



## Living in dangerous times

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## Living in dangerous times

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There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

### Ecclesiastes 3

Time is not simply a measure. It is not simply a means of marking the passing of one moment to the next. Ecclesiastes 3 allows for a reflection on the poetic quality of time, as well as its regulatory function. The passage is an attempt to differentiate between times, each defined by a particular quality. There is a time for war and there is a time for peace. These are times that we live through and the passage encourages us to understand and accept their place within our lives, to order and find a balance between them. Of course, the passage does not encourage us to ask why there is a time for war, there simply is. These qualities of time are simultaneously imperatives: they conduct. Wartime is not simply the characterisation of an era, it is a call to arms. Just as peoples' lives are regulated and governed through the measurement of time (in shifts, schedules, timetables), so too are they regulated and governed through time's poetic dimension. Time is imbued with meanings and aspires to regulate accordingly.

So, what are these times that we live in? Over the past two decades it has become commonplace to claim that we are living in dangerous times, in times of unprecedented danger. Our times are a time for danger. But what makes our times dangerous? In part, the answer is time itself. Understanding time not as a description of danger but a means of endangerment requires us to interrogate its poetic quality. Time has not been awaiting meaning, passively witnessing and observing the motions and developments of our societies until it could be labelled correctly. Time has been at work. Replete with fictions and imaginaries, time has imparted and bestowed upon societies a series of incitements and imperatives. In short, time has produced the dangers that it is often used to describe.

During the "war on terror" a multiplicity of times have produced a myriad of dangers:

*There is a time where deep histories resurface, of Orientalist fantasies and Islamophobic paranoia, where ancient antagonisms and animosities define civilisational clashes. Such a time legitimises violence in the name of fundamental and irreconcilable differences.*

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*There is a time where history ends*, of the flexing of muscular liberalism, where universal values are realised by some and transgressed by others. Such a time legitimises violence in the name of realising the potential of some and eradicating the potential of recalcitrant others as part of the inexorable march of progress.

*There is a time which anticipates catastrophes*, of Critical Infrastructure Protection and civil contingencies, where predictions of an imminent future loom over a present that must prepare and brace for its arrival. Such a time legitimises violence in the name of holding back or mitigating the “end times” so that we might persist and endure a little longer.

*There is a time of sacred pasts*, of Pearl Harbour and “9/11”, where historical memories invigorate and coordinate a renewed sense of national identity and purpose. Such a time legitimises violence in the name of ancestors who must be lived up to or hard lessons that must be learned.

*There is a time of emergencies*, of “ticking time bombs” and “45-minute warnings”, in which the normal must be suspended in order to face the unprecedented and exceptional challenges of today. Such a time legitimises violence in the name of urgency and necessity.

*There is a time of new normals*, of mass surveillance and Prevent duties, in which an ever-present vigilance is normalised and embodied. Such a time legitimises violence in the name of maintaining and protecting life through unceasing preparedness.

Our dangerous times are many, and there are many dangerous times besides. Our times are made dangerous by a present that is over-saturated with entangled, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes dissonant temporalities: of deep and linear histories, of threatening futures and sacred pasts, of suspended and new normals. Each temporality asserts its veracity in order to normalise both its vision and its lesson. This is the poetic licence of our times.

Crucially, our pursuit of security from and through the dangerous times we have come to understand we inhabit has created differential zones of habitation. The effects and extent of these dangerous times are not neat, even, or regular. Dangerous times are unevenly distributed across spaces and bodies. They congeal and stick to certain spaces. Our imaginative temporalities have their own imaginative geographies. But these are not simple time zones in which there is a time for over *here* that is defined by and contrasts with a time for over *there*.

The complexity of this relationship between space and time in the production of living environments is reflected in how time is experienced. These times do not belong to everyone equally. Indeed, questions of belonging are often negotiated through them. For some, these times have a lightness of touch, they glide over certain bodies without much of a trace. For others, they are an unbearable weight, leaving profound physical and psychological imprints and scars. From the slow violence of unexploded ordnance, the persistent trauma of living under drones, to the quotidian and elongated experiences of racialised bodies as they negotiate the formalities and informalities of hostile environments in hospitals, classrooms, on public transport, and at work.

These are the consequences of our capitulation to time; of allowing our poetics of time to produce and sustain a multiplicity of violent presents.

These dangerous times; these are the times we live in.

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