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INTRODUCTION



Remembering German-Australian colonial entanglement: an introduction

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The role of German actors in European colonialisms, especially before the foundation of the German nation state in 1871 and Germany's entry into imperialism proper with the so-called protectorates of 1884/1885, is a contested one. Different academic camps have interpreted the peculiar German case very differently. Opposing positions were flagged in the late 1990s and still hold. Notably, the literary scholar Susanne Zantop compellingly argued that longer standing German 'colonial fantasies' were not only instrumental in paving the way for later German imperialism but analogous to Hannah Arendt's earlier argument that they were also constitutive for Germany's fascist futures in the twentieth century.¹ Although the continuity argument about the links between the Holocaust and antecedent genocidal practices during the Herero uprising in South West Africa (from Waterberg to Auschwitz, so to speak), and the implications of making the link have been debated, subsequent historians, including George Steinmetz,² have shown how colonial fantasies were indeed operative, although they met with other determining factors, such as local conditions and the habitus of German colonial actors, when they were put into practice in the German colonies. By contrast, critics like Russell Berman,³ partly drawing on Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt, but also deliberately distancing himself from universalising arguments about the European colonial project, proposed that early German investment in other states' colonialism could be, and very often was, a disinterested affair driven by a passion for science and the extension of knowledge rather than conquest.

Much of the extant research on Germans' role in colonial Australia tends to foreground that idea of benevolent and enlightened Germans and forgets or disavows the exploitative economic and administrative contexts to which German-born explorers, naturalists, missionaries, settlers, anthropologists and merchants in the Australian colonies contributed, and from which they profited. Gerhard Fischer has provided a comprehensive critical commentary on this generally celebratory scholarship that emphasises 'the German (or Austrian) contribution' to Australian arts, science, education, business, etc.:

As a rule, the authors go to pains to stress the positive influence of German immigrants, the achievements of explorers and scientists, as well as of the pioneering farmers and businessmen. [...] The Germans, the readers are told, are [...] the 'quiet achievers' in Australian society.⁴

While we do not wish to question the achievements of German-speaking migrants within Australian settler society, 'contributionism' is too restricting and blinkered a lens to use. It also tends to forget that the contribution argument does not occur in a historical vacuum, but is often used for a particular purpose, as Stefan Manz's work on the German diaspora has shown.⁵ For us, it is vital to engage critically with contributionist accounts and to interrogate the manner in which the roles of Germans on the Australian colonial frontier are often conceptually shielded from the violent realities of their time precisely by those actors' allegedly purely intellectual or scientific orientation.

By zooming in on a range of German-speaking actors in colonial Australia, the essays collected in this special issue of *Postcolonial Studies* seek to promote a more critically nuanced understanding of German colonial engagements in Australia. Building on Zantop's and Berman's broader focus and longer periodisations, we do not use the term 'colonial' to exclusively denote a historical period: in modern Germany, that would be 1884–1914/1918; in Australia (as a collection of British colonies) it would be 1788–1901, but as a colonial master (in a New Guinea partly wrested from Germany in the First World War), 1906–1975, with interruptions. Rather, 'colonial', first and foremost, describes a set of relations, discourses and practices that sustain historical processes of colonisation, processes that do not, or not necessarily, begin with the claiming of protectorates or colonies and end with official declarations of independence by formerly colonised nations, or with the emancipation of formerly disenfranchised or disempowered groups within those nation states. We read the notion 'colonial' very much in line with Foucault and Said as ultimately a function of power that plays out in a range of interconnected fields – economic, military, political and juridical – but also, in a more fundamental way, at the epistemic level. Colonial relations, discourses and practices build on specific ways of knowing and ordering the world, and on ways of disavowing or subjugating others.

Seen from this perspective, German-speaking individuals and the epistemic traditions they brought with them have been deeply entangled with the Australian colonial project – even if Australia was never a German colony as such – since German speakers were intricately involved in imagining, knowing and shaping colonial Australia. Leaving to one side those who imagined 'Australia' before it was 'discovered' by Europeans, the list of entangled German speakers probably begins with Johann Reinhold and Georg Forster, the father and son naturalists on James Cook's second circumnavigation of the planet, who never actually set foot on Australian soil but wrote about it extensively (see Fredericka van der Lubbe's contribution in this issue). Some of the Forsters' nineteenth-century successors, among them Ferdinand von Mueller, Charles Ruemker, Ludwig Preiss, Georg Neumayer, Amalie Dietrich, Richard Slemmon, Gerard Krefft, Wilhelm Blandowski and Richard Schomburgk resided for often quite long periods in the colonies and were much more deeply entangled (see, for example, Anja Schwarz's contribution).

Sojourning and expatriate science, however, was hardly the only site in the German-Australian entanglement – during the colonial period proper or afterwards. Indeed there were numerous waves and moments of German settlement in Australia, driven by European religious discrimination, the failed revolution of 1848, and other factors. In their own ways, each of these German-speaking migrants sought to entangle themselves in different ways in the society that they came to, or else to disentangle themselves (see the contribution of Dennis Mischke). Another significant site was German missionisation,

whether under British aegis or carried on by bodies like the Moravians, or the Hermannsburg Missionsanstalt (see Felicity Jenz's contributions). It was in this context that German-speaking missionary-anthropologists like Carl Strehlow at Hermannsburg (Ntarea) in Central Australia formed another special site of entanglement, poised between missionisation, anthropological science and colonial management of the 'natives' (see Andrew Wright Hurley's contribution in this special issue). These German missionary-anthropologists resident in Australia were also joined by secular German anthropologists, such as Hermann Klaatsch, who conducted fieldwork in colonial or federated Australia, or who were entangled in a more remote way, including by way of examining visiting Indigenous performers to Germany, as in the case of Rudolf Virchow in the 1880s, or by accumulating Aboriginal artefacts (and all too often human remains) from Australian sources. These materials were often enough trade articles, and that reminds us of another very important field of entanglement: those German merchants who maintained economic interests in the British colonies, such as the immigration agent and propagandist, as well as honorary consul for Hamburg, Wilhelm Kirchner, and the shipping magnate J.C. Godeffroy, who profited handsomely from German emigration to the Australian colonies and the circulation of goods and articles it enabled.

In writing about such 'colonial entanglement', we wish to foreground the impossibility of fully disentangling the spheres of science, religion or art from more obvious economic or military processes of exploitation, displacement or annihilation. Many of our contributors show clearly that there can be no disinterested engagement with the Australian colonial; that the production of colonial knowledge (geographic, geological, biological, anthropological, theological, aesthetic) inevitably ties in with orders of violence and destruction. At the same time, we wish to be wary of any grand narrative that subsumes all activities under a singular imperial order without allowing for more nuanced subject positions and levels of reflexivity. Together, these essays promote a pluralised and differentiated picture of German colonial engagements across different fields and periods.

One of the lessons from the recent boom in scholarship about the relatively short-lived period of German colonialism proper, and from the debates about continuities from Waterberg to Auschwitz, is that the memories of colonialism have sometimes had extremely powerful force during the postcolonial period. Colonial nostalgia was a significant part of the Weimar socio-political matrix, with a colonial lobby at the time seeking the return of the German colonies that were 'unjustly taken' under the Treaty of Versailles. In the Nazi era, a great deal of planning occurred should the prospect of that return eventuate, as many lobbyists ardently hoped.⁶ Memories of German actors in the Australian colonies were also re-awakened and functionalised during these eras.⁷ The memory of German colonialism, and to a lesser degree of German speakers in the Australian colonies, was also functionalised differentially in the two German states during the Cold War. And of course, the 'colonised' themselves have also remembered (and at times deliberately forgotten) German colonialism in different, significant ways. This attention to the important memory work that occurs on the 'ruins of colonialism'⁸ has inspired another group of contributions to this special issue, ranging from the critical interrogation of family memoirs (see the contribution of Monica van der Haagen-Wulff) and works of musical recollection (see Andrew Wright Hurley's contribution), to the mnemonic powers of objects/subjects that travelled across continents (see the contribution of Lindsay Barrett, but also of Anja Schwarz and of Lars Eckstein). They foreground the different trajectories and political

economies in which German-Australian entanglements have been commemorated and/or forgotten over time – by Germans, settler-Australians and Indigenous people. In doing so, such contributions add their own critical edge to the ways that German-Australian colonial entanglements are currently being re-assessed, and contribute to a discussion about the repercussions of these entangled colonial pasts for the futures of Germany and Australia: a post-reunification Germany still grappling with the legacies of fascism and the two Germanys that followed it yet which is by and large still unwilling to address, let alone accept, the responsibilities arising from the atrocities of German colonialism (see the contribution of Lars Eckstein in this special issue); and a post-Apology Australia that continues to be in denial about its postcolonial obligations to the original owners of the land. As is to be expected of a project of this scope, the essays in this special issue do not aspire to be comprehensive. Rather, they highlight selected historical discourses, events, objects, anecdotes or works of art that allow authors to focus on the intricacies of German-Australian colonial entanglements and their repercussions for our equally entangled present.

Notes

1. Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
2. George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2007.
3. Russell A. Berman, *Enlightenment or Empire: Colonial Discourse in German Culture*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.
4. Gerhard Fischer, 'Debating the "German Presence" in Australia: Notes on Research and Research Desiderata', in Andrea Bandhauer and Maria Veber (eds), *Migration and Cultural Contact: Germany and Australia*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009, pp 137–138.
5. Stephen Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora: The 'Greater German Empire', 1871–1914*, New York: Routledge, 2014.
6. Karsten Linne, *Deutschland jenseits des Äquators? Die NS-Kolonialplanungen für Afrika*, Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008.
7. See, for example, Andrew W. Hurley and Anja Schwarz, "'The greatest son of our Heimat": Reading German Leichhardts across the National Socialist era', *Journal of Australian Studies* 39(4), 2015, pp 529–545.
8. Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Politics in the Whitlam Era (2011). Other relevant publications include: ‘The Spirit of the Age: Jevons, Bentham, Hazlitt’, *Cultural Studies Review* 7(2), November 2001, pp 130–143; and ‘Stanley and Me’, *Heat*, Ivor Indyk ed. 19, 2009, pp 27–45.

Lars Eckstein is Professor of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures outside of Britain and the US at the University of Potsdam, Germany. His research interests include postcolonial and decolonial theory, literary and cultural memories of empire, and the study of global popular cultures. Among his publications are *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic* (Brill 2006), *Reading Song Lyrics* (Brill 2010), and a range of edited works, most recently *Postcolonial Justice* (Brill 2017, with Anke Bartels, Nicole Waller and Dirk Wiemann) and *Postcolonial Piracy* (Bloomsbury 2014, with Anja Schwarz). He is co-spokesperson of the Research Training Group (Graduiertenkolleg) Minor Cosmopolitanisms.

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Anja Schwarz is Professor of Cultural Studies, University of Potsdam. She holds a PhD in Postcolonial Studies from the Freie Universität Berlin. She is a member of the bi-national research projects ‘German-Australian Colonial Entanglements’ (2011–12) and ‘Leichhardt’s Legacies’ (2012–2013) co-funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Australian ATNnetwork. Recent publications on German-Australian entanglements and colonial entanglements include ‘Epistemic Crossroads in the Pacific World: Re-Thinking Oceanic Histories with Tupaia’s Map’, Frederike Offizier, Mark Prieue and Ariane Schröder, eds. *Crossroads in American Studies: Transnational and Biocultural Encounters*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2016 (with Lars Eckstein); ‘“The greatest son of our Heimat”: reading German Leichhardts across the National Socialist era’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 39.4, 2015 (with Andrew Hurley); ‘“Mínyin nyíni bíal piabúni whiteman? - Why don’t you [learn to] speak like a whiteman?”: The Politics of Remembering the Dawes/ Patye-garang Encounter’, *Agents of Transculturation: Border-Crossers, Mediators, Go-Betweens*, Ed. Sebastian Jobs and Gesa Mackenthun. Waxmann, 2013; ‘Memory, Migration and Guilt’, *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture* 4(1), 2013 (with Aleida Assmann).