Talking Up Strife: The rhetoric of clash of civilisations

THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2018, 9:30am-11:00am
DIXSON ROOM, State Library of NSW, Sydney

Twenty-five years ago, Samuel Huntington’s lecture, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, popularised a view of conflicts between “civilizations,” mostly based on “religion” (loosely interpreted). Mass media have been central to the emergence and dissemination of what rapidly became known as the “Huntington thesis”. For example, Edward Said in his essay on “The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations” observed that “Journalism and popular demagoguery are [Huntington’s] main sources, rather than serious scholarship or theory,” tending to “prejudice the argument in favour of conflict and polemic”. Media are also regularly accused of fostering polarised public conversations, insulating citizens within ideological “bubbles,” and even playing to prejudice by disseminating “fake news.” However, journalists also have a historic role as sources of critique, resistance and dissent, and of impartial commentary and factual information.

A panel of foremost Australian social and media commentators looks at the role the media have played in reinforcing, and challenging, divisive rhetoric in Australia and beyond, especially between European and non-European cultures and religions. The panellists question the dominant characterisation of clashes as religious or cultural, obscuring other motives which might be in play, especially the competition for economic resources.

CHAIR

Professor Marion Maddox FAHA
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Marion Maddox PhD, PhD, FAHA is a Professor in the Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations at Macquarie University, Sydney. She holds PhDs in Theology (Flinders, 1992) and Political Philosophy (UNSW, 2000). She has held several distinguished fellowships, including an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship (FT110100198, 2011-2016), ‘Religion, State and Social Inclusion: Lessons from Schools in Three Countries’ and visiting fellowships in sociology of religion at EHESS Paris and Sciences-Po Aix en Provence, in Studies of Religion at the University of Newcastle and in Australian politics at the University of Adelaide and at ANU’s Research School of Social Sciences. As Australian Parliamentary Fellow (1999-2000), she wrote her first book, For God and Country: Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics.

Professor Maddox was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 2017.

**Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah**  
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY  

Randa Abdel-Fattah is based in the Department of Sociology at Macquarie University and is undertaking an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award project comparing the generational impact of the war on terror on Muslim and non-Muslim youth born into a post 9/11 world in relation to their trust relations in the everyday contexts of school/university, developing political participation and affective responses to the war on terror in relation to the geopolitics of fear (2018-2020).

She has recently published her book *Islamophobia and Everyday Multiculturalism in Australia* (Routledge). Randa is also a multi-award-winning author of 11 books whose young adult and children’s books are published in over fifteen countries. This literary corpus primarily deals with intercultural relations, migration, race/religious issues in Australia, identity, belonging and political consciousness among young Australians, both Muslim and non-Muslim. She is well known for her commentary as a public intellectual, her media appearances and her writing across a wide range of genres.

Randa’s discussion will focus on media framings and narratives of young Muslims particularly in the context of moral panics over their ‘radicalisation’, where radicalisation, ‘extremism’ and ‘threat’ are defined as a disassociation with ‘Western/Judeo-Christian’ values.

**Dr Shakira Hussein**  
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE  

Shakira Hussein is a writer and researcher based at The University of Melbourne. Her book *From Victims to Suspects: Muslim women since 9/11* draws upon fieldwork and interviews undertaken in Pakistan, Australia, and Europe. Her essays have been published in *Meanjin, The Griffith Review* and *The Best Australian Essays*. She is a regular contributor to media outlets including *Crikey, The Australian* and ABC Online.

@shakirahussein
Rory O’Connor is CEO of the award-winning Yugambeh Museum, Language and Heritage Research Centre, based in the Yugambeh language region that covers the Gold Coast and neighbouring regions of South East Queensland. He is an Aboriginal Australian, descendant of Jackey-Jackey (c. 1815 – 1900), King of Logan-Pimpama, and also Jenny Graham (c. 1859 – 1943), a prominent Aboriginal woman in the South East region. As CEO of Yugambeh Museum, Rory is the driving force behind many positive initiatives keeping Yugambeh Aboriginal heritage alive in the South East Region.

As the tribe scribe, he has spent much time with the Elders (past and present) and has produced numerous books, exhibitions and videos to help preserve their stories and memories. Rory is also the founder of the annual three-day Aboriginal walking pilgrimage, The Drumley Walk, which follows in the footsteps of Aboriginal leader Billy Drumley (c. 1853 – 1951). Rory is also an experienced journalist, having worked for more than 30 years domestically and abroad in television and print. He is a regular commentator on Indigenous matters for ABC television and radio and continues to produce videos, exhibitions and printed matter for the Museum. As a journalist Rory has experienced first-hand the challenges of bringing Aboriginal stories into the mainstream press. He has noted the treatment Indigenous issues receive and the constant struggle communities have for matters to be covered objectively.

Rory has been involved in many of the successes of the Yugambeh community, including the reinterment of some 200 ancestors in the 1980s, the creation of Australia’s first permanent memorial for Indigenous men and women who served in defence of their country in the 1990s and an exhibition in the National Museum of Australia on Aboriginal Resistance in 2007. Most recently Rory spearheaded his community’s campaign to have Indigenous content highlighted at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games. It involved a number of Indigenous firsts and performance successes, such as:

- The koala mascot Borobi - Australia’s first games mascot to carry an Aboriginal name.
- Elders being invited to Buckingham Palace to launch the Queen’s Baton Relay.
- More than 150 didgeridoo players from Australia-wide featuring in the opening ceremony.
- A local Indigenous youth choir featuring in the closing ceremony.

The Indigenous elements of the opening ceremony brought great pride to communities around Australia but were viciously targeted by elements of the mainstream media as un-Australian and not reflective of modern society. Rory found himself defending the content in the national press on behalf of the ceremony organisers.
Noel Debien

Noel Debien is a religion and ethics specialist with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Currently an ABC TV Compass producer, Noel also writes for ABC News and Digital, and has previously presented The Spirit of Things, The Religion and Ethics Report and For the God who Sings for ABC Radio. He appears regularly on programmes including the Drum, Nightlife, the BBC and News 24. His youthful studies included Theology, Philosophy, History, Politics. Ethics and various stuff that led to a lifelong interest in beliefs, social policy and how our nation really works. He loves being part of our National Broadcaster where all of these things are an integral part of our work.

Stephen Levitt

Stephen Levitt spent four decades as a journalist, photographer and filmmaker working in zones of conflict and covering humanitarian disasters in the Indian sub-continent, the Middle East, Africa, South East Asia, Eastern Europe, Central America and Oceania. Stephen’s first documentary covered the independence of Papua New Guinea. His film on Vietnamese boat people won a United Nations Media Peace Prize and was instrumental in developing empathy among the Australian people for the first boat people. As a pioneer of video journalism, Stephen gained access to various militant factions fighting the hidden wars such as the decades long conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the Government of Sudan and Southern Sudanese, which otherwise went unnoticed by mainstream western media. He also became involved in documenting the conflict of frontline states such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe and covered the eventual collapse of apartheid in South Africa. Stephen worked with diverse groups to cover conflicts and the subsequent refugee and internally displaced movements in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Gaza, Iraq, Iran, Rwanda, Mozambique, the Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor. In Australia and abroad, Stephen worked as media director and consultant for various NGOs and at different times was based out of Nairobi, Bangkok and Paris. Upon his return to Australia, he worked as the Media and Policy Adviser to consecutive CEOs of World Vision, Australia’s largest INGO. He now lives in Canberra where he works as a media consultant and video producer.

The Australian Academy of the Humanities’ 49th Symposium Clash of Civilisations? Where are we now? will explore modern and ancient cross-cultural encounters and their contemporary implications in the spheres of history, politics, and studies in religion, as well as their cultural expressions in literature, film, and the arts.

The program has been convened by Professor Bronwen Neil FAHA and Professor Catriona Mackenzie FAHA from Macquarie University.

Visit the Academy’s website for more information and to register.

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