

Preface

The further we advance into the twenty-first century, the broader spreads the realisation that we are moving deeper into a ‘post-Western’ world. Ideas and institutions developed in Europe and North America, which came to dominate global orders and expectations, are becoming less and less authoritative as new, non-Western centres of power rise and as precolonial ideas and institutions reassert themselves. The big question, of course, is what a post-Western world will look like. For those of us sceptical of a future shaped by a ‘clash of civilisations’, our contemporary world provides abundant evidence of the interplay and mutual influence of different cultural approaches to order—or as the scholars writing in this book call it, ‘hybridity’.

This collection of essays represents the product of a sustained intellectual conversation that took place over the course of a seminar series and a workshop held at The Australian National University during 2015. Like many fruitful academic collaborations, this one had its gestation in informal conversations and deliberations among a group of scholars based at the time in the ANU Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs. This group applied for, and was awarded, a small grant to organise the Bell School’s inaugural Horizons Seminar Series in 2015. The Horizons Series aims to nurture interdisciplinary conversations and research collaborations among scholars working on diverse aspects of social and political change in the Asia–Pacific region. ‘Hybridity: History, Power and Scale’ was the theme chosen for the inaugural seminar series.

The seminar series brought together scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds whose work engaged in some way or another with the concept of hybridity. Areas of research represented included peacebuilding, state formation, legal pluralism, transitional justice, security governance and development. The series culminated in an international workshop in December 2015 that engaged critically with core themes that had emerged

during the course of the seminar series. As well as those who had presented seminars, the organisers invited a number of additional speakers and participants, including Oliver Richmond, one of the foremost authorities on hybridity in the critical peacebuilding field, and Hilary Charlesworth, a leading scholar in the fields of international law, human rights and gender. Other participants included Anne Brown and Volker Boege, who, along with other colleagues at the University of Queensland, had developed the concept of ‘hybrid political orders’; Helene Maria Kyed, who has utilised the concept of hybridity in the context of policing and legal pluralism; Shahar Hameiri, who has undertaken extensive critical analysis of contemporary statebuilding practice; Peter Albrecht, who has examined the nature of hybrid authority at the level of local governance; Matthew Allen and Sinclair Dinnen, who have deployed the concept of scalar politics as an analytical alternative to hybridity in exploring ongoing processes of state formation; and Damian Grenfell, who has examined the relevance of the concept of hybridity in the context of gender-based violence.

The essays in this volume have thus emerged from an intensive process of presentation, discussion, critique and reformulation. Most, though not all, argue that the concept of hybridity has heuristic value for thinking about the uncertain ‘post-Western’ world we are entering. While they pose more questions than they answer, together they point the way to rich and ongoing conversations across disciplinary and geographic boundaries and to exciting future collaborations.

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