

## From the editors of this issue

The present issue combines two years of work, with the last one under heavy restrictions, postponements and loss. In early 2020, Australia was ravaged by fires that can be explicated not merely as the result of global warming but also as the effects of economic exploitation with all its implications of social and racial injustice. The following worldwide spread of SARS-CoV-2 has led not only to unprecedented restrictions in modern academic life – including the cancellation of the 2020 German Australian Studies conference – but it has also shown the intricacies between questions of ecological sustainability, social justice and the exploitation of resources. Persisting and tenacious yet equally malleable and adaptable, narratives of race and racism have infiltrated the debates around socio-ecological disasters and health protection, while at the same time exhibiting extant patterns of prejudice. Think of higher mortality rates among socially disadvantaged groups, for one, or the re-awakening of fantasies of nationalist protection. The fears of *imported* diseases, it can be argued, mirror the fears of a dissolution of national integrity.

Historically, references to physical health and disease indeed acted as integral devices to script racialised bodies, with the in-group considered the epitome of utmost health and the subjected out-group inscribed with plagues they were said to be carrying over centuries. To take an admittedly extreme example from German history, as Bernd Gausemaier outlines, Jewish people, since ostensibly exposed to tuberculosis in the past, were classified as resistant transmitters of tuberculosis under Nazism.<sup>1</sup> Although most contemporary debates deviate in tone and effect from such radical concepts, they can still hint at similar, if not common, origins. The unearthing of such origins as well as their resonance in the present can hardly be wholistic and straightforward, but rather partial. Race, gender, nation, sexuality, Indigeneity, dis-ability, to name a few, are not isolated socio-historical categories, but entangled. Their analytical disentanglement is a matter of complexity through time and space.

An innovative approach to the very disentanglement can be achieved through decidedly trans-national and trans-historical lenses. While the following articles do not systematically combine the three aforementioned subjects per se and while not all of them are strictly trans-national, it is their combined reading that can result in radical interventions in social categories. Contemporary bush fires, for instance, can be related to concepts of race and racism, as much as the translation of Indigenous literature can evince the national and historic shifts in racial narratives. And Australian discourses around the current pandemic, it seems, resemble those of the Spanish Flu of 1918/19 – rhetorics of nationalism and race included. Put succinctly, we invite our readers to also direct their attention to

1 Bernd Gausemaier, Rassenhygienische Radikalisierung und kollegialer Konsens, in: Carola Sachse, *Die Verbindung nach Auschwitz. Biowissenschaften und Menschenversuche an Kaiser-Wilhelm-Instituten*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2003, p. 186.

subjects beyond their immediate research interest and, instead, to read across the individual articles – indeed to read across time, space and academic disciplines. We hope this may lead to a broadening not only of individual interest but also of insight to how much seemingly unrelated subjects can exhibit striking relatedness.

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