



Embers of empire in Brexit Britain

Tuesday 21 August 2018, 11.30am – 12.30pm

Chair

Professor Frank Bongiorno
The Australian National University

Speaker

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Location

The Nye Hughes Room
ANU Centre for European Studies
The Australian National University
Building #67C, 1 Liversidge Street
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As the United Kingdom haggles its way out of the European Union and casts about for alternative futures, it is widely thought that the imperial past has much to answer for – with Brexit derided variously as a ‘pining for empire’ (Pankaj Mishra); the ‘Last Gasp of Empire’ (Ben Judah), and the prelude to ‘Empire 2.0’.



This is not just a matter of unrepentant Remainers resorting to easy political put-downs, but also registers frequently in the rhetoric of the Brexiteers themselves. Indeed, in recent years, any number of contemporary ills have been attributed variously to the ‘shadow’, ‘hangover’ or ‘blowback’ of empire. The recent ‘Windrush’ immigration furore; devolutionary pressures in Scotland; disputes over UK military deployments abroad and the recurring ructions over Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands are routinely explained by one metaphor or another of this type. In other words, Brexit is by no means the first time Britain’s perceived failure to divest itself of worldly delusions has been diagnosed, though rarely established beyond vague gestures to ‘ghosts’, ‘hangovers’ and periodic bouts of ‘nostalgia’. What, then, lies behind the perceived potency of an empire that has long since dipped beneath the waves? How do we account for the almost ethereal presence of the embers of empire in Brexit Britain?

Professor Stuart Ward is Head of the Saxo Institute for History, Ethnology, Archaeology and Classics at the University of Copenhagen, and Director of the collaborative research project ‘Embers of Empire: the Receding Frontiers of Post-Imperial Britain’. He specialises in imperial history, particularly the political and social consequences of decolonisation, including two books on Australia at empire’s end: *Australia and the British Embrace* (2001) and *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire* (with James Curran, 2010). He has also edited several volumes on aspects of late colonialism, including *British Culture and the End of Empire* (ed. 2001); *Australia’s Empire* (with Deryck Schreuder, eds, 2008) and *Exhuming Passions* (with Katie Holmes, eds, 2011). He is currently visiting ANU to complete a new book for Cambridge University Press: *Untied Kingdom: A World History of the End of Britain*.



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