

**Anna Haebich & Julianne Schultz, eds, *Looking West. Griffith Review 47*.** South Brisbane: Text Publishing for Griffith University, 2015. 327 pp. ISBN 9781922182678. AUD 27.95. **Reviewed by Alexander Bräuer,** Graduate School “Cultural Encounters and the Discourses of Scholarship”, University of Rostock.



What does it mean to be Western Australian? “Looking West”, the latest edition of the quarterly *Griffith Reviews* (number 47), and edited by Julianne Schultz and Anna Haebich, tries to give an answer to this question. After the successful publication of volumes with a geographical focus on Tasmania (number 39) and New Zealand (number 43), *Griffith Review 47* takes a closer look at the western part of the continent. As the wide array of literary forms covered in this volume makes

clear, there is no easy answer to the question of Western Australian identity. The perspectives and approaches seem to be endless: 37 contributions ranging from essays, memoirs, a reportage and interviews to poems, fiction and one photo essay (the online version contains 6 more pieces) cover specific topics like mining, sharks, urban planning, the Indian Ocean World, immigration, Aboriginal and environmental issues. In this foray of literary production, certain topics – sometimes explicit, often allusive – appear to pop up on multiple places and provide useful guidelines for the reader. Here, I want to outline some of the most important guidelines.

While reading through the various stories it becomes clear that Western Australia is still a postcolonial country that is battling with the responsibilities of its own colonial history, present and future. The complex relations between Aboriginal and white Australians are most prominent featured in the essay by Steve Kinnane, Judy Harrison and Isabelle Reinecke on compensation for stolen wages in the Kimberley; in Kim Scott’s essay on the creation of children books

through Aboriginal storytelling; in the memoirs of Holly Ringland on a road trip through the Aboriginal art scene of the Western Desert; but also in the contributions by Jacqueline Wright, Ken Mulvaney or Sean Gorman. This aspect is amplified further by a photo essay on the return of the Carrolup drawings, painted by Aboriginal children of the Stolen Generation in the Carrolup Native Settlement during the 1940s and 1950s. All these contributions argue that the process of healing has just begun and that further cultural, economic and social investment is required to make Aboriginal history an acknowledged part of Western Australian identity.

Another pivotal point of this volume is the economic development of Western Australia – incorporating most prominently the mining industry – as well as the social and cultural consequences out of high-speed capitalism. Rebecca Giggs criticizes this mining boom that, according to her interpretation, follows an Australian tradition to see land largely as a resource to be exploited with disastrous consequences for human bodies and identities. Carmen Lawrence comes to a similar conclusion from her political work as a Premier of Western Australia in the early 1990s and Sarah Burnside discusses the complicated details of the ownership of mineral wealth in Western Australia. Despite the recent mining boom, not every aspect in *Looking West* is focused on mining. Andrea Gaynor gives an insight into the history of the wheat belt and argues for an economically and socially more sustainable and diversified agriculture. Pearling and its Aboriginal, Asian and white origins are the focus of Sarah Yu's, Bart Pigram's and Maya Shioji's contribution. Overall, the different articles argue not only for a diversification of the economic development that tries to avoid some of the negative developments of the recent mining boom, but actively promote a new perspective on the economy acknowledging the importance of "labor", i.e. of the labor force and Labor Party for Western Australia.

From an environmental standpoint, the Swan River colony was a disaster. It was haunted by a poor agricultural performance in the beginning and marked by constant struggling with environmental factors like water resources, epidemic plants, imported animals or

fire management. As some of the articles in this volume suggest, this struggle is far from being over and continues to be an important part of Western Australian identity: David Ritter argues for more political engagement with environmental issues; Peter Newman in contrast proposes that Western Australia has already mastered some important environmental challenges because of an active political engagement of its population; Ruth Morgan elaborates on the critical water resources; John Charles Ryan and Jessica White are both connecting endemic plants to the identity formation of Western Australia; and in an impressive piece of short fiction Shaun Tan is reminding us of the short and fragile human presence in the Western Australian habitat. What becomes clear is that the idea of managing and planning the environment is at best a precarious one. Western Australia is in search of an approach that can contribute to a unique identity while at the same time being sustainable and economically reasonable. Not surprisingly, most articles keep on coming back to Aboriginal strategies of land use that proved to be working in the challenging Australian environment for at least 60,000 years.

*Looking West* takes a geographical focus as its theoretical foundation and throughout the volume space – its perception and use – plays an important part in Western Australian identity formation. Even more, all of the aforementioned guidelines – colonialism, environmental issues and the economic development – are obviously connected to space, land and borders. However, some articles stress this point more than others. Samuel Carmody, for example, writes in his memoir about the role of sharks, or what he dubs “monsters of the sea,” for identity formation. The contributions of Suvendrini Perera and Caroline Fleay, Nadir Ali Rezai and Lisa Hartley are indicating the fragility of artificial borders contested by asylum seekers among others; Terri-Ann White and John Mateer widen these perspectives on the Indian Ocean World with articles on the difference between literary production in Calcutta and Perth and a glimpse into the complex history of the slave trade; Helen Trinca takes a look east on the inter-Australian migration and both contributions by the editors – Julianne Schultz and Anna Haebich – work intensively with spatial metaphors that are featured in the title

“Looking West”.

In conclusion, the volume reveals a Western Australian identity drifting between isolation and globalisation. This identity is probably nowhere better embodied than in the iconic figure of the FIFO worker (Fly-in fly-out), working for global mining cooperations and transferring constantly between the isolated camps in the desert and the city of lights, Perth.

On another more subtle level, the title suggests that “looking” has to be understood as a process. Time is an integral part of identity formation and therefore of importance in nearly every article. However, Amanda Curtin delivers in her story about the history of a place in the Group Settlement of the Southwest the most impressive example of an interaction of place and time. Throughout the volume it becomes clear that the view of Western Australia is directed to both the past and the future, thus generating a very fluid picture of identity formation characterised by the feeling of being “in between”. The authors of “Looking West” perceive themselves as an active part of this development, shaping and creating their own heritage and future.

Overall, *Looking West* presents a very well-made and recommendable book. The editors assembled an interesting and multifaceted team of authors who produced a collection of well-rounded and readable contributions targeting the general public and scholars interested in Western Australia. All the more it is difficult to understand why the growing economic and social inequalities, especially in the wake of the recent end of the mining boom, do not play a greater role in the contributions. Consequently, a faith in capitalism and economic success for everybody – notable exceptions here are the Aboriginal population and immigrants – seems to live on through the volume, becoming itself an important part of the eclectic Western Australian identity.