences of colonialism and the crisis of modernity. What we are dealing with today is a general habitus of terrorism induced by the crisis situations that afflict many Muslims today. The roots of the habitus of terrorism are deeply embedded in the crisis situations of postcolonial modernity.

12:15 pm

Dr Amrita Malhi, Australian National University, Canberra

Her research has focussed on Islamism in colonial Malaya, in particular the Islamist politics of a forest uprising in Terengganu in 1928 which became a Holy War against colonial power; and also on Islamism in contemporary Malaysia.

Amrita Malhi is a Visiting Fellow in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the ANU. Her recent PhD thesis explored the politics of the Caliphate and Holy War in an anti-colonial forest uprising in 1920s Malaya. She has also written on contemporary Islam and identity politics in Malaysia. Amrita is co-convening the Malaysia & Singapore Studies Association Colloquium in December, and will shortly take up a fellowship at the National Library of Australia.

Deconstructing the Caliphate Threat: Sovereign Longing in Colonised Malaya

Since 2006, scholars of the postcolonial have called for histories which show 'the back-history of today's colonial or late colonial terror' (Boehmer and Morton 2009:7). In addition, Ahluwalia has called for studies which deconstruct notions of Muslims as a global threat (2007). This paper responds by considering the longing for Muslim sovereignty represented by calls to restore the Caliphate.

In popular commentary, the Caliphate is considered the dangerous end-game of Islamist agitation, evidence of Muslims' innate illiberal impulses. This paper, however, will locate caliphal longing in Malaya in the experience of colonisation. Drawing on colonial and Malay sources, the paper will consider a forest uprising and Holy War (perang sabil) which took place in Malaya in 1928. Here, rebels drew on Ottoman imagery, using the Turkish flag as the symbol of their struggle.

This particular invocation was generated within a concrete set of interactions between local grievances and perceptions of a global confrontation between Muslims and their colonisers. Rebels may have been defending their local livelihoods and forest access, but they were also actively seeking to play their part in a global struggle for Muslim sovereignty.

[Back to full program - Day 1](#)

Session 3

2:00 pm

Dr Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Post doctoral Research Fellow, UniSA

Minerva's research examines the role and interface of multiculturalism, racism, discrimination, sectarianism, religion, primordialism and more recently, countering violent extremism.

Minerva Nasser-Eddine's research and teaching interests are related to contemporary socio-political and cultural issues and developments in the Middle East and among its Diaspora communities in Australia. More specifically: the connections and consequences of post-colonial, regional, transnational and global links and their impact on identity, belonging and citizenship. The role and interface of multiculturalism, racism, discrimination, sectarianism, religion and primordialism are often examined within this context. More recently Minerva has developed research interests in countering violent extremism.

Why do they hate us? ... An Unanswered Question

Tracing the development of terrorism studies, and literature written on terrorism and terrorists, provides an insight into the contemporary politics of knowledge. The devaluation of historical significance in post-2001 literature leads to incomplete and somewhat distorted views of contemporary social and political issues that dominate our thinking 'in the age of the war on terror'. The shift away from historical contexts and understandings of post-colonial experiences leads to falsely reframing deep seated political concerns within society. As a result some current writings on modern terrorism and terrorists are written within the context that Islam is inherently violent and has natural tendencies towards terrorism. This in turn provides a largely altered view of Islam, its metaphysical boundaries and its people. Post 9/11 literature discloses a lack of regard for the link between local (concern about 'home grown terrorists') and global (undervaluing of historical and contemporary political developments) concerns. Instead "the erasure of history takes place in the name of history". That is, history that is being written is not only distorted, it's unhelpful to our security concerns.

2:45 pm

Dr Lisa Slater, Research Fellow, Hawke Research Institute, UniSA

Her research seeks to understand and define the processes of neo-colonialism, contemporary Indigenous identity formation and settler-colonial belonging.

Dr Lisa Slater is a Research Fellow at the Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia. Her research seeks to understand the processes of Australian neo-colonialism, contemporary Indigenous identity formation and settler-colonial belonging with a particular focus on the role of cultural production - most recently Indigenous festivals - as sites for the expression of Indigenous sovereignty and ethical inter-cultural engagement. Her recent projects have a strong focus on remote, rural and regional Australia.

Saltwater Cowboys: life in a time of death & destruction

This paper begins at the Derby (western Kimberley, WA) bull rides, where young Aboriginal men compete to be champion bull riders - with the prize of a social status akin to an AFL football star. The abundance of life performed in this arena lies in stark contrast to the too often rehearsed appalling health and social statistics, which has produced policies such as the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, Shared Responsibility Agreements and 'Close the Gap'. Too many Indigenous Australians are in a state of relentless poverty, which is responded to with shortsighted instrumentalist policies. Achille Mbembe argues that the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die - the creation of death worlds (2003). Notably, above the Tropic of Capricorn 90% of the prison population is Indigenous, leading some to contend that we are in a state of war. The wounded Indigenous body is represented as an aberration - outside of the healthy civic body - and in need of mainstreaming. In the political moment there is a focus upon the war on terror, but what of the war at home? War upon Australian soil seemingly has been consigned to history. Is it productive to consider the ongoing death and destruction in Indigenous Australia as forms of state based terrorism? The challenge as a postcolonial scholar is to not only critique our time but to also think relationally and trace paths of decolonization - to create models of thinking that renew life.

[Back to full program - Day 1](#)

Session 4

4:00 pm

Dr Warren Chin, Defence Studies Department, Kings College, London

His research interests include strategy and warfare, insurgency, counter insurgency, terrorism, future conflict, British Defence Policy and British Weapons Acquisition Policy.

Warren Chin is a Senior Lecturer in the Defence Studies Department King's College London and teaches at the United Kingdom's Royal College of Defence Studies and Joint Services Command and Staff College. His main research focuses on contemporary warfare and strategy.

Colonial Warfare in Post Colonial States

Debate and analysis of the war on terror understandably focuses on the policies and actions of the United States. This paper attempts to view the ongoing conflict through the eyes of one of America's key allies the United Kingdom. The development of a different perspective seems justified because the UK provides a good case study of how a small/medium sized power has attempted to deal with the challenges and problems created by this conflict and these observations might to apply to other small/medium sized states. It also attempts to demonstrate how the British have come to apply a sanitised version of its history of colonial warfare to develop a doctrine of population centric counterinsurgency in what Munkler terms post colonial states; territories whose viability as states were largely shaped by the influence hegemonic empires. For the British this has been a particularly acute problem because of its close association with two states which were deemed to be central to the successful prosecution of the war on terror: Afghanistan and Iraq. The paper explores why this doctrine is likely to result in political and strategic failure and the implications this is likely to have for the US and NATO which have copied this approach.

4:45 pm

Associate Professor Philip Darby, Director: Institute of Post Colonial Studies, University of Melbourne, Victoria

His expertise lies in rethinking "the international" with particular reference to the Third World.

Phillip Darby is Director of the Institute of Postcolonial Studies, which he co-founded with Michael Dutton in 1996. He is also a principal fellow in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. He has written in the fields of international relations, development and postcolonial studies. His most recent book is an edited collection, *Postcolonizing the International: Working to Change the Way We Are*.

Re-orienting the Postcolonial: Responding to the South, Working in the North

Whether the war on terror has brought into being a new grammar of international politics is open to doubt. I prefer to think in terms of a long tradition of the West acting from above and outside to reshape the non-European world. After some preliminary observations about the relationship between the Cold War, Huntington's conflict of civilizations thesis and the war on terror, this paper will focus on what I believe are major shortcomings in postcolonial thought. It will be argued that postcolonialism has had little to say about key issues of contemporary international politics such as the invasion of Iraq and the role of development in legitimising the world order. Associated, postcolonialism has failed to pursue its historical interest in the politics of the everyday so as to come up with an agenda for change. The paper goes on to suggest that here, in the North, we should be thinking in terms of a geopolitical reorientation; that instead of attending to other people's everyday, we should be attending to our own at home. On the one side, the everyday in the South can no longer - if it ever could - be regarded as an open book, available to all as a kind of global property. Moreover, such an involvement can stand in the way of local people authoring their own political subjectivity. On the other side, there is a pressing need to work against the colonial mindset in the culture of the

everyday in the North that helps sustain the existing world order. The paper will conclude by asking whether recent writing on climate change requires us to think in a different register about what the postcolonial means today.

[Back to full program - Day 1](#)

Day 2: Friday 17 September

Session 1

9:30 am

Dr Eyal Weizman, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK

He is an architect and Director of the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, and has worked with a variety of NGOs and human right groups in Israel-Palestine.

10:15 am

Emeritus Professor Barry Hindess, School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra

His research interests include postcolonialism, liberalism and imperialism, and history of political thought.

After working as a sociologist in Britain, Barry Hindess joined the Australian National University in 1987, later moving to ANU's Research School of Social Sciences, where he learned to pass as a political scientist. He is now Emeritus Professor in ANU's School of Social Sciences. Like many senior academics he has published more than he cares to remember, but he is happy to recall *Discourses of Power*: from Hobbes to Foucault, *Governing Australia* (with Mitchell Dean), *Corruption and Democracy in Australia*, *Us and them: elites and anti-elitism in Australia* (with Marian Sawer) and papers on neo-liberalism, liberalism and empire and the temporalizing of difference.

The Unity of Humanity, Barry Hindess

After doubting whether the War on Terror is substantial enough to identify an age of its own, the paper addresses cosmopolitan attempts to promote a sense of human unity. The cosmopolitanism of the European enlightenment was generally not of this kind, but rather a pan-European anti-nationalism. Kantian and many later cosmopolitanisms seem to have gone beyond this Eurocentric perspective to embrace all sections of humanity. I argue that such universalism comes at a very heavy price and consider alternative perspectives.

[Back to full program - Day 2](#)

Session 2

11:30 am

Dr Gilbert Caluya, Post doctoral Research Fellow, Centre for Post Colonial and Globalisation Studies, Hawke Research Institute, UniSA
His postdoctoral research explores alternative Islams in Australia.

Gilbert Caluya is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the International Centre for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding and the Centre for Postcolonial and Globalization Studies, Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia. His current research interests include everyday security, the politics and ethics of intimacy and Muslim Australians. He completed his PhD 'Terror's Territories: Fear, Politics and Everyday Spaces' with the Gender and Cultural Studies Department, University of Sydney and has published several articles on the cultural politics of fear, Australian racism and interracial intimacy.

Everyday Cultures of Security in the Postcolonial City

Postcolonial scholarship on the Age of Terror has returned our attention to the state and state apparatuses. Some, following Edward Said, have focused on exposing the discursive, usually mediated, construction of Islam or Muslim Others. Others draw on Foucault to critique the racial biopolitics of Western, colonial governmentality. Still others draw on Agamben to foreground the use of camps as states of exception where bodies are stripped of the legal trappings of citizenship to become bare life. In this paper, I bracket these studies in order to focus on the conditions of public support for the War on Terror. This paper proposes 'everyday cultures of security' as a framework for studying the material, semiotic and affective processes underlying the cultural formations of everyday senses of security. It distinguishes 'everyday cultures of security' from sociological studies of 'risk society', 'surveillance society' and 'cultures of fear' even as it overlaps many of their concerns and borrows from their methodologies. I argue that everyday cultures of security in the West need to be understood in the context of the postcolonial city, i.e. the urban environment transformed by the processes of colonisation and its aftermath.

12:15 pm

Associate Professor John Phillips, National University of Singapore

His research interests include community, politics, friendship, visual culture, modernist poetics, and military technology.

John W P Phillips teaches in the Department of English Language and Literature at the National university of Singapore. He has published on aesthetics, critical theory, deconstruction, linguistics, literature, military technology, philosophy, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, and urbanism. He is author of *Contested Knowledge: A Guide to Critical Theory* and coeditor of several volumes, including: *Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global processes*; *Beyond Description: Space, Historicity, Singapore*; and *The New Encyclopaedia Project*, Volume I, *Problematising Global Knowledge* (2006), and Volume II, *Megacities* (2011). Among recent activities he is coauthor with Ryan Bishop of *Modernist Avant-Garde Aesthetics and Contemporary Military Technology: Technicities of Perception* (EUP, 2010).

Bios, Munus and the Postcolonial (Sensories, Necessaries and the Autoimmune)

To what does "the postcolonial" refer in the 21st century? Most broadly, perhaps, the term signals an era: an economic dominance emerging in the late nineteenth century, with a stress on regulatory globalization. This is the postcolonial in its most conservative form, as an alibi for

commodity diversification within a rational (enlightenment) framework of international law and cosmopolitan order. But alternatively, in its form as an inevitable twisting of colonial logic--as the quasi-dialectical outcome and "other side" of the colonial project--the postcolonial represents the hope for an intellectually informed alternative ethics. In that case, globalization is held in check not so much by regulatory mechanisms but by an intrinsically resistant and protective order (e.g., under diverse and sometimes deeply troubled forms of the postcolonial nation: Burma/Myanmar, Singapore, Indonesia, and so on). The celebration of difference and commodity diversification go uneasily hand in hand. But with the era of the war on terror the postcolonial could shape up in an entirely different way. The rhetoric of the war trades on the idea of infection as the metaphor of globalization (the biological and biotechnological imaginary). The political logic of the war on terror thus falls back on an old link between the ideals of ethical health and justifications for war. Yet postcolonial protection against dangers of *its own* economic complicity often figures in derisive, and alternately tragic and comic failure, as kinds of endless rehearsal for an economic stability that never arrives. It also perhaps represents a powerful antidote to the war.

[Back to full program - Day 2](#)

Session 3

2:00 pm

Round table session with all the participants of the Symposium.

[Back to full program - Day 2](#)

Closing Session

4:00 pm

Professor S. Sayyid, Director International Centre of Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding, UniSA
His research interests encompass: ethnicity and racism; the relationship between culture and politics; postcolonial political studies, and in particular, the way in which the analysis of postcolonial conditions inform and affect so-called 'mainstream' political and social processes and structures.

[Back to full program - Day 2](#)

This program is preliminary and is subject to change without notice.

[top^](#)