

## **Revisiting ‘the Potentate and the Traveler’: Mobile Narrators and Narrations of Nation**

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Edward Said uses travel as a metaphor for the modes of intellectual work that he most values. His, implicitly superior, traveling intellectual ‘crosses over, traverses territory, and abandons fixed positions, all the time’ (Said 2000: 404). In contrast, his, implicitly inferior, intellectual potentate ‘must guard only one place and defend its frontiers’ (Said 2000: 404). Of course Said was not speaking about literal travel but it is intriguing to take him literally and to consider how his ideas might apply to the work of intellectuals who actually travel. It is particularly intriguing to do so given his view that intellectuals worthy of the title are by definition suspicious and critical of the nation-state (1994). By drawing on the mobility biographies of several highly mobile academics with links to Australia we seek to answer the following questions. When it comes to their relationship to their nation-state of origin, what practices of thought would intellectuals who travel have to adopt to be considered travelling intellectuals in Said’s terms? Can an intellectual who travels also be a national potentate and is this necessarily negative? We argue that mobile narrators (be they travelers or potentates) and narrations of nation can assist a state to internally and externally reconstitute itself in terms of uneven geographies of power and knowledge. In this context then the academy is not just the place for ‘the realisation of the intellect’ as Said (2000: 397) says, but also for diverse realisations of the nation-state itself.

### **References:**

SAID, E.W. (1994). *Representations of the Intellectual*. London: Vintage.

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