Re-orienting Australian Studies? Re-making Australia from the West

Abstract

Western Australia has continued to be seen from without as both necessary, and as supplemental: its distinctive place within the national economy, history, and psyche have continued to drive a specific and contested set of relations with the state that provides a useful lens upon ‘Australia’ and Australian studies in its larger sense. The status of Australian studies has fluctuated over the last decade, but continues to thrive, especially internationally. This special issue explores the potential for a Western Australian perspective to engage with a multi-faceted Australian S/studies. Contributors seek to re-evaluate the analytical framework of Australian studies, interrogating influential assumptions about history and culture. Through narratives of deep time, Asian exchange and cosmopolitanism, truth-telling, and extra-colonialism, for example, such research re-orients our ideas of ‘Australia’ by rupturing the seemingly inevitable contours of the nation and offering means to re-imagine a future shared civic space. A western orientation offers possibilities for spatially and temporally disrupting the Western linearity that has grounded the modern nation state. Key principles of this approach must include critical interrogation – rather than celebration – of the entity ‘Australia’; the centrality of Aboriginal perspectives and voices; and the opportunities for creativity and innovation offered by interdisciplinarity.

Keywords: Western Australia, West, Australian Studies, Indigenous Australia, interdisciplinarity
In his 1960 overview history, *Australia’s Western Third*, Frank Crowley noted that the act of British parliament authorising Governor Stirling to legislate in ‘His Majesty’s Settlements in Western Australia, on the western coast of New Holland’ was the first official use of the name ‘Australia’.¹ While Matthew Flinders had coined the term in 1814, it was not until ‘Western Australia’ was formally seized by the British that Australia - an entity seemingly defined so naturally by its coastline – came into existence. Only when the huge expanse was claimed on both sides was the cluster of south-eastern colonies given grander status within this imagined community. In this way, Western Australia made Australia, completing and defining what subsequently became the modern nation state. To this day, Western Australia has continued to be seen from without as both necessary, and as supplemental: its distinctive place within the national economy, history, and psyche have continued to drive a specific and contested set of relations with the state that provides a useful lens upon ‘Australia’ and Australian studies in its larger sense. In its synecdochal relationship with the nation state, this perspective focuses the destabilizing but exciting possibilities for re-imagining the nation.

The status of Australian studies has fluctuated over the last decade, but continues to thrive, especially internationally. This special issue of the *Journal of Australian Studies* explores the potential for a Western Australian perspective to engage with the multi-faceted program called Australian S/studies – an apparatus of jobs, centres, intellectual questions and disciplines, and curricula. Contributions originated in a workshop held at The University of Western Australia in 2019, aiming to explore the intellectual potential for a research and teaching network on this theme drawing from local strengths, but extending outwards to make national and eventually international connections.² Contributors seek to re-evaluate the

² Contributions to this event spanned Indigenous Studies, economic history, and legal analysis as well as the more traditional disciplines of history, sociology, literature, and archaeology most strongly represented here. Due to their authors’ various publishing
analytical framework of Australian studies, interrogating influential assumptions about
history and culture. Often omitted from national overviews, we suggest that a view from the
Indian Ocean may offer fresh insights into the very nature of Australianness.

The vast spatial and temporal scale of this entity within the nation – constituting a
third of the continent, and recently revealing scientific evidence for its initial human
colonisation – defines complex people-land-people relationships that continue to create and
calibrate Australian identity. Contributors ask how a perspective facing north and west,
toward Asia and the Indo-Pacific, might shape our outlook. Equally, how might the deep
history of human movement across the globe to this continent contest narratives of origins in
the south-east centred upon the arrival of the British in 1788? Through narratives of deep
time, Asian exchange and cosmopolitanism, truth-telling, and extra-colonialism, for example,
the papers collected here offer viewpoints from history, economics, Indigenous studies,
archaeology, museum studies, politics and sociology, and literary studies. Such research re-
orient our ideas of ‘Australia’ to centre Indigenous histories from more than 50,000 years
ago, to acknowledge centuries-old encounters with Asia and Europe, and a continuing,
cosmopolitan exchange of goods, ideas and culture. Where many have questioned the
Eurocentric model of knowledge known as ‘area studies’, founded on the privilege attached
to the fixed spatial nation-state, this perspective might rupture the seemingly inevitable
contours of the nation and offer the means for different ways to re-imagine a future shared
civic space. A western orientation offers possibilities for spatially and temporally disrupting
the Western linearity that has grounded the modern nation state. Here I start with an overview
of the meanings and history of Australian S/studies, and the critiques to which it has been
subject. Taking up arguments for re-temporalisation, I then turn to the possibilities of the

constraints, as well as for reasons of space and coherence, these contributions were not
included here.
multiple spatial and temporal narratives offered by a western perspective, for rupturing pernicious national frameworks to change our view of ‘Australia’ – further explored by Sven Ouzman, Tony Hughes d’Aeth, Alistair Paterson and Andrea Witcomb, and Catherine Noske in their contributions to this special issue. I conclude by reviewing the implications for ‘Australian studies’, suggesting that tensions between nativism and localism remain central to this framework – as explored further by Greg McCarthy, Farida Fozdar, Philip Mead, and Richard Nile.

What is Australian studies and why do we have it?

There are many conceptualisation of Australian S/studies. Defined variously over its four-decade history as a program of teaching and research at tertiary level, as a national and international infrastructure of centres, programs, jobs (fellowships and chairs), a kind of ‘soft power’, or even as a ‘distinctive cultural practice’, Australian studies presents many targets for critique – as well as inclusive, unpredictable, and disruptive spaces of inquiry. Since the 1980s, it has flourished, declined, and currently exists in diverse forms across the globe. The 1987 _Windows onto Worlds: Studying Australia at Tertiary Level_ report authored by Kay Daniels, Bruce Bennett, and Humphrey McQueen, was a landmark in establishing the Australian studies framework, and remains an important touchstone. Commissioned at a time when a widespread ‘cultural cringe’ was perceived to deny Australian achievements and significance, and in view of the looming 1988 Bicentenary, the 30-member Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education (CRASTE) was asked by Minister for Education, Senator the Hon Susan Ryan to explore ‘how Australians learn about Australia through the tertiary education system’, and make recommendations for the development of
Australian studies in Australia and overseas. At this time Australian issues were absent from or secondary within the tertiary curriculum in favour of European or Old World examples. As the preface stated, ‘Australians want their education to give them a firmer and sharper sense of their own place and culture’ and it called for the tertiary curriculum to be ‘Australianised’ in order to enhance citizenship, secure a productive culture, increase international awareness, bring intellectual enrichment, broaden cultural concerns, enliven disciplines, rationalise ‘over-crowded curricula’, and secure local resources.

Significantly, *Windows onto Worlds* announced the project of nationalism as both a necessary but simultaneously a troubling frame for secondary and tertiary learning; the report argued against Australian Studies with a capital S – that is, as a defined and separate field of study— and recommended embedding Australian problems and approaches across the curriculum. The report argued that ‘the advancement of knowledge proceeds best from where you are and what you are doing’ and that the whole tertiary curriculum should be ‘Australianised’ through ‘a reconceptualisation of the production and dissemination of knowledge’. ‘Australianness’ was not ‘an ideal condition to which each resident should aspire’ but ‘that shifting mix of what we are making out of what we have inherited from here and abroad’. Despite this explicit rejection of a celebratory model, the authors defined nationalism as ‘that group of practices which helps to make or keep a country independent of foreign domination’, and which ‘thrives on the differences that result from countries having the power to remake their own social and cultural environments. Running one’s own country does not lead onto the over-running of other people’. However the authors were dubious

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about the need for a ‘capital S’ Australian Studies, that is, a ‘discipline’ in its own right.\textsuperscript{5} These tensions around both centering and at the same time contesting the national framework continue to animate Australian studies in ways that remain both troubling and productive.

Frank Bongiorno’s memoir of Australian Studies during the 1990s, and after, placed this conceptualisation within the decline of Australian Britishness and the emergence of the ‘so-called new nationalism’, producing a ‘moderate, inclusive post-imperial nationalism championed by political elites in Australia from the late 1960s.’\textsuperscript{6} *Windows* emphasised regionalism, and especially the diversity of Indigenous traditions, and argued that,

To speak of ‘Australian culture’ is not to assert that the unemployed Anglo-Saxon male from Esperance shares the same political assumptions or enjoys the same music as a female, Dutch rentier resident of Peppermint Grove. Rather, it is to observe that the operation of class and gender between them are not the same as the differences of class and gender between an heiress to Italy’s Agnelli family and a process worker in one of the Fiat plants in Turin. Differences between classes and sexes, to name but two areas, do exist within Australian culture, but those experiences have a specific location which distinguishes them from parallel differences in Vietnam or Spain.\textsuperscript{7} They noted that ideas of excellence valorised European models, and that ‘the raising of the criterion of quality primarily against Australian topics’ indicated ignorance about local research, arrogance, and an attitude of uncritical reverence ‘towards foreign scholarship.’\textsuperscript{8} Yet

\textsuperscript{5} Daniels et al, *Windows*, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{7} Daniels et al, *Windows*, 27.
by the 1990s, as Bongiorno recalls, despite the deepening of interest on Australian history and culture the ‘young and progressive’ were cynical about this nationalistic agenda, coinciding with the election of the Hawke Government, and a period of ‘painful neoliberal economic reform’, reacting against corporate nationalism. Further, the racialised environment of the 1990s politicised many scholars working on Australian ethnic and cultural politics, leading to the inception of Asian Australian studies in 1999 as a field of cultural analysis. Jacqueline Lo contrasted this new approach against Multicultural studies, with its focus on ethnicity, biculturalism, migrancy and modes of becoming Australian. Asian Australian studies instead focused on tropes of diaspora, hybridity, heterogeneity, and transnationalism, emphasising mobility and traveling as a means to understand diasporic communities and mapping of ‘multiple spatialities and histories’ to disrupt notions of a singular national space and culture. Lo concluded that intellectual approaches that foreground national interest and specificities therefore remain as important as diasporic approaches that focus on broader global perspectives. The organising concept of mobilities continues to pose many questions regarding the impact of nativist movements and increasing nationalism in many places, including in Australia.

Unhelpful intellectual antagonisms also emerged. Traditional disciplines such as history and literature, for example, were sceptical of the inter-disciplinarity inherent within Australian studies, as well as its local focus. This tension was also expressed through the relationship with cultural studies: in 1996 Graeme Turner caricatured this friction in suggesting that cultural studies saw Australian studies as “ingrained with a unitary

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nationalism, which lacks sufficient theoretical sophistication, and which is intrinsically descriptive rather than critical or analytic”, while Australian studies saw cultural studies as “imperialising, ‘foreign’ and elitist”, and inimical to local modes of analysis. These “discipline wars” refracted larger antagonisms: between nation and transnation, local and universal, and most destructive, an intellectual division of labour in which “Australian cultural studies” opted “for the ‘high’ ground of theorised critique … leaving the ‘lesser’ discourses of public debate to Australian studies”.  

Fifteen years later, the boundaries of both “studies” have softened, complicated by newer questions and alliances. From the vantage point of 2021, the notion of competing ‘studies’ seems less important, as scholars work across disciplines and sets of questions at need, drawing from both ‘foreign’ theory as well as ‘local’ theorisations - such as settler colonialism, a paradigm now taken up around the globe. Even supposedly ‘foreign’ theory such as postcolonialism was powerfully shaped by the founding contributions of Australian literary scholars of the 1980s, especially as a theory of settler identity. However other related “studies” and theoretical frameworks have simultaneously enriched and undermined scholarly concerns with “Australian” problems, from critical whiteness studies, Indigenous studies, to concerns with post-representation and posthumanism. Much of this work has been led by Australian studies scholars. Such diversification has also characterised more traditional disciplines such as history: for example, as Australian historians developed a new national

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identity during the 1950s and 1960s, decolonisation and its push toward political and cultural independence prompted new professional and academic national histories. Like the nation itself, around the turn of the millennium this framework was increasingly challenged by scholars, and transnational, comparative, diasporic and world histories raised newer questions regarding readership and localism that have seen Australian historians diversify and globalise their inquiries.

Much scholarship has focused upon the status of the nation: as David Carter explained, while this concept was “unavoidably” a “recurrent focus”, as an heuristic device it was important to centre the ambiguous “way in which nationality will always be both “too much” and “not enough””. Yet during the Howard years it became apparent that many within Australian society continued to champion this entity, and were deeply invested in particular historical narratives invoking either pride or shame, as the so-called ‘History Wars’ pitted those who wished to see our history as one of ‘heroic achievement’ against those ‘black armbands’ who wished to acknowledge colonialism and its effects, in an intense politicization of history and identity within the public sphere. Ideas of Australian Studies as ‘a distinctive intellectual practice’ seem sadly dated, overtaken by interdisciplinary themes and problems, and theoretical approaches driven by specific problems. In this essay I use the term ‘Australian studies’ as a broad and inclusive way of referring to both the intellectual and

14 Fiona Paisley and Pamela Scully, Writing Transnational History (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.)
16 David Carter, Dispossession, Dreams and Diversity: Issues in Australian Studies (Sydney: Pearson Longman, 2006); see also David Carter, Kate Darian-Smith, Gus Worby, Thinking Australian Studies: Teaching Across Cultures (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004).
the infrastructural aspects of this dyad, and I agree with the *Windows* authors in rejecting the notion of an Australian Studies ‘discipline’; I capitalise the term when referring to formal programs of teaching and research, and institutional structures such as the Australian National University’s Australian Studies Institute, founded in 2018.18

**Area studies: destroy it or marry it?**

While in many ways the *Wow* report established key themes and concerns that remain salient, one gap was its consideration of Australian studies within a global context: it did not address international students, nor the place of Australian studies within global area studies.19 Three decades later, this omission seems even more glaring, as Australian studies flourishes overseas (or at least in China and Europe) while it has declined domestically. Most important, in 1987 perhaps it was not so clear that Australian studies belonged to a global proliferation of Area Studies - however tangentially. As a program, area studies had its historical origins in US Cold War politics, and therefore, as Harry Harootunian argues, was ‘always constrained by its instrumental purpose to supply the national security state with accurate information concerning the United States’ enemies’. In this way, area studies programs bolstered US capitalism as ‘the natural expression of democracy, although actually cementing contradictory claims of equality and inequality.’20 After the Cold War, foreign governments, 

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18 Its purpose is to ‘promote the study of Australia, to share our research and, drawing upon that, to help bring an Australian perspective to comparative, transnational and international projects. In short, we hope to join global conversations and also help to facilitate them.’ https://ausi.anu.edu.au

19 Ann Curthoys, “Australian Studies and Study Abroad”, *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, Winter, 2000, 47 – 58. This was also a key concern addressed by David Carter, Kate Darian-Smith, Gus Worby, *Thinking Australian Studies: Teaching Across Cultures* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004).

mostly outside Euro-America, and especially Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese governments, felt the ‘need’ to ‘pay American universities and colleges to teach courses on their histories and societies.’ Even at the turn of the millennium, Miyoshi and Harootunian argued that ‘American scholars are still organizing knowledge as if confronted by an implacable enemy and thus driven by the desire to either destroy it or marry it.’

Harootunian suggested that this Eurocentric model of knowledge might be undermined and decentered through critique of the spatialisation of the nation-state, linked to its ‘rationalities such as the liberal-democratic state, capital accumulation, and the primacy of the “self-regulating market”’. In particular, Harootunian argued against its ‘privileging the spatial over the force and forms of time’, instead advocating a strategy that ‘seeks to identify specific space/time relationships’, recalling M. M. Bakhtin’s chronotope, which aims to ‘restore time to any consideration of space and opens up the possibility for conjunctural analysis of multiple and distinct forms of temporality, drawn from social formations and modes of production.’

Much as Lo advocated mapping of ‘multiple spatialities and histories’ to disrupt notions of a singular national space and culture, Harootunian urged the possibility for conjunctural analysis of multiple and distinct forms of temporality, drawn from social formations and modes of production. I return to this possibility below in reviewing Western perspectives on the nation.

Re-imagining ‘Australia’

The question, ‘What does it mean to ‘be Australian’?’ remains important and troubling, and the national framework shows no indication of losing its power. Richard White’s classic

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22 Harootunian, “Memories”. 
study of Australian identity, *Inventing Australia*, argued for the fictional and endlessly provisional nature of this entity, as powerful interests compete for authority.\(^{23}\) Scholars continue to examine the interests that seek to promote particular versions of ‘Australianness’, and the desire of members of an ‘imagined community’, such as Australia, to shape and define their essence.\(^{24}\) Among the implications of this recognition are that while we are saddled with the nation – and global events reinforce the continuing salience of the state – nonetheless its interrogation, subversion, contextualisation and permeability must be embraced.

In 2019, questions regarding the Australian nation, social cohesion and a shared national culture were prominent in public debate. In July, a public *Inquiry into Nationhood, national identity and democracy* was convened by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee which sought to examine a ‘growing sense that democracy is under threat’, increasing political divisions, a decline in levels of public trust. The inquiry’s terms of reference defined a polarisation between populist, conservative nationalist and nativist ideologies reflecting a ‘post-truth’ politics that appealed to emotions instead of expertise, on the one hand, and extremist ‘eco-fundamentalist and postmodernist’ movements adhering to identity politics threatening free speech, on the other. Seeking to strengthen a ‘cohesive democracy and nation’ and civic engagement, it canvassed concerns and processes from the status of Indigenous Australians, enhanced connectivity, a decline in religious belief, and decline in commitment to ‘fundamental freedoms’.\(^{25}\) In October, the Murdoch

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press published a series linking such concerns and issues to the decline of Australian studies. In one feature, somewhat luridly titled ‘Shocking Cultural Cringe Sweeping Australia’s top universities’ (sub-titled, ‘What kind of country can’t bear to teach its own literature? Australia, apparently’), Rosemary Neill suggested that the de-funding of the chair of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney underlined a ‘disconnect between universities’ coolness towards our own literature and the public’s enthusiasm for it’. In the context of a global social media culture of polarisation, fragmentation and silencing, techniques of suppression from both ‘left’ and ‘right’ in place of engagement and dialogue are widely identified as undermining the civic sphere in Australia as elsewhere.

Against these conflicts, how might we re-imagine ‘Australia’? Following the 2016 International Association of Australian Studies (InASA) conference held in Walyalup (Fremantle), in Whadjuk Noongar country, Dean Chan and colleagues started from ‘the legacies of epistemic, structural and psychological violence that characterise the formation and continuation of the modern nation-state of Australia’. In this they referred to Australia’s slow and uneven abandonment of policies of control over Indigenous people, moving toward policies of Indigenous decision-making and self-determination, encapsulated by the concept of Aboriginal sovereignty. In May 2017, over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people advocating for recognition issued the “Uluru Statement from the heart”, seeking constitutional reforms, and the establishment of a Makarrata (reconciliation) Commission to

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Nationhood

supervise a process of agreement-making between government and First Nations – and, crucially, “truth-telling” about Australian history.\textsuperscript{28} Chan et al argued that,

As much as Australia is a vast place with diverse cultural lives, its dominant colonial history has incapacitated it from unleashing the energies within these diversities. By putting our sense of place central to how we mediate and relate with each other and the environment, by remembering silenced histories and recognising multiple memories, reimagining emerges from linked lives, crossed borders, and in-between spaces. We are reminded that reimagining occurs in multiple and intersectional sites that allow multiple realities to mediate with each other in dignity.\textsuperscript{29}

Inherent in the movement from championing cultural nationalism to our current predicament is a temporal shift - from celebrating ‘what we have’ to looking ahead to redressing wrongs. But it is also a temporal re-imagining that looks to the past to re-tell the story of Australia, in ‘acts of truth-telling’ that reimagine narratives of Australian national history. As Noongar historian Elfie Shiosaki writes, “We echo the voices of our old people with our own, as Aboriginal people of our generation continue to contend with practices of colonisation. We move between the two worlds.”

\textbf{Deep time Indigenous histories}

Historians of Australia have tended to locate Western Australian history in the rear-guard of national history, and frequently see it as a place where processes such as invasion and


colonial relations, convict transportation, gold-rush, self-government, all took place after other regions of the country. Memorials and commemorations focused on the south-east of the continent - such as the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, or the ‘discovery’ of the east coast by James Cook – continue to dominate public histories, government funding, and debates about the nation. Yet the history of European encounter with the west greatly precedes Cook’s ‘discovery’. Between 1606 and 1756, the world's first multi-national company – the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (United Dutch East India Company, or VOC) VOC mariners explored and mapped ‘New Holland’s’ (Australia’s) coastlines, while observations by mariners such as Abel Tasman, Maarten van Delft and others played a significant role in Australian and global histories in constructing European perceptions of the continent and its inhabitants.

In particular, the story of the 1629 wreck of the Dutch East India Company ship Batavia off the coast of Western Australia, and the subsequent mutiny and massacre of the survivors has sometimes been proposed as a gruesome national foundation myth. Two hours before dawn on 4 June, 1629, the ship struck the Morning Reef, part of the Houtman Abrolhos islands. While most of the 322 passengers and crew made their way to the flat, inhospitable islands of the archipelago, commandeur Francisco Pelsaert and others left in a longboat to search for water, and when they were unsuccessful, continued on the long journey north to Batavia. Meanwhile undermerchant Jeronimus Cornelisz., the most senior VOC officer remaining, led a group of mutineers in the massacre and enslavement of the survivors. A battle between mutineers and soldiers was dramatically interrupted by the return of Pelsaert, and the former were captured, interrogated with torture, and several executed –

although two were left on the mainland coast to make their way alone. Two decades after the disaster, the popular illustrated book *Ongeluckige voyagie, van't schip Batavia (Unlucky Voyage of the Ship Batavia)*, was published in Amsterdam, helping to shape a new genre of shipwreck narratives for European audiences. But as early as 1897, Perth-based public servant Willem Siebenhaar, the first English translator of the disaster, termed the survivors ‘Australia’s First White Residents’, preceding better-known stories of British invasion and encounter on the east coast by a century and a half. At a time of nationalist debate leading up to Federation in 1901, Siebenhaar noted that this ‘earliest of Australian books’ told the story of ‘the first settlers — involuntary, it is true — in Australian territory’. Siebenhaar suggested that while ‘its heroes and villains are Dutch and Frenchmen, and its publisher honest Jan Jansz, of Amsterdam, the whole deals with Australia and Australian settlement, and gives us a glimpse of [A]borigines similar to those who still inhabit our colony.’

Siebenhaar’s suggestion – marking seventeenth-century links to the Dutch, to Indonesia, and to the unseen but ever-anticipated Indigenous inhabitants - was not taken up. Yet could this gothic tale of madness and brutality more truthfully function to counter the oppressive sense of progress inhering in British ‘foundation’ stories featuring heroic ‘discovery’ and white empire-building?

The late historian Philippa Maddern provided a snapshot of history-making in Western Australia in 2012, suggesting that up until the 1980s, and beyond, ‘WA was very much the under-acknowledged outsider in general histories of Australia, or indeed the

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empire’. Maddern identified two traditional streams in WA history – first, the tendency to localise, through producing political, economic, or settler histories ‘like the “Australian” ones, but focusing on WA’, or second, a tradition of writing commissioned ‘histories of particular WA institutions’. But she argued that WA history need not be ‘just the national history in small and in loco’ but could ‘take its true, and vital, place in the great narratives of world history.’ 32 Eminent historian of the West, Geoffrey Bolton, also referred to the ‘robust particularism’ of WA histories, so easily subsumed into national narratives. 33 More recent work has complicated and expanded these themes, both identifying the distinctive role of WA as well as incorporating the history of the colony into broader imperial and global processes, such as the implementation of policies of protection, or in securing self-government. 34 Again, in my own recent work I have found that the Swan River venture of 1829 played a significant role in debates about the abolition of British slavery. During the 1820s, anxiety about the ‘loss’ of slave profits in the Caribbean led to a range of experimental colonial labour schemes. Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s theory of systematic colonisation – in which Swan River stood as a counter-example and object lesson - can be understood as a direct response to this impending loss. In 1833 Wakefield wrote that ‘[t]he last colony founded by

32 Philippa Maddern, “‘The Past Is Not What It Used To Be’: The future of Western Australian History,” History Council of Western Australia Annual Lecture, 2012.
Englishmen, has severely felt the want of slavery’, because ‘there never has been a class of laborers’, and ridiculed Peel ‘who, it is said, took out a capital of 50,000l, and 300 persons of the laboring class’ but had ‘been left without a servant to make his bed, or to fetch him water from the river.35 Wakefield’s theory was structured by key principles drawn from and defined in contra-distinction to slavery – disciplined and coerced ‘free labour’, land commoditization, and spectacular forms of punishment – and these became central both to settler colonialism and to the emergence of global capitalism. Karl Marx pointed out in mocking Wakefield’s vision and its role in healing ‘the anti-capitalistic cancer of the colonies’ – so underlining the importance of these experiments in an evolving imperial division of labour.36

The Comparative Wests research project sought to place WA into a global context by examining the historically ‘peripheral regions’ of Anglophone settler-colonial societies of the western United States, western Canada, and western Australia, and tracing the ways in which their indigenous societies and territories have been ‘continually enmeshed in the processes of uncertain, and reversible, incorporation into settler states’, with resulting ecological and cultural changes.37 While these processes are not confined to the ‘wests’ of their respective nation states, as Lisa Ford pointed out, one key insight of this research was to note the ‘problems that still result from imagining the Wests of settler-colonial expansion as “frontiers”—either untouched frontiers upon which was painted the progress of developing

nation-states or as frontier of pristine landscapes to be protected’. These stereotypes hinder our understanding of a more complex landscape.

However our growing insight into the deep time story of human colonization, emerging largely through archaeological research, has recently shown that Australia was first colonised more than two thousand human generations ago, by ancestors of Western Australia’s Aboriginal peoples. These colonists adapted to changing environments, in tropical savannahs, deserts, woodlands, forests and coastlines, in a long history characterised by intra-regional genetic and economic continuities, and exchanges and dynamism in religion, language and art. These relationships are remarkably well documented in Western Australia’s Kimberley, Western Desert, Pilbara and South West regions, which feature many of the oldest sites on the continent, first occupied c. 50 000 years ago, and numerous other sites first occupied in the late Pleistocene. Recent mtDNA analyses show that two groups of settlers arrived between 50 – 65 ka settling Northern (Papuan) and Southern Sahul. This new picture also reveals that Aboriginal people have lived in Western Australia’s desert interior for more than 50,000 years – around 10,000 years earlier than previously known. At the desert rock shelter site of Karnatukul (previously Serpent’s Glen), more than 1,000km from where the coastline would have been, people occupied what is now known as the Little Sandy

40 Joe Dortch, Jane Balme, Jo McDonald, Kate Morse, Sue O’Connor & Peter Veth, “Settling the west: 50,000 years in a changing land,” Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia 102 (2019): 30-44. See also Veth 2017.
Desert very soon after settling the north of the continent. This is some of the earliest evidence of people living in deserts, not just in Australia, but anywhere in the world.42

This must be understood in the regional context of new evidence from the north-west shelf, East Timor and Borneo, for the ability to voyage over large tracts of ocean and harvest its resources.43 There is also increasing evidence Australia was occupied from at least 65,000 years ago, from Madjedbebe rockshelter in Kakadu, near Jabiru in the Northern Territory, for example. This story has consequences for the global story of human evolution, in showing that Australia is the end point of early modern human migration out of Africa and therefore determines the minimum age for the global dispersal of humans.44 In sum, the archaeological evidence indicates that the First Australians adapted with ingenuity and flexibility as they quickly dispersed into every bioregion across the country.45

This picture may be immediately understood through the powerful conceptual tool of the map turned ‘upside down’, emphasising the ways in which, for much of our history, exchange with the continent’s neighbours was along the northern coast, and the inhabitants

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formed long-reaching networks throughout our region (Map 1). Viewing the region in this way foregrounds movement across the Indian Ocean, and helps us recognise and understand long-standing trade and cultural exchanges that have only recently begun to pierce imperialist and nationalist complacency.\textsuperscript{46} The cosmopolitan story of exchange between the Asian region and the northern coast has now been explored, most notably through recovering the history of ‘Macassan’ trade and exchange. Leaving Makassar in the province of South Sulawesi (Celebes) with the northwest monsoon in December, these trader fishermen with their crews of Makassan, Bugis, Butonese, Timorese, Malukan and Papuan sailors travelled to Australia. They called the Arnhem Land coast Marege, and the Kimberley coast \textit{Kayu Jawa}. This history also challenges oppressive British-centred national myths of a fatal impact upon a pure and archaic race, emphasizing that Indigenous people were equals and participants in the Macassan trade rather than subordinate victims. It shifts our focus from the south-east, to northern Australia and its Asian connections.\textsuperscript{47} In this way, mapping ‘multiple spatialities and histories’ and many and culturally diverse forms of temporality works to rupture concepts of a singular national culture.

\textless Map 1. ‘Upside-down’ Western-centred regional map. Drawn by Lucia Clayton.\textgreater

But it is not merely the north-west that changes our view of this region. The Nyungar are the Aboriginal people who have occupied and managed the south-west of Western Australia for over 40,000 years, caring for country. To the Nyungar, the general area south of Geraldton

\textsuperscript{46} E.g., Regina Ganter, \textit{Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal contact in North Australia} (Perth: UWAP, 2006); Jane Carey and Jane Lydon, eds., \textit{Indigenous Networks: Transnational Mobility, Connections and Exchange} (New York: Routledge, 2014)

and west of Esperance and Nungarin is known as Nyungar Boodjar, and many place-names are attached to a landscape that reverberates with Nyungar histories and stories. Wirloom Noongar musicologist Clint Bracknell for example shows how language and song are integral to maintaining Aboriginal knowledge systems and expanding ways of knowing. Kim Scott writes of his and others’ years of work in documenting and sharing languages and stories which demonstrate the dynamic nature of Nyungar tradition, as well as ‘its sampling of new language and forms in the attempt to capture new experience’; he notes the way that Nyungar heroes are ‘polite and respectful, but up for any challenge’, who travel and return ‘as the centre of celebration’. Perhaps, he offers, beyond the benefits for Aboriginal people of reconnection to cultural heritage, this work shifts power imbalances, as ‘the very structure of story-telling puts the storyteller at the centre, not locked out of the relationship. And there is that paradox of empowerment by giving.’

Another view comes from Shino Konishi, who draws on Bruce Pascoe’s suggestion that by using documentary sources but ‘adjusting our perspective by only a few degrees, we see a vastly different world through the same window’, to argue for the importance of ‘extra-colonial histories’. Konishi seeks to recover the pre-colonial history of early cross-cultural encounters between Aboriginal people and European explorers, ‘where history was played out between individuals and when neither “native” nor “newcomer” consistently held the

upper hand.’ As she notes, extra-colonial histories reveal that ‘the arrival of British colonists did not suddenly and irrevocably transform Mineng, Eora and Dambeemangaddee worlds and wipe out their people.’

Such perspectives dizzyingly tilt our view of Australian history, showing Europeans – even European exploration from the sixteenth century - to have been relative late-comers in our history.

Four of the contributions to this special issue extend the disruptive potential of these localised western perspectives. Archaeologist Sven Ouzman reviews ‘Archaeologies of Austral’, tracing the evidence for ‘Australian’ identities from the Pleistocene to the Anthropocene, noting how Australia’s distinctive and familiar shape is an artefact of sea level rise that stopped about 6,000 years ago. He considers the very different place encountered by the First Australians, who arrived at least 65,000 years ago. Given the powerful ways that place shaped identity, Ouzman suggests that a multi-scaler archaeological perspective on time, place and identity may help understand the links between relative isolation as well as multi-culturalism which may be ‘central to recasting Australian history and mapping its future’.

Tony Hughes-d’Aeth and Catherine Noske take up the challenge of how we might confront troubling aspects of the past such as frontier violence and dispossession in responding to the Uluru Statement’s call for ‘truth-telling’. Such questions extend to methods of narrativization, explored here with respect to two notorious episodes of frontier violence - the 1880 Kukenarup Massacre on Wirloomin Noongar Country, and the 1926 Forrest River

Massacre, today Balanggarra Land. Hughes-d’Aeth explores new ways of narrating transgenerational trauma and its continuing histories through acclaimed Noongar writer Kim Scott’s 2017 realist novel *Taboo*, centring on the Kukenarup Massacre which followed the fatal spearing of John Dunn. In his novel, Scott examines the psychic dimension of massacre and its legacies through what Hughes-d’Aeth terms the *extimate*, a Lacanian term describing ‘the intimate exterior of psychic reality’, an ‘imbrication of inside and outside that complicates the binary of individual and society’. The extimate destabilises the distinction between public and private by allowing the individual to have an outside (a sociality, a historicity) and a society to have an inside (a political unconscious). *Taboo* is set in the present day and entwines the private traumatic history of sexual exploitation with the public traumatic history of Noongar massacre and dispossession. As Hughes-d’Aeth shows, the novel sutures ‘points of extimate connection that join the personal trauma of sexual abuse to the social trauma of Wirloomin massacre and genocide’, creating a dual cosmology that expresses the dialectic between ‘hegemonic social reality (the hollow victorious world of the coloniser) and the repressed … of Noongar tradition, language and law’. *Taboo* ‘reanimates in the present the foundational violence of settler colonialism’ and thus ‘intervenes into both settler amnesia and Indigenous transgenerational trauma’.

Transformations in how we perceive such narrative strategies are evident in Catherine Noske’s analysis of Randolph Stow’s well-known 1961 short essay, ‘The Umbali Massacre: As told to him by Daniel Evans’ in the *Bulletin*. Stow’s re-telling has long been considered a landmark intervention, and praised for its unique amplification of an Indigenous voice that broached the taboo topic of massacre. Even decades later, during the history wars of the turn of the millennium, such narratives were questioned and denied, so Stow’s early intervention

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52 The Aboriginal groups concerned include the Kwini, immediately north of Oombulgurri; the region is primarily Yeidji/Yeiiji Country; part of the larger Worroran family. I thank Sven Ouzman for this advice.
was revolutionary indeed.⁵³ Acknowledging these earlier evaluations, Noske maps the inadequacies of such mechanisms in today’s terms, arguing that ‘Stow’s intent needs to be understood in the context of outcome’. In aiming to ‘feel out some of the complexities around collaboration’, Noske points out that Stow profited professionally and financially from his use of Indigenous voice and culture in his work, and raises questions for decolonising practice in publishing industry. In broad terms, both Hughes-d’Aeth’s and Noske’s essays mark a radical shift in how Australian society, once silent about violence, now regards its colonial past.

Yet Indigenous people continue to be unequally subject to continuing colonial practices such as the forced exploitation of Aboriginal land for extractive industries such as mining, as well as the continued intervention into Aboriginal lives through work programs, and a cashless welfare card.⁵⁴ These legacies are especially powerful in Western Australia, where in 2020 during a covid19-related global recession, the mining economy is more lucrative and important than ever. In their contribution to this issue, Alistair Paterson and Andrea Witcomb argue that extractive industries were allied to the expansion of the frontier and at the forefront of colonialism across Australia. In the context of profit-driven exploitation, as well as the late nineteenth century rise of ethnographic collecting, they show that the history of collecting in Western Australia offers some unique as well as exemplary features that illuminates broader aspects of collecting. The distinctive history of northern Western Australia, as one of the last-invaded and colonised regions of the continent, determined the ‘belated’ timing of this process of encounter and exchange, and the perception of the Indigenous people of north-western Western Australia living a traditional way of life as

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authentically primitive. Paterson and Witcomb explore the extractive process of adding value to a collection so as to produce a resource that can be commodified and put to productive use, which they term an ‘extractive value adding approach’. As the recent case of Juukan Gorge indicates, such tensions persist in the present: the deliberate destruction of a cultural site of the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura people by mining giant Rio Tinto in 2020 attracted national and international condemnation. The site held evidence of 46 000 years of continual human occupation, but the mining company’s actions were lawful, due to the weak protections offered by the outdated Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (WA). Currently, debate over proposed new Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation continues.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Western localism and connection: Australia’s ‘quiet civil war’}

The second half of this special issue comprises four analyses of the framework ‘Australian S/studies’ and the potential and challenges offered by its western incarnations. In Western Australia, geographically distant from the urban centres of south-eastern Australia, a strong sense of localism is often expressed, including within institutional cultures of teaching and research, sometimes moving uneasily between nativism and highly aspirational cultures of local excellence. This constitutes a synecdoche of long-term tensions posed by an Australian studies framework. Western Australia has always had a strong sense of being different yet important within larger frameworks, stemming from colonisation, when competitors in both Tasmania and Britain termed the fledgling Swan River colony a ‘failure’ in order to boost alternative settler destinations. From within, a desire for self-determination has driven a long history of secessionist sentiment which is unique within the country’s history, spiking for example in a referendum in 1933, and a petition to secede from the Australian Federation.

\textsuperscript{55} John Southalan, “Submission 130”, Inquiry into the destruction of 46,000 year-old caves at the Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara region of Western Australia (Canberra: Senate, Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia, Parliament of Australia, 2020).
submitted by the government of Western Australia to the British Parliament. In April 1933, during the ‘Great Depression’, Western Australians voted overwhelmingly (68%) to withdraw from the Commonwealth, mainly due to economic factors. As the Dominion League of WA argued through its ‘Secession Map’ (Map 2), its ‘natural trade flows north and west’ showed ‘a favourable balance of £50,000,000 over the last ten years’, by contrast with the adverse balance of trade with the eastern states.\footnote{Thomas Musgrave, “The Western Australian Secessionist Movement,” \textit{Macquarie Law Journal} 3 (2003): 95-129; Christopher Besant, “Two Nations, Two Destinies: A Reflection on the Significance of the Western Australian Secessionist Movement to Australia, Canada and the British Empire,” \textit{University of Western Australia Law Review} 20 (1990): 226-7; H. Gregory, “Why Western Australia Should Secede,” \textit{The Australian Quarterly} 5, no. 18 (1933): 20-32.} These sentiments persist: in 2008, for example, WA Premier Colin Barnett suggested that ‘since Federation there has been a continuing drift that has seen responsibility shifting from the states to the commonwealth’ and stated, ‘To me, this has been Australia’s quiet civil war, a war that continues today.’\footnote{Extract from Hansard, [ASSEMBLY - Thursday, 28 February 2008], p522b-533a. \url{https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/6f5e0f23e7a0c2ebc8257570000f73a2/$FILE/A37%-20S1%-2020080228%-20p522b-533a.pdf}

\begin{map}
\textit{Citizens of WA. You must study the Map and Vote for Secession.’} 1930s, State Records Office of West Australia, Cons 1496, 1931/0102.
\end{map}

Within the academy, these tensions are also evident. At a national level, the 1987 \textit{Windows} report adumbrated continuing concerns regarding supposedly ‘universal’ intellectual hierarchies, which remain an important problem in assessing ‘research excellence’, particularly for Humanities and Social Science (HASS) sectors. Australian universities have become ever more focused upon their position in global rankings which rely upon supposedly universal metrics developed within STEMM disciplines, and which are increasingly
implicated within disciplinary hierarchies which deny or evade non-dominant perspectives, shaped by factors such as gender and diversity. As the Leiden Manifesto argues, HASS research is more regionally and nationally engaged, but pluralism and societal relevance tends to be suppressed to create papers of interest to English-language journals. The Manifesto seeks to ‘hold evaluators to account’, including through the protection of ‘excellence in locally relevant research’, rather than simply equating this with English-language publication. The staff of WA universities, many themselves educated in the west, frequently feel a strong sense of local value which opposes itself to ‘outside’ influences. This culture was evident, for example, during negotiations over the impact of Covid19: the University of Western Australia branch of the National Tertiary Education Union made a submission to the Vice Chancellor, arguing that

The University has a tendency to favour external appointments over internal, often citing the value of outside perspectives and a fresh outlook. While the approach can have some merit, it is also indicative of institutional knowledge being critically undervalued. … The processes to prioritise internal appointments, currently being developed by the COVID19 Temporary Measures Committee as part of the Enterprise Agreement Variations, should be retained long term as a means of arresting this trend.

Although I was born and raised in Brisbane, studied and worked in New South Wales, undertook postgraduate research at the Australian National University, and worked for more

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60 NTEU Branch UWA, 7 October 2020, submission to Vice Chancellor Amit Chakma.
than a decade in Victoria, such views were novel to me. While local cultures may commonly arise in less populated states and places, and those which are geographically and culturally remote from hubs of power - in Australia, the south-east - I suggest that this explicit expression of a desire to protect a distinctive local culture is most evident in the West. In his contribution to this issue Richard Nile also notes how the hard borders and ‘social distancing’ required by Covid19 have reanimated a longer history of Western Australian ‘separation tendencies’, that might be termed variously parochialism, Bolton’s ‘robust particularism’, or ‘exceptionalism’. In his review of western exceptionalism, Nile streams vivid symbols and stories imagining the West - as ‘last’, as gazing westward from the rim, conjuring bright moments that conflate place and culture. In seeking to trace Westralian influences on the development of Australian Studies Nile reviews the history of the literary journal *Westerly*, and seeks to identify specifically western ‘networks of Australianists’ through the teaching of Australian literature and history, and especially the pioneering work of Bruce Bennett, John Hay, and Tom Stannage as ‘first wave Australianists’. *Westerly*’s emphasis on West Australia and the Asian region is embodied by its cooling tempering, western breeze, and as Nile suggests, signifies ‘directionality’, because it ‘observes west as existing here not there but also by reference to its other, the east’. Echoing Bruce Bennett, he asks, ‘what difference does it make if I write, or speak, from Perth, Townsville, Melbourne or Alice Springs?’ Nile quotes writer Tim Winton in claiming that a certain wild ‘doggedness’ is needed to defy the ‘prevailing cultural headwind’ of the West and its ‘kind of continental cringe’ - and insists on the importance of place in fostering a distinct form of regionally based interdisciplinarity.

Similarly, given the fluctuations in Australian studies over the last few decades, Philip Mead points to the interdisciplinary imperatives at work in many institutional and research

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contexts to ask how we might conceptualise a progressive, creative and sustainable ‘Australian Studies’ in the 2020s. In a kind of memoir – a form often favoured by scholars reviewing its fortunes - Mead traces the various interdisciplinary, national and trans-national scholarly networks to suggest that ‘area studies have never been more permeable or less sovereign’. As he observes, both sides of the dyad ‘Australian Studies’ are equivocal and problematic: ‘there is both an idea and a nation, and they have a polymorphous relationship, rather than a reductive or synchronous one.’ For Mead, the idea of studies is also ‘an idealist and theoretical perspective, which has sometimes included the sense of the public value of Australian Studies, but that tends to be overridden by the global politics of knowledge, which is always hierarchizing and therefore marginalizing.’ From his literary perspective there has been a ‘multi-faceted embrace of world literature, trans-, post-national and Global South paradigms predicated on critiques of territorialized cultures, histories and identities’ - characterised by globalized Indigenous or First Nations literary circuits, and the institutionalisation of Indigenous Studies. Mead concludes that future ‘Australian Studies’ need to be centred upon the Indigenous. Mead asks important questions regarding contemporary academic structures of undergraduate study, locally and internationally, and the mechanism that might ‘allow it to negotiate flexibly between influential and invested existing disciplines’.

Conversely, in a ‘provocation’ that argues strongly against Australian Studies ‘as a discipline’, sociologist and mobilities scholar Farida Fozdar suggests in her contribution that Turner’s 1996 criticisms remain an accurate means of describing the field’s problems. Although she acknowledges that national(ist) politics are on the rise around the world, she questions the usefulness of ‘area’ studies at all. For Fozdar, Australian Studies is always capital S, and the nation haunts its very existence in unproductive and essentialising ways. Although Fozdar might be accused of setting up a straw Australian Studies in her premise
that scholars want it to be ‘seen as a discipline’, her critique provides a bracing prompt to self-criticism and reflection. Fozdar raises salutary questions regarding its subject matter, asking, for example ‘why is the settled representational form the nation-state, and what assumptions are being made in taking this stance?’, and exploring its undoubted potential use for conservative ends. Fozdar provides an important critique of the conservative position, characterising calls for teaching Australian literature issued from the Murdoch press during 2019, as nationalistic ‘dog whistling to a conservative readership about radical university agendas and the threat to traditional Australian values offered by cosmopolitan and internationalist material’.

Finally, taking up the view from China, Greg McCarthy explores the success of Australian studies in his contribution to this special issue, which he argues is underpinned by its indigenisation, or ‘the process by which Australian literature is reframed and textually reinterpreted as an indigenised form of humanism to suit the Chinese sensibilities and the political environment in which they operate.’ McCarthy argues that this Sinicisation of Australian studies has prompted a unique intellectual and infrastructural program focused on literature and translation which facilitates academic freedom in China. Generally, McCarthy suggests, Australian studies in China never took the form of the American area studies model, but rather conforms to Australian norms and the aims of diplomatic soft power. There are now 37 Australian studies centres in China, and an active Chinese Association for Australian Studies which convenes a biannual Australian studies conference, and has recently launched an Australian studies journal. McCarthy shows that this success derives from both scholarly interest within China, as well as the work of the Australia China Council and the Australian Embassy network; beginning with its concern with literature and history, this program has expanded to ‘culture, society, trade, international relations, foreign policy and more recently Australian politics’. He argues for the need for foreign policy and national security expertise
to provide balance in current relations between China and Australia- an especially timely challenge today as this relationship at the level of the state is widely perceived to be ebbing. Synecdochally, and just as Western Australian perspectives may challenge the nation state, McCarthy’s account hints that for China, Australian studies has perhaps been less ‘constrained by its instrumental purpose to supply the national security state with accurate information’ but rather has provided a space for conjunctural analysis drawn from distinctive local histories and cultures. As Lo and Harootunian, among others, urged of interdisciplinary scholarship such as this, the promise of this perspective lies within its disruption of notions of a singular national space and culture- whether of China or Australia.

**Conclusion**

The friction between the scholarly desire to question and critique, and to re-imagine, on one hand, and official insistence on promoting and celebrating a unified nation, on the other, has been inherent within Australian S/studies from its inception. Indeed, as Philip Mead points out, in joining the two terms of the dyad- Australia and studies - this tension animates the concept. The vehicle of Australian S/studies has always served the needs of the moment: originally a force for defining culture and identity in countering a post-war ‘cultural cringe’, this goal was overtaken around the turn of the millennium by a more self-confident, yet also more self-reflexive and questioning stance. Intellectual critique of the national framework, as evident in the range of interdisciplinary fields supporting the scholarly project of interrogation, have increasingly diverged from official views of the usefulness of Australian studies as a form of soft power and cultural diplomacy, an adjunct to tourism and the foreign student market. Such tensions are emblematic of the current relationship between government and the academic sphere more generally, echoing, or perhaps explaining growing antagonism between government and HASS sectors: officials wish to unify, celebrate, and stabilise
against more critical scholarly perspectives that wish to understand, interrogate, acknowledge, redress, repair and re-imagine – for example by identifying and actively engaging with the overlooked or denied legacies of an unjust past. Researchers see this process as difficult and troubling, but ultimately necessary in the pursuit of justice and a more consensual and inclusive society, and consequently the achievement of unity.

These divergent views participate in broader cultural divisions, starker than ever in 2020 as we engage in polarising public debates about ‘free speech’ vs right-wing control of media, climate change, border protection, immigration and asylum-seekers, social inequality, and the status of our First Nations people. Concerns that such antagonisms are destabilizing and undermine shared civic spaces have magnified: surely resolving these problems can only benefit from their explicit study in local context. With the increasing mobility of people, capital, and information since the turn of the millennium, the need for interrogation of community, nation, diaspora, and unbelonging has only increased. Here Australian studies offers inclusive, unpredictable, and disruptive spaces of inquiry, as much work across disciplines, such as critical whiteness studies and Indigenous studies, has been led from within Australian studies in both engaging and contextualising ‘Australian’ problems. Key principles of this approach must include critical interrogation – rather than celebration – of the entity ‘Australia’; the centrality of Aboriginal perspectives and voices; and the opportunities for creativity and innovation offered by interdisciplinarity.

These longstanding tensions within Australian studies are focused by a ‘Westralian’ perspective, and its disruptive, diverse histories, spaces, and stories. In his reflection on Nyungar storytelling, Kim Scott concludes that supporting the work of language revitalisation and its Indigenous ‘healing’ capacities can also help non-Aboriginal Australians, ‘because only through relationships with these communities can other Australians have the possibility
of resonating with the deep rhythms of a continent’s Abiding Stories.’ In other words, by embracing the localism of Indigenous Country and culture, and seeing beyond the colonial settler construction of nation, Australians may re-imagine a richer, shared future. In this way, this special issue seeks to show how unique western histories, culture and temporalities rupture notions of a unified national space. The west constitutes a synecdoche of local-larger relations – integral yet overlooked, necessary yet subordinate. The west offers a powerful and much-needed challenge to stories of the British nation, overturning narratives of fatal impact, and British heroes, discoverers and founders. Instead, as signified by the map turned upside down, we can recognise millennia-old connections to south-eastern Asia and across the Indian Ocean region, from the first human colonisation of the continent, to more recent regional exchanges, from at least the seventeenth century. In this multiplicity, the west serves as a model of how to engage with, yet simultaneously challenge the supposedly representative collective we term the nation.

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62 Kim Scott, ‘Not so easy,’ 214.
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