#18

An issue of the
Postcolonial Studies Association newsletter
• Winter 2017

#18

PSA Funding Reports

PSA News

Last Word

editors' introduction

Welcome to **Issue #18, Winter 2017,** of the **Postcolonial Studies Association Newsletter**. This issue is open-themed though it is nevertheless inflected by some of the seismic global changes that are shaping the world at the moment, and that appear to testify more than ever to the urgency of adopting a "postcolonial perspective". We begin with two articles on "Brexit", or the UK's vote in June of last year to leave the European Union. **Ben Holgate** approaches the issue from an outsider's perspective, considering the impact of such a move on a country like Australia. Then, **Maja Založnik** looks back on the referendum itself, analysing how the result might have turned out differently if younger voters, whose futures will be most affected by the outcome, were given a greater say.

In the next section, **David Firth** reports on the recent GAPS Postgraduate Forum on the theme of "Postcolonial Narrations" and centred on the question of how to express the unspeakable and the ethics of doing so. **E. Dawson Varughese** then introduces a new project, KARAVAN, a travelling literary installation that will go into schools, literary festivals and libraries, encouraging people to travel the world through poetry and fiction.

We then have several reviews of books that engage a number of pressing topics in postcolonial research. Firstly, **Hannah Kershaw** reviews the extremely timely anthology *The Good Immigrant*, edited by Nikesh Shukla. **Carmen Thong** reviews Vincent van Bever Donker's recent book *Recognition and Ethics in World Literature: Religion, Violence and the Human* and Lissa Lincoln reviews the recent Routledge collection, edited by Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak, *Dalit Literatures in India.* Returning to the topic of migration, **Helen Cousins** gives her assessment of Akram al Deek's monograph framed by the writing of the Palestinian diaspora, *Writing Displacement: Home and Identity in Contemporary Post-colonial English Fiction*, and

Yasmin Begum reviews Ruvani Ranasinha's recent study of contemporary diasporic South Asian women's fiction. Many thanks to our reviewers for their hard work.

In PSA news, we have two reports on research that has been supported by PSA funding schemes: archive research undertaken by **Maya Parmar** for her project on India in East Africa and a conference on Middle Eastern literatures organised by **Nadia Atia** and **Lindsey Moore.** We are also pleased to announce the winners of this year's funding competition, as well as those of the PSA/JPW Essay Prize. We are also very excited to announce the upcoming **PSA Convention 2017 on the topic of Globalisation.** We have now secured our full list of keynote speakers for the event and these will be Prof. Aamir Mufti (University of California, LA), Prof. Nandini Gooptu (University of Oxford) and Dr. Sharae Deckard (University College Dublin). There will also be a special screening of *Welcome to the Smiling Coast* (2016), a documentary about African tourism, development and migration. Finally, we end on a creative note, with some South African themed poetry by **Caitlin Stobie.** Many thanks to all our contributors for sharing their work with us.

Lucinda Newns (Design) and **Dominic Davies** (Editorial) are the editors of the Postcolonial Studies Association biannual newsletter. Lucinda is a Lecturer in Postcolonial and World Literatures at Queen Mary University of London. Her current research focuses on representations of domesticity and the everyday in contemporary diasporic fiction. Dominic is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Oxford currently researching the way urban infrastructures in post/colonial cities are represented by comics and graphic novels.

Ties that Unbind: An Antipodean View of (In)dependence
Ben Holgate

In April 2016, two months before the Brexit referendum, Australia's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Alexander Downer, raised his glass to toast a group of Australian and New Zealand students studying at Oxford and Cambridge and pleaded with them to do one thing on behalf of their native countries – vote "remain".

As the crowd of students, government officials and business people knocked back antipodean wines at the London offices of an Australian bank, the former conservative Liberal Party foreign minister reminded them that as citizens of Commonwealth countries they were eligible to vote in this potentially historic plebiscite. Downer's argument was simple and straightforward. Australia's best interests, he said, lay in Britain remaining a member of the European Union because Australia uses the UK as an entry point to trade with continental Europe.

Tellingly, there was no mention of Australia's historical ties with Britain, nor cultural links. Australia is by nature a forward-looking country, and a pragmatic one, too. In the twenty-first century, Australia is arguably closer in spirit and outlook to its geographically closest neighbours in Asia than it is to the UK or Australia's World War II saviour, the United States.

Downer's message, which ended up being contrary to the referendum result, illustrates the multi-layered ironies of Brexit when viewed from an Australian perspective. I write this article only a couple of days after one of the country's main public holidays, Australia Day, which falls on 26th January to commemorate the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788. However, what began as a celebration of colonialism has, since the Bicentenary in 1988, increasingly come to be viewed by many Australians as a day of reflection on the dispossession of Indigenous Australians from their own lands and has consequently been unofficially renamed Invasion Day.

This historical revisionism reflects an assertiveness of national independence that has been growing over the past four decades or more. This was highlighted by the 1999 referendum in which voters were asked whether they wanted the country to shed its stature as a constitutional monarchy and become a republic, replacing the British Queen as the official head of state and her representative, the governor-general, with a president appointed by the federal parliament. In effect, that vote was Australia's equivalent to the Brexit referendum, a once-in-a-lifetime chance for voters to decide whether they wanted their nation-state to completely break free from a foreign authority. Yet 1999 failed and 2016 succeeded. Why was that?

Well, motivations of voters aside, much of that answer can be explained by the mechanics.
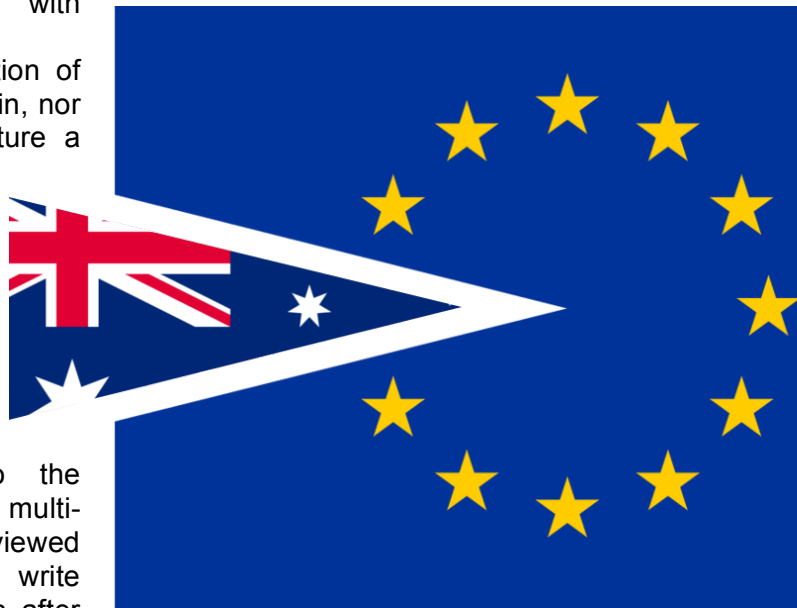
In other words, what's required for a "win" under the two very different referendum systems? Here's where the ironies abound. More than a century after Federation in 1901, Australian politicians still frequently refer – mostly with pride – to Australia's so-called Westminster style of government. Yet when it comes to a plebiscite, the two styles of government are virtually polar opposites.

Australia has a codified constitution. Britain does not. Australia has compulsory voting.

Britain does not. The Australian constitution requires that a referendum to change the constitution must be supported by a majority of voters nationally as well as a majority of voters in a majority of the six states (that is, more than half the voters in at least four states). The task is almost impossible and that's why, historically, constitutional referendums in Australia almost never succeed. On the other hand, because

Australia's best interests, [said the High Commissioner], lay in Britain remaining a member of the European Union because Australia uses the UK as an entry point to trade with continental Europe.

everyone eligible to vote must vote, or face a hefty fine, the result is unambiguously clear about what the electorate actually thinks of a particular issue.

By contrast, Britain's EU referendum required only a simple majority nationally among those voters who bothered to turn up at a polling booth. At one stage there was talk that the referendum's architect, then prime minister David Cameron, should structure the plebiscite so the winning vote required a majority of electors in each of England and the three devolved nations: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This would have roughly equated to Australia's prerequisite for a yes vote in a majority of states. If that had occurred, Scotland's overwhelming "remain" vote would have ensured the UK stayed in the EU. But Cameron buckled under pressure from the Eurosceptic forces in the Conservative Party and agreed to an overall simple majority.

In the end, 72.2 per cent of the 46.5 million people eligible to vote turned out. Of those, 51.9 per cent voted to leave the EU and 48.1 per cent voted to remain – the difference was only 1.3 million votes. Under the terms of that particular referendum, it was a simple majority.

Viewed from a "colonial" perspective, however, by which the actions (or inaction) of every eligible voter counts toward the result, the mathematics suggest a different picture. In reality, only 37 per cent of eligible voters voted to leave, while 63 per cent did not vote to leave (the 35 per cent who voted to remain plus the 28 per cent who did not vote, for whatever reasons). In other words, almost two-thirds of eligible UK voters did not expressly agree to break free of the EU and assert full national sovereignty.

So, Australia looks likely to lose its gateway to the EU against its wishes, based on the High Commissioner's exhortation, while technically remaining a subject of the British monarchy. Australia fluffed its chance to completely break free of Britain due to a majority vote by eligible voters, while Britain looks set to completely break free of the EU due to a minority vote of eligible voters.

In 1999, the Australian Republican Movement was led by Malcolm Turnbull, who at that time was a lawyer and investment banker, but is now the Australian Prime Minister. Leading a conservative government that includes many monarchists, Turnbull has largely shed his former republican stance for realpolitik. But with the "mother country" leaving its own nearby family, perhaps it's time for the colonial child to finally cut the apron strings.

Ben Holgate is an Australian who completed a Doctor of Philosophy in English at the University of Oxford in 2016. At the time of writing he is an independent scholar based in the UK.

What Would Have Happened
if the Brexit Vote was Weighted by Age?
Maja Založnik

Britain's youngest voters will spend about 60 years living with the consequences of Brexit – even though the majority of them voted Remain. Wouldn't it be fairer if their vote was worth more than the vote of someone with only a decade left to live?

This could be seen as a cheeky insult to the principle of "one person one vote", but in light of the polling results on the EU referendum, I think a little thought experiment is in order. Of course, this is not intended to discriminate against older citizens – I examine it simply to play with and explore the meaning of "fairness" in our democracy. The generational divide of the Brexit vote has angered many voters and commentators, as well as spawning a new round of internet memes.

But many were quick to note that the younger generation's overwhelming preference for staying in the EU didn't translate into a result, because a majority of them simply didn't turn out to vote. Because of the secret ballot, we do not actually know how many did or didn't. But a

YouGov poll (tweeted by Sky data) estimates that only 36% of 18- to 24-year-olds cast their vote in the referendum.

And it gets worse. Turnout is measured as a proportion of "voting eligible" individuals – which means people who are on the electoral register. But available registration data indicates that almost 20% of the youngest age group had not even bothered to register in the first place. Which means voter apathy among young people is even worse than the polling data would have us believe.

So, what if we gave young people's votes more weight, proportional to how long they had to live? Would such a system be enough to counter the levels of non-voting that were observed on June 23rd? Let's do a little back of the envelope calculation on how the Brexit vote would have panned out under this alternative voting system.

In order to do that, we need to understand the voting behaviour for each age group. The data is scant, but some estimates are available.

Age disaggregated - actual EU referendum result*
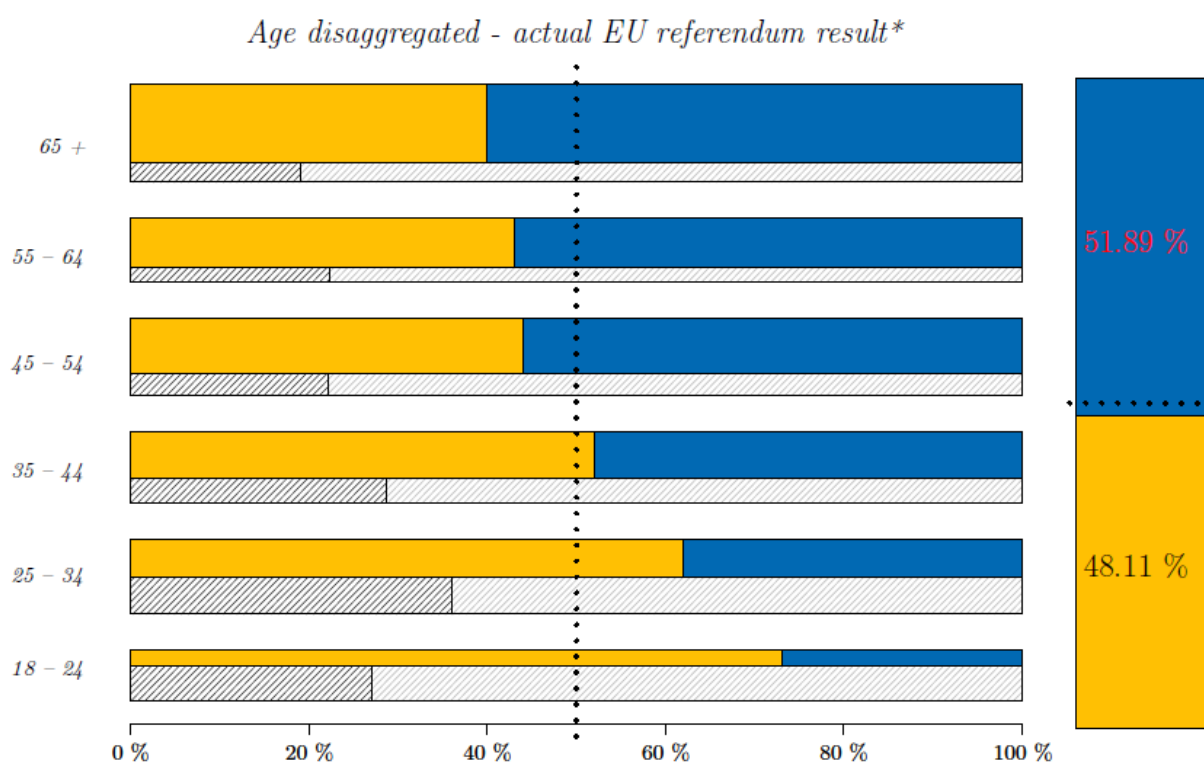
*In the horizontal bars all areas are proportional to the population size

Lord Ashcroft's referendum day poll on who voted for each outcome is based on a survey of 12,369 people after they had voted. Sky data estimated voter turnout based on YouGov data for the same age groups. And finally, we have registration levels by age from 2014 from an Electoral Commission report, which we can top up with new registrations from the government's Voter Registration Dashboard, to get the numbers up to date. Then, all we need is population counts and life expectancy estimates, which are available from the ONS.

When we put these all together, we get an overview of how the UK voted, broken down by age group. All areas in the chart below are proportional to the number of people in each group. We can see the familiar Remain-Leave pattern as it shifts with age. And note how the unregistered (black shaded) and non-voting (grey shaded) proportions become smaller and smaller as the voters get older. What this means is that, for example, while the 18- to 24-year-old group represents almost 11.5% of the adult population, it made up only about 5.7% of the voters. And of course, the opposite is true for the oldest age group.

Now for the alternative weighting: using remaining life expectancy, we can calculate how many "years left to live" belong to each age group, and use them to weight the results. So the youngest age group, which is about 5.8m people, has over 350m years of life left to live between them. And that is 19.6% of all the years left to live in our new voting system. Meanwhile, the over 65s – which currently represent 22.6% of the adult population – only have 8.2% of the years left to live.

Here's how our experimental voting system would work: the youngest group's votes would account for 19.6% of the overall votes, while the over 65s preferences only make up 8.2%. So, with this new, "fairer" weighting of votes, would the result be radically overturned?

Well, it would be overturned. Remain would win with a two point margin. But the chart below shows even more dramatically how many "votes" are now lost to black and grey voter apathy.

A good friend of mine called this system cruel. She noticed it implies that if you have one day left to live, your opinion doesn't matter. She also knows of a solution: her grandparents have always asked her how they should vote, and then voted according to her wishes. If more people were as lucky as her, the system might take young people's concerns into greater consideration.

The more our societies age, the more self-

*Votes by life expectancy - hypothetical EU referendum result**
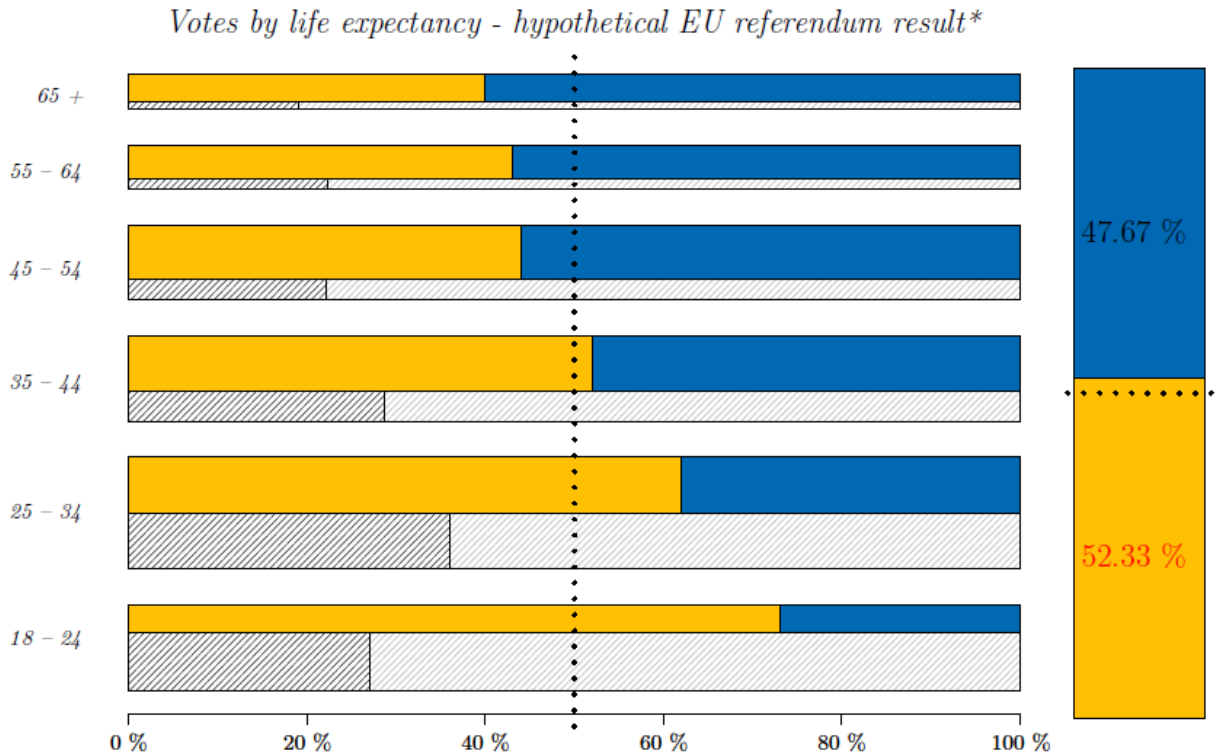
*In the horizontal bars all areas are proportional to the number of years left to live by each age group

serving voting behaviour will translate into inter-generational warfare. To those who would argue that this would also be an ageist system: in fact, over an individual's lifetime, everyone would get the same number of votes, so it would even out in the end. This thought experiment is not as fanciful as it may seem: political scientists in Japan – one of the oldest societies today – are already seriously theorising about how to put similar voting principles into practice. But until then, blaming the older generations for voting as they do, when the young don't make use of their voting rights, is disingenuous at best.

Maja Založnik is a demographer and methodologist working for the University of Oxford, and a fellow of the Oxford Martin School. This article was first published in *The Conversation* on 4 July 2016 and is reproduced here with the author's permission.

Conference & Project Reports

GAPS Postgraduate Forum // Postcolonial Narrations
Expressing the Postcolonial: Approaches to Verbalise the Unspeakable

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich
October 9–11, 2016

In October 2016, the Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien (GAPS), Germany's Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies, held its fourth annual Postgraduate Forum conference, on the theme of "Postcolonial Narrations". Held at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, the conference was organised by Laura Zander and Julia Hubner. The conference's theme was intended to focus attention on the means and forms of expressing the postcolonial, which struck attendees as particularly important after the various social and political events of 2016. Professor John McLeod (University of Leeds) opened the 3-day conference with the first keynote address, "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Postcolonial Expression". His keynote identified the ethical concern of postcolonial writers to find the requisite literary *forms* of expression that can empower readers to bear *critical* witness to the truths of past and ongoing colonial exploitations. The presentation therefore emphasised the seminal role played by the formal quality of literature to engage and challenge readers into new, progressive modes

of thinking. The presentation demonstrated the centrality of form to postcolonial expression through a series of close readings of the work of V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Caryl Phillips and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, emphasising their formal experimentation rather than an adherence to accepted forms. Formal experimentation in this way, McLeod argued, helps foster the urgent need to unlearn dominant modes of thinking to bring about a more inclusive, sensitive, and radical vision of human coexistence. John ended his address by questioning whether in 2016 this line of thinking was hopelessly utopian—but in this writer's

The presentation [...] emphasised the seminal role played by the formal quality of literature to engage and challenge readers into new, progressive modes of thinking.

opinion, and judging from the applause McLeod's talk received (not to mention the conversations that followed over the course of the conference) the answer would be a firm "no". All evidenced a shared belief that the continued engagement with postcolonial theory will help contribute to McLeod's vision.

The ethical concerns put forward in the opening address were captured and echoed in the various papers presented over the course of the conference's seven panels. Panel I, "Silence, Absence and the Conflicted Self", focused attention on the role of silence as a form of protest, from issues of political censorship in Mohameodou Ould Slahi's *Guantanamo Diary* examined by Faruk Bajraktarevic (University of Sarajevo) to the symbolic destruction of pianos across various works in Lena Mattheis's paper (University of Duisburg-Essen).

In Panel II, "Creolising the Discourse", Lioba Schreyer (University of Duisburg-Essen) examined the experimental use of form and language to oppose colonial oppression in close readings of poems by Medbh McGuckian and Lionel Fogarty. Kati Erwin (University of Oahu) gave an engaging presentation on Hawaiian slam poetry and the role of pidgin and translation in relation to local and oppressed forms of knowledge. Diana Josan (Goldsmiths) closed the panel by discussing arguments on the overlooked role of Caribbean women within postcolonial discourse.

The theme of Panel III, "(De)Colonizing Language", focused on the role of political

narratives as forms of domination and oppression. To this purpose, Emma Dolan (University of Aberdeen) addressed the politicised role of "comfort women" in relations between Japan and South Korea, examining the formal differences between official discourse and personal testimony. Meanwhile, Panel IV, "States of Transition", featured three papers that each paid attention to identities and experiences that were and remain marginalised in the colonial and postcolonial context. Sofia Aatkar (Nottingham Trent University) examined the theme of belonging in relation to the second-generation migrant experience, discussing the notion of "in-between identities" and third culture. Sarah Newport (University of Manchester) presented on the notion of the third gender in India, discussing the political future of India's hijra community and demonstrating the unhelpful conflation between the transgender and third-gender categories in the Indian context. Hanna Teichler (University of Frankfurt) closed the panel by analysing Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 2010 to facilitate a national engagement on the country's colonial history and foster new relationships with indigenous populations, discussing notions of the non-binary and transcultural in relation to national identity.

Panel V, "Intermediality: The Textual and the Visual", involved a series of analyses through textual sources and visual counterparts. Valérie-Anne Belleflamme (University of Liège) presented a close reading of Gail Jones' *Sorry* in relation to its Shakespearean intertext. Martina Heyer (University of Passau) analysed the role of visual symbols and integrated photographs in the work of Michael Ondaatje to discuss the notion of "seeing" in relation to the dominance of Western discourse. Antonia Purk (University of Erfurt) examined Jamaica Kincaid's *See Now Then*, discussing the role of knitting and needlework as a metaphor for the process of writing and coming to terms with colonial history.

Panel VI, "Expressing Africa", featured three papers analysing the role of the English