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The Centre for Australian Studies at the University of Cologne

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The official opening of the Centre for Australian Studies (CAS) at the University of Cologne in 2017 is the outcome of a longstanding and growing collaboration of colleagues in literary and cultural studies and linguistics to build upon our shared interest in Australian Studies and to create – together with colleagues from other disciplinary fields – a sustained platform for Australian Studies in Germany through national and international partnerships in research and teaching. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)-funded Dr. R. Marika Chair for Australian Studies (established in 2009) and the establishment of a network between German Universities (Bonn, Düsseldorf, Duisburg-Essen, Heidelberg, Münster, Potsdam, Rostock, Stuttgart, Trier) to promote digital teaching in Australian Studies (2015-) at the University of Cologne were milestones in the process.

From the start, the Centre has focused on two major goals: to initiate and promote research projects, and to develop research-based digital teaching formats with partners in Germany and Australia, and thus to strengthen inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations in Australian Studies in a global context. In line with strategic research areas at the University of Cologne, the Centre's research and teaching activities focus on the three interrelated areas of Indigenous languages and cultures, migration, and environmental concerns.

Major research projects on Indigenous languages and cultures have been and are conducted in collaboration with Indigenous communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. We are currently working closely together with the Mirima

¹ We are extremely grateful to the Editor-in-chief of the journal, Dr. Jatinder Mann for his valuable suggestions on our article.

Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre (MDWg) in Kununurra, Western Australia to produce a grammar of Kununurra Kriol, a Creole language used on Miriwoong Country. In the Northern Territory, we worked in collaboration with several communities documenting some of the Indigenous Sign Languages in use in Arnhem Land. Together with our partner Dr. Bentley James, Associate Professor Elaine Maypilama, Associate Professor Anne Lowell, and several Traditional Elders, we have been involved in transdisciplinary ethnographic research, and environmental and decolonizing methodologies projects in Yolŋu communities.

A number of workshops on experiences, challenges, and methodologies in Aboriginal stories in June 2017, on Creole languages and Kriol at the MDWg in August 2018, on bimodal bilingualism at Charles Darwin University (CDU) in September 2017, and further workshops on reclaiming Indigenous Signs in August 2019, and on genuine collaboration in repatriation and restitution in November 2023 as well as publications have evolved together with guest chairs and visiting fellows since the establishment of the Dr. R. Marika Chair.²

Research in the areas of migration and environmental concerns has also inspired a number of collaborative interdisciplinary workshops and publications with national and international colleagues in Europe and Australia. This includes projects focusing on human journeys and processes of transnational identity formation with Prof. Paul Arthur and Dr. Jamal Barnes (Edith Cowan University [EDU], 2018-2020), and on memorial practices with Prof. Noah Riseman and Dr. Meggie Hutchison (Australian Catholic University [ACU], 2020-2022), both funded by the Australia-

² For example Beate Neumeier and Kay Schaffer, *Decolonizing the Landscape: Indigenous Cultures in Australia*, Cross-Cultures Series (Rodopi, 2014); Bentley James, Dany Adone, and Elaine Maypilama, *Decolonizing Research Methodologies: Insights from Research on Indigenous Sign Languages of Australia* (Sign Language Studies, 2020); Dany Adone, Bentley James, and Anna Gosebrink (Eds), Special Issue on *Indigenous Australia in the Anthropocene*, *Australian Studies Journal/Zeitschrift für Australienstudien* (2024).

Germany Joint Cooperation Scheme and DAAD. CAS-related publications include a monograph on the concept of nation in Australian film: Victoria Herche, *The Adolescent Nation: Re-Imagining Youth and Coming of Age in Contemporary Australian Film* (Winter, 2021) and a co-edited volume on migration: Katrin Althans, David Kern, and Beate Neumeier (Eds), *Migrant Australia: From Botany Bay to Manus Island* (WVT, 2021).

We have held numerous successful international events in the context of research on environmental issues, such as the biennial conference of the German Association for Australian Studies, which was chaired by Beate Neumeier as president from 2016 to 2023, on nature and the environment in Australia (Cologne, 2016), as well as workshops on Australian Studies and the Global South (October 2018), or on activist arts and environmentalism' (July 2020), which have stimulated and promoted further individual and institutional research collaborations and publications.³

All these activities have benefited immensely from the expertise of our short- and long-term guests and fellows from different disciplines including literary and cultural as well as performance studies (Prof. Paul Arthur, Edith Cowen University [ECU]; Prof. Bill Ashcroft, University of New South Wales; Prof. Helen Gilbert, Royal Holloway, University of London), history (Prof. Anna Haebich, Curtin University; Prof. Noah Riseman, ACU; Prof. Paul Pickering, Australian National University [ANU]), political science and international relations (Dr. Jamal Barnes, ECU), as well as linguistics/cultural studies (Dr. Knut Olawsky, MDWg ; Associate Professor Anne

³ These include: Beate Neumeier, Boris Braun, and Victoria Herche (Eds), *Nature and Environment in Australia* (WTV, 2018); Beate Neumeier and Helen Tiffin (Eds), *Ecocritical Concerns and the Australian Continent*, Ecocritical Theory and Practice-Series (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); Dany Adone and Melanie Brück (Eds), *Fire, Water and Land in Indigenous Australia* (Cologne UP, 2019); Bentley James, Glenn James, and Dany Adone, *Two-way Tools, Fire on Country*, In: *Australian Studies Journal/Zeitschrift für Australienstudien* (2024).

Lowell, CDU; Dr. Bentley James; Dr. Piers Kelly, Max Planck Institute Jena; Associate Professor Rob Amery, University of Adelaide; Prof. Jakelin Troy, University of Sydney; Prof. Anne Pattel-Gray, University of Divinity; Dr. Michael Pickering, ANU; Prof. Ghil'ad Zuckermann, Flinders University; Associate Professor Duane Hamacher, University of Melbourne; Dr. Burcu Cevik-Compiegne, ANU; Dr. Arianna Grasso, University of Naples; Dr. Gareth Knapman, ANU). These experts have been vital for enriching our research and teaching and for stimulating the Centre's intellectual life. The close collaboration with these colleagues enabled us to expand our formal collaboration with several universities and institutions in Australia, such as Curtin University (Memorandum of Understanding [MOU], 2018), ECU (MOU, 2019), Charles Sturt University (MOU, 2023), the University of Sydney, Western Sydney University, and CDU.

In parallel, we have extended our project on a research-based and certified digital teaching program in Australian Studies. Our inter- and transdisciplinary introductory digital lecture series in Australian Studies, inaugurated in 2017, regularly attracts around +150 students each semester. As a result of this successful development, we started sharing this course in 2018 with other universities (Bonn, Düsseldorf). Moreover, since 2019 students at the University of Cologne can obtain a Certificate in Australian Studies, issued by CAS, crediting the successful completion of four on/offline courses in this study area. In English Studies at the University of Cologne alone, more than 1200 students on average take Australia-related courses over a two-year study period. The huge interest in Australian Studies at German universities among students of English, history, geography, but also political science and economics, is documented in the great demand for Australia-related courses and study abroad programs in Australia.

To satisfy this demand – and sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic – we have considerably extended our Australian Studies Online Network. For this purpose, we have developed and are in the process of implementing an interdisciplinary collaborative, research-based digital Master's degree together with some of our regional German partner universities. This pilot project is financed by the Ministry of Culture and Science and the participating universities. We are very pleased and grateful for the participation and support of Australian institutions and colleagues in this teaching program by aligning their contributions with our key areas of research on Indigenous languages and cultures, migration, and environmental studies. This digital study program will be supplemented by a non-mandatory study period in Australia.

The response to and recognition of these innovative approaches in the academic community and the university administration encourages us in our endeavours to strengthen the solid link between research and teaching addressing the challenges of the 21st century.