



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **BORDERING ON BREXIT: GLOBAL BRITAIN AND THE EMBERS OF EMPIRE 20 - 22 SEPTEMBER**

A major conference at the Garrison Library next month will analyse different aspects of Brexit in detail. The conference has been organised by Dr Jennifer Ballantine-Perera in conjunction with the University of Copenhagen and the Office of the Deputy Chief Minister.

The three-day symposium is entitled “Bordering on Brexit: Global Britain and the Embers of Empire”. It will be opened by the Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia on Thursday 20 September.

As the United Kingdom navigates the shoals of Brexit and casts about for alternative futures, it is widely assumed that the imperial past has much to answer for – with Brexit derided variously as a ‘pining for empire’ (Pankaj Mishra); ‘England’s 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 in the rhetoric of the Brexiteers themselves. The Conservative Government’s vision of ‘Global Britain’ is one of several instances where Britain’s imperial past has been invoked to inspire confidence in a post-Brexit future, beckoning a divided nation back into the world.

This conference seeks a more critical purchase on the persistence of these imperial analogies.

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; disputes over UK military deployments abroad and the recurring ructions over the Falkland Islands are routinely explained by one metaphor or another of this type, while the issue of Scottish independence has long been associated with a species of unfinished colonial business, pointing to a deeper process of national disintegration.

In education curricula, the arts, museums, economic performance, immigration policy and a host of other areas, Britain’s perceived failure to divest itself of worldly expectations is frequently cited, though rarely established beyond vague gestures to ‘ghosts’, ‘hangovers’ and periodic bouts of ‘nostalgia’.



In Gibraltar, which voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union, the immediate practical challenges of Brexit will be analysed too.

Recent studies have brought the afterlives of empire into focus, assessing the myriad ways in which fallen empires retain a present-day purchase.

The core premise of this conference is that the British empire is indeed history – that there remain few political or economic vestiges of empire that might explain these enduring entanglements, little trace of the material fragments from which the empire might be refashioned.

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?

The successful 'Leave' campaign in 2016 was fought on a three-word slogan: 'Take back control'. It is the purpose of this conference to underscore the retrospectivity embedded in that deceptively simple phrase at a time of unprecedented concern about the future of Britain's internal cohesion and external viability.