

A Paroxysm of Whiteness

›White‹ Labour, ›White‹ Nation and ›White‹ Sugar in Australia

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Abstract: During the first one hundred and fifty years of European settlement in Australia, whiteness as a social construction underlay continuous definition and redefinition with regard to its boundaries of belonging. Initially, the convicts usually dwelled at the social fringes of the early settler society and only experienced symbolical admittance to ›whiteness‹ in contradistinction to the indigenous people. Subsequently, members of the labour movement were able to draw on ideological elements of ›whiteness‹ to maintain their ground in the struggle against capital. When, at the turn of the twentieth century, legislation and a broad desire for a ›White Australia‹ helped the Queensland sugar industry to become the model for a physically, socially and demographically ›white‹ industry, labour was enabled to fight successfully for tangible ›wages of whiteness‹. Though the consumption of Australian sugar then became the outward profession of faith to white supremacy, during the following decades the subsidization of Australian sugar remained the basis on which doubts about the intra-Australian demarcation of ›whiteness‹ were expressed.

Around 1900 the Australians were well-nigh drunk with ›whiteness‹. Politically, they constituted themselves as a ›white nation‹. Socially, they integrated members of all classes into their understanding of whiteness. And culturally, they celebrated their shared whiteness by expanding it well into everyday life.

Of special significance therefore was a product which was called ›white sugar‹ and that was consumed in large quantities. With it the Australians dressed the dough for their scones, cooked their candy, sweetened their tea, brewed their beer and distilled their rum. It was important for them to have thoroughly, meaning doubly, white sugar: ›refined white‹ and ›produced white‹. The former was a technical problem and was, since the improvements of the vacuum-pan in the mid-nineteenth century, basically solved. The latter was the result of a sociopolitical decision with varying factors contributing to its implementation and acceptance.

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Berlin [et al.]: Lit 2010, pp. 99-131.*

The necessary development of this was anything but self-evident. When the First Fleet arrived in Australia in 1788, it had on board sugar cane cuttings and unfree labour. The latter, though it was not incorporated in slaves but in convicts, nonetheless indicated the traditional pattern of colonial plantation economy. That this pattern did not unfold was not only accounted for by the fact that sugar initially did not grow well. Nor was it only due to the fact that, during a spectacular process even before the First Fleet departed, slavery was declared incommensurate with the English way of life. To a greater degree, it was owed to colonialism which had already been fully established for a considerable time when the First Fleet reached Australia and which, in terms of theory, had just received a supposedly scientific justification with the inception of race theory.

Starting with this I investigate the story of ›white‹ sugar in the context of that paroxysm of whiteness which made Australia into one of the model countries of racism around 1900. The relations within the settler society, interspersed with violence, enabled even those convicts who were exposed to social deprivation to feel as representatives of a *white supremacy*.

The racist symbolic capital acquired in the course of this, however, was simply ignored by the unfolding capital interests which favoured cheap labour of whichever colour. Therefore, the emergent labour movement utilized the existent ›white‹ self-awareness of the lower classes to constitute itself as *white labour*.

Since this process went along with nation building, the labour movement had the possibility to present its interests as national imperatives. This chance was decisively seized. Many labour organizations saw the setting-up of a *white nation* as a guarantor for the improvement of the social position of their members.

But the racistically¹ imagined commonalities did not override the dissent between capital and labour. This is not least shown in the sugar industry where the planters did everything they could to continue the employment of the cheapest possible labour. The conversion of racist symbolic capital

¹ To date, the English language possesses no ›official‹ adverb for racist action. Nonetheless, its necessity has entered professional literature where ›racistically‹ and ›racistly‹ are used interchangeably (see Terry J. Ellingson: *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, p. 334; Eduardo S. Bonilla: *On the Vicissitudes of Being ›Puerto Rican‹*, p. 34; Noël Carroll: *Beyond Aesthetics*, p. 187 for ›racistically‹ and Kamari M. Clarke, Deborah A. Thomas: *Globalization and Race*, p. 232; Katharyne Mitchell: *Conflicting Geographies of Democracy and the Public Sphere in Vancouver BC*, p. 176; Gavin Kitching: *Seeking Social Justice Through Globalization*, p. 305 for ›racistly‹). I prefer using the term ›racistly‹ because it is more concise and poignant; for the necessity to differentiate between ›racially‹ and ›racistly‹ see Wulf D. Hund's essay in this volume.

into *white wages* had to be fought for by the labour organizations. In the course of this, they drew on a rhetoric in which demands for social equity were inextricably linked with racist discrimination.

To indulge in *white sugar*, it was not sufficient merely to ban non-white labourers from the sugar industry and introduce wages of whiteness. Doubts about the ›whiteness‹ of the wages' recipients necessitated constant ideological justification of the sugar industry's importance. Also, the sugar produced in this manner would not have been able to compete with traditional plantation cane sugar or beet sugar on the world market, and thus it had to be publicly subsidized and protected by import tariffs.

White Supremacy

Before the First Fleet departed for Australia, debates in London sought to determine whether the convicts were to lead »a life of hard labour on plantations« in the new colony or should be landed »not as plantation slaves but as free yeoman farmers [...] with a small grant of land«. By contrast, Captain Arthur Phillip, leader of the expedition and subsequently the first governor of New South Wales, adopted a pragmatic position. On the one hand, it appeared to be obvious to him that »there can be no slavery in a free land«. On the other hand, he assumed that the convicts were to serve the time of their sentences with hard labour to lay the foundations of a new colony.²

Therefore, he would not have been surprised that his ships carried – in addition to forced labourers – cuttings of that plant which was closely linked to the history of slavery and colonialism: sugar cane. The contemporary class racism might well have supported his consent to such a cargo. It found such flagrant expression that »[t]he stereotypes of the poor expressed so often in England during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were often identical with the descriptions of blacks expressed in colonies dependent on slave labor, even to the extent of intimating the subhumanity of both«.³

Added to this, the convicts embodied a group constituted through the punishment of behaviour deemed deviant – a group that was neither socially nor ethnically homogenous. To begin with, that meant that the convicts were divided into different categories. Accordingly, some of them

² Cassandra Pybus: *Black Founders*, pp. 60 (cit. John Robertson: ›hard labour‹), 66 (cit. James Mantra: ›yeoman‹); Manning Clark: *Select Documents in Australian History*, p. 42 (cit. Arthur Phillip: ›free land‹).

³ Edmund S. Morgan: *American Slavery, American Freedom*, p. 325.

were eligible for positions ordinarily filled by free people – like Michael Massey Robinson who was educated at Oxford and worked as an attorney, then tried for extortion and conditionally emancipated almost upon arrival in the colony where he became secretary to the deputy judge advocate.⁴

Furthermore, the founders of what was supposed to become a ›white‹ outpost of Britain were not of a homogenous skin colour. Of the five hundred and forty-three male convicts of the First Fleet eleven were ›black‹.⁵ On the one hand, they served as a benchmark for the indigenous society. Compared to the Aborigines a black convict was said to have »their complexion«. An Aborigine, in turn, could be termed a »native negro« and it was believed that even washing would not render them »two degrees less black than an African Negro«. ⁶ On the other hand, an emancipated convict like ›Black Francis‹ could become a squatter and be assigned white convicts as labourers. This was partly accounted for by the fact that colour racism in the convict society was overridden by class racism and that white like black ›criminals‹ of the lower classes were treated alike. Not least, however, it was due to the colonially-oppressive racist relations of the settler society. Among other things this became apparent in the fate of the first bushranger, ›Black Cesar‹. As long as he was believed to have killed the Aboriginal resistance leader Pemulwuy, the otherwise despised Caesar rose in the esteem of lieutenant-governor David Collins.⁷

Upon arrival in the new colony, lines of belonging were drawn. William Bradley, First Lieutenant on the HMS Sirius, discriminated between »our« and »their« people.⁸ ›Our‹ people subsumed all the new arrivals; ›their‹ people meant Aborigines. The gulf between the convicts and the other settlers was only bridged when seen in juxtaposition to the native population of Australia. When compared to the Aborigines, the forced migrants became members of a British outpost.

With the expansion of the frontier accelerating and the forms of land-

⁴ Cf. William Nichol: *Ideology and the convict system in New South Wales*, pp. 3 ff. (grades of convicts); Donovan Clarke: *Robinson, Michael Massey*.

⁵ Cf. Cassandra Pybus: *Black Founders*, p. 90; see also Ian Duffield: *Martin Beck and Afro-Blacks in Colonial Australia*, pp. 9 f., who estimates that over three hundred seventy male and seventeen female »›Afro-Black‹ convicts« were landed in New South Wales in the time from 1788 until 1842.

⁶ William Bradley: *A Voyage to New South Wales*, p. 62 (›complexion‹); ›Tasmanian Aborigines‹, in: *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 8.4.1825 (›native negro‹); Janeen Webb, Andrew Enstice: *Aliens & Savages*, p. 30 (cit. Watkin Tench: ›two degrees‹).

⁷ Cf. Ian Duffield: *The Life and Death of ›Black‹ John Goff*, p. 36.

⁸ William Bradley: *A Voyage to New South Wales*, pp. 59 ff. (›our‹), 81 (›their‹).

use generating the necessity for exclusive property rights over large tracts of land in the 1820s, conflicts between Aborigines and Europeans intensified.⁹ Against the official instruction which stressed the friendly treatment of the Aborigines, settlers and squatters more or less clandestinely acclaimed the convicts' contribution to the seizure of land and expansion of the colonial frontier.

After the first years in the new settlement, the experiences on the colonial frontier transformed Captain Phillip's attempts to establish a friendly relationship with the Aborigines into the desire to occupy evermore land by getting rid of the people who occupied it. One settler actually complained that due to the flight of the »very troublesome natives« into the »extensive mountainous country« the white settlers of the Bathurst area could »never exterminate them«. The ›Sydney Gazette‹ reported on »exterminating war« in the Bathurst area and, in the context of the ›Black War‹ in Tasmania, the Hobart newspaper predicted that settlers and stock-keepers would feel forced – for their own protection – to »destroy the black tribe even to utter extinction«.¹⁰

During these murderous encounters with the Aborigines, the convicts experienced a social inclusion which they were otherwise denied in the settler society. They were granted a concession of belonging in dissociation from the Aborigines whom they could kill with impunity during incidental encounters in the bush or on punitive expeditions. Since the »blackfellow was not a human being« shooting him was considered equal to »shooting a native dog«. The Europeans' atrocities were recorded in journals as the »Sunday afternoon ›sport‹ of ›hunting the blacks««. It took more than fifty years of colonial settlement until the first major trial against Europeans for assaulting Aborigines took place.¹¹

On 10 June 1838 twelve armed stockmen murdered twenty eight Aboriginal men, women and children. The events following this Myall Creek massacre implicated an unprecedented ›white‹ consolidation which was based on the colonists' refusal to treat the murder of Aborigines as a crime. It was also the squattocracy's »highly unusual [...]»

⁹ Cf. Michael Pearson: Bathurst Plains and Beyond, pp. 71 f.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 74 (›troublesome‹ etc.); (Untitled), in: The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, 14.10.1824 (›war‹); ›Hobart Town‹, in: Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser, 5.1.1827 (›extermination‹). For the ›Black War‹ 1823-1831 ending in the infamous ›Black Line‹ see Ben Kiernan: Blood and Soil, pp. 274 ff., see also Henry Reynolds: An Indelible Stain, pp. 62 f., 70.

¹¹ Cit. in Ben Kiernan: Blood and Soil, p. 262 (›dog‹); Janeen Webb, Andrew Enstice: Aliens & Savages, p. 108 (›sport‹); see also Brad Hazzard in Legislative Assembly Hansard & Papers, 8.6.2000, p. 6897; John Rickard: Australia, p. 59. Andrew Marcus: Australian Race Relations, p. 47, tells about an executed convict in Newcastle in 1820.

concern for convicts«, which led to »a closing of the ranks, a solidarity on the crucial tests of race and skin colour«. ¹² At the time of the events the prevailing opinion saw the Aborigines as »a set of monkeys [...] and] the earlier they are exterminated from the face of the earth the better«, as »black animals« and as »murderous wretches« from whom the »settlers must be protected«, not vice versa. Due to the »lack of adequate exertion to protect« the colonists, the »Sydney Herald«, campaigning for the acquittal of the accused, advised a resort to vigilante action against Aborigines and »[s]hoot them dead, if you can«. ¹³

The coverage of the trial which was »one of no ordinary importance to the country« revealed the common opinion that the settlers had »a perfect right« to take possession of the Aborigines' land« and was a signal for the »solidarity of racial feelings« in an »alliance of all classes«. ¹⁴ The calamitous assaults on Aborigines were ideologically and financially supported by the landed classes. Members of the squattocracy, interested in the expansion of the colonial frontier and, with that, also in the transformation of Aboriginal into Crown land, formed the »Black Association«. ¹⁵ Their desire to »exterminate the whole race« urged them not only to finance the legal defence of the accused in the Myall Creek case but express support for »all who may be charged with crimes resulting from any collision with the natives«. ¹⁶

After the jury had returned a verdict of not guilty in the first trial, the public was in high spirits. The statement of one of the jurors that he »knew the men were guilty of the murder, but [...] would never consent to see a white man suffer for shooting a black one« met with public approval. ¹⁷

¹² Alexander T. Yarwood, Michael J. Knowling: *Race Relations*, p. 107 (»concern«, »closing«); Andrew Markus: *Australian Race Relations*, p. 49.

¹³ »The Jury System«, in: *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 11.12.1838 (»monkeys«); »The Blacks«, in: *The Sydney Herald*, 5.10.1838 (»blacks« etc.); (Untitled), in: *The Sydney Herald*, 14.11.1838 (»shoot«).

¹⁴ »Supreme Court Criminal Side«, in: *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 20.11.1838 (»importance«); »Crown Lands«, in: *The Sydney Herald*, 7.11.1838 (»perfect right«); Alexander T. Yarwood, Michael J. Knowling: *Race Relations in Australia*, pp. 108 ff. (»solidarity«, »alliance«); see also Jürgen Matthäus: *Nationsbildung*, pp. 33 f. and Wulf D. Hund: *Die weiße Norm*, pp. 191 f.

¹⁵ Richard Walsh: *Australia Observed*, p. 431; Alexander T. Yarwood, Michael J. Knowling: *Race Relations*, p. 107 (»Black Association«).

¹⁶ Bill Rosser: *Aboriginal History in the Classroom*, p. 206 (»exterminate«); »Supreme Court Criminal Side«, in: *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 20.11.1838 (»collision«).

¹⁷ Cit. in »The Jury System«, in: *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 11.12.1838.

Admittedly, the racist solidarity the accused met with had varying sources. They lay in the general feeling of pretension of the Europeans as well as in the ruthless interests of the settlers and squatters to use convicts as their allies in the process of expanding into and expropriating Aboriginal land. But this solidarity also amounted to an inclusion into the realms of whiteness of the otherwise socially marginalized convicts.

In the context of the Myall Creek massacre this was manifested in the actions of the perpetrators. Since they were already aware of the racist connotations of their murders they obviously counted on a tacit acceptance of their deeds. Subsequently, this was conveyed in the readiness of those who otherwise took severe action even against the smallest misconduct of their forced labourers to support the accused through funding their legal defence. Moreover, the support for the racist atrocity was disclosed in the tenor of a print media, which did not denounce the deeds but depicted them as necessary and exemplary and openly called for their continuation. Eventually jurors and judges conceded the act but denied the guilt, thereby sanctioning juridically the dehumanization of the Aborigines.

Even though this judgment was eventually quashed and in a second trial at least seven of the eleven accused were pronounced guilty, public opinion remained unchanged and future assaults against Aborigines were not prevented. They became »a more discreet affair« and were largely not reported – elimination of Aborigines was thus made a matter of »death by stealth«.¹⁸

White Labour

Part of the few benefits bestowed upon the convicts, other than the racist symbolic capital of whiteness,¹⁹ was the consumption of sugar. Until the 1820s »no other article of luxury or indulgence than those of tea and sugar« was granted to the convicts.²⁰

This sugar, however, had to be imported. Sugar cane did not grow well in the first decades of the settlement. After the climate around Port Jackson was found to be unfavourable for sugar, experimental plantations closely followed the expeditions northwards. It was with the use of

¹⁸ Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath, Marian Quartly: *Creating a Nation*, p. 135 (»affair«); Bruce Elder: *Blood on the Wattle*, p. 94 (»stealth«).

¹⁹ For the concept of »racist symbolic capital« see Anja Weiß: *Rassismus als symbolisch vermittelte Dimension sozialer Ungleichheit* – see also her essay in this volume.

²⁰ Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry into the State of the Colony of New South Wales, p. 588.

convict labour at the Port Macquarie penal settlement that sugar was successfully grown to a large extent for the first time. Unfortunately, frost destroyed the cane fields and sugar cultivation moved further north. It was not until 1862 that Louis Hope produced the first marketable amount of sugar and laid the foundation for the rise of the sugar industry.²¹ To the detriment of the emerging sugar industry, by that time the transportation of convicts to New South Wales had already been abolished for over twenty years.

After the end of convict transportation, the amount of tractable labour decreased while wages rose. Constant opening up of new land created a large demand for labour but also offered job prospects. Shortages of workers led to a recruitment of Chinese, Indians, and other non-Europeans.²² Already at this time the demand was made that Australian sugar, which was by now grown commercially on ever increasing plantations, should be produced »by means of European labour exclusively«.²³ The anticipated influx of white workers to Queensland, however, did not occur. As a consequence, in 1863 the first Pacific Islanders were introduced and employed in the sugar fields. The newspapers answered their arrival with musings about the commencement of a slave trade in Queensland.

This non-white labour was highly exploitable. In the hierarchical labour segmentation it did not necessarily threaten white employment but resulted in enhanced wage rates for skilled European workers. In the case of the sugar industry, the Pacific Islanders were increasingly confined to the cane fields. Positions as overseers and skilled occupations in the sugar mills and refineries were taken by skilled white workers.

However, a realization of the tangible advantage of the »wages of whiteness«²⁴ was not possible for the majority of the lower classes. They were prevented from the free selling of their labour power by laws like the Masters and Servants Act, politically incapacitated by electoral law and somewhat overawed by the social power of the ruling elites. The growing social tension was discharged where many hoped to become rich quickly – on the goldfields, where the protest voiced a fury against the ruling classes. Above all, the fury was aimed at the allegedly racially infe-

²¹ Cf. Ian Duffield: *The Life and Death of »Black« John Goff*, p. 32; Andrew Markus: *Australian Race Relations*, p. 55; Hugh Anderson: *Sugar*, p. 10.

²² Cf. Andrew Markus: *Australian Race Relations*, p. 56.

²³ »The Sugar Cane«, in: *The Argus*, 20.06.1849; see also »Sugar Growing«, in: *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 2.6.1849; concerning the following, see »The Slave Trade in Queensland«, in: *The Courier*, 22.8.1863.

²⁴ Cf. David Roediger: *The Wages of Whiteness* – see also his essay in this volume.

rior competitors – the Chinese diggers. The protest is therefore described as having an »irony with a somewhat bitter taste«: »what is often seen as the first instance of an Australian rebellion against colonial authority, the Eureka Stockade, also initiates the first organised racist campaign against the Chinese«.²⁵

When the number of Chinese immigrations rose in the 1870s, evermore racist allegations of immorality were emphasized. »One hundred of these Chinamen would do more to demoralise this community than a thousand Europeans« stated the trade unionist and politician Angus Cameron. He saw the responsibility for the Chinese immigration as lying with the employers since the »influx of Chinese [...] was favoured only by capitalists, who believed in cheap labour«.²⁶

Many ex-convicts and workers came to realize that their racist symbolic capital was a vested right which was not convertible under the changed conditions. It could be in their favour at the colonial frontier as a means of distinguishing themselves from Aborigines and thereby effecting their inclusion into the settler society. But it proved to have no power to secure higher wages or even employment, when the white workers were in competition with Chinese and other non-European workers. The emerging class consciousness of the ex-convicts and other white labourers solidified in dissociation from Chinese and other immigrant workers. Clashes between European and Chinese miners added to the conception of alien labour as unfair competition. Myths about their alleged corruption of morals and culture justified the rejection of non-European workers. Consequently, the statutes of the newly-founded unions excluded all persons who were »Chinese, Japanese, Kanakas, or Afghans, or coloured aliens« from membership.²⁷

One of the earliest and most extensive agitations against the employment of non-European labour was the Seaman's Strike of the late 1870s. The seamen struck from November 1878 to January 1879 against the replacement of Australian crews with Chinese crews by the Australasian Steam Navigation Company (ASN). In July 1878 the ASN had once again replaced European by Chinese sailors, thus cutting the wages of their employees from six pound to (roughly) three pound a month. The Trade and Labor Council (TLC) called a public meeting in which they emphasized the necessity to oppose all Chinese immigration.²⁸ Though the press usu-

²⁵ Lars Jensen: *Unsettling Australia*, p. 141.

²⁶ »Legislative Assembly«, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18.8.1876 (>Chinamen<); Phil Griffiths: *Containing Discontent*, p. 75 (>influx<).

²⁷ Alexander T. Yarwood, Michael J. Knowling: *Race Relations*, p. 185.

²⁸ For the following see Ann Curthoys: *Conflict and Consensus*, pp. 48 ff.; cf. also Noel B.

ally was not »in the habit of advocating the cause of the working men«, in the case of the Europeans' replacement, the »Sydney Morning Herald« »had done all it could to show what the colony would suffer if the »yellow agony« were admitted into it« as the leading speaker of the TLC remarked.²⁹

The ASN's actions were seen as a tocsin to the working classes who were to »realise the fact that Chinese labor is slowly but surely superseding theirs«. The »presence of any considerable number of these people would be most disastrous to the morals and health of our own countrymen and women, and dangerous to the national character«. The uniting of the labourers and their emerging self-consciousness »indicated the development of a working class set of interests«. ³⁰ It led to the formal discrimination against non-whites in labour conditions by employers and functioned to validate the superiority of »white« labour.

When in late 1878 more Chinese were employed, the European sailors broke into a strike. »As a rule strikes are bad things«, the »Brisbane Courier« claimed. »But, if anything can justify a strike, and a general exhibition of public sympathy with the strikers, the step taken by the company would do so«. In general, Chinese employment was objected to on racist grounds rather than for economic reasons. Agitation against Chinese stressed their perceived moral inferiority, opposed their willingness to sell their labour for wages much below those of the white workers and frowned upon their supposed opium habits and associations with white women. Since the Chinese were held to accept conditions which necessitated »descending many steps in the ladder of humanity«, »[w]e Australians [...] are agreed that it is better for us to have a community capable of the highest civilisation« even without the advantages of low labour costs.³¹

The strike was seen as being founded on a »social principle which is shared by all classes« since it was »not a question of class against class, but a question of race against race« and supporting it meant to bring into the public's focus the question of immigration restriction. The seamen's strike was not considered a »fight of labor against capital, but a fight of labor against a pest«. ³² Australianness had become class-spanning. The

Nairn: *Some Aspects of the Social Role of the Labour Movement in New South Wales*, p. 11; Alexander T. Yarwood, Michael J. Knowling: *Race Relations*, p. 183; Charles A. Price: *Great White Walls*, p. 163; Andrew Markus: *Fear & Hatred*, pp. 82 f.

²⁹ »Influx of Chinese into the Colony«, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24.7.1878.

³⁰ »Our Sydney Letter«, in: *The Brisbane Courier*, 2.8.1878 (»fact«, »presence«); Ben Madison: *Day of the Just Reasoner*, p. 15 (»set«).

³¹ (Untitled), in: *The Brisbane Courier*, 20.11.1878 (»strikes« etc.).

³² (Untitled), in: *The Townsville Herald*, 30.11.1878 (»principle«); (untitled), in: *The*

»struggle to save British Australia« was given a »national character« by the public and media support and the involvement of other unions.³³

Throughout December 1878 public meetings – representing »nearly every class of the community« – were held and petitions were signed acknowledging the »law of self-preservation« against moral and economic competition from abroad.³⁴ Colliers and miners refused coal supplies to the ASN vessels with Chinese crews, wharf labourers joined the strike, and the TLC participated in the agitation against Chinese immigrants.³⁵ In mass meetings and petitions the public disapproved of the allegedly unpatriotic actions of the ASN to replace white with Chinese workers. Furthermore, many businessmen and traders of Brisbane, Cooktown and Mackay declared a boycott of the ASN steamers if they continued to employ Chinese. Even the Brisbane Chamber of Commerce stood behind the seamen's demands. Most decisively, the Queensland government withdrew from the mail subsidy contract it had with the ASN and stipulated that in the future these subsidies would only be granted if no Chinese or Pacific Islanders were employed.³⁶

The Seamen's Strike against the ASN was the first intercolonial dispute for white workers' racial rights. The collaboration of the strengthening labour movement in the form of several trade unions with public institutions and politicians was supported by the broad public. In this way, the Seamen's Union members were able to utilize their racist symbolic capital in order to secure employment and public and political support. Still the »wages of whiteness« were rather symbolical – only half of the dismissed seamen were reemployed and the company retained most of those who were hired as strike breakers, presumably at lower than union wages.³⁷ Eventually, the ASN dismissed all their Chinese sailors and

Townsville Herald, 11.12.1878 (»question«); (Untitled), in: Maryborough Chronicle, 7.12.1878 (»labor«); all articles cit. in Phil Griffiths: *The heroic shameful role of labour*, pp. 7 ff.

³³ Ibid., p. 6 (»struggle«); Queensland Branch: Federated Seamen's Union of Australasia – Executive's Address to Members, 1892, cit. in Norbert Ebbels: *Australian Labour Movement*, p. 155 (»national«); Noel B. Nairn: *Some Aspects of the Social Role of the Labor Movement*, p. 12, emphasizes that no other strikes in nineteenth century Australia have shown »such a complete identity of interest between a union and its society«.

³⁴ (Untitled), in: *The Age*, 16.12.1878, cit. in Norbert Ebbels: *Australian Labour Movement*, p. 104 (»nearly«); see also Andrew Markus: *Fear & Hatred*, p. 84; Myra Willard: *White Australia Policy*, p. 53 (»self-preservation«).

³⁵ Cf. Myra Willard: *White Australia Policy*, p. 55; Raymond Markey: *Labor Party*, p. 288; (untitled), in: *The Brisbane Courier*, 31.12.1878.

³⁶ Cf. Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders, Kathryn Cronin: *Race Relations*, pp. 312 f.

³⁷ Cf. Andrew Markus: *Fear & Hatred*, pp. 86 f.; Raymond Markey: *The Making of The Labor Party*, p. 288; see also »The Seamen's Strike«, in: *The Brisbane Courier*,

any further attempt to replace local with cheap imported labour was discouraged for the time being.³⁸

Factored into this racialized debate surrounding the employment of the seamen were also other economic sectors – not least the sugar industry: »The sugar planters say ›Without Polynesian labor sugar cultivation won't pay.‹ The squatters say ›We find Polynesian labor better than white labor, although it is more expensive.‹ (?) The ASN Company say ›We cannot afford European seamen and firemen, we must have Chinese‹.«.³⁹

The sugar industry was by now firmly established; the acres under sugar had reached new heights, and in the early 1880s Australian sugar consumption per capita surpassed that of every other society of the world.⁴⁰ New technologies in the processing of sugar allowed for the production of a whiter-than-ever sugar. With the additional fall of the world sugar prices sugar in the purest quality could be consumed in all milieus of society. As a Queensland parliamentarian observed in the 1890s, »even the working man would take nothing but purely white sugar«.

Curiously, the chemical purification of sugar occurred at almost the same time as the Queensland sugar industry was to undergo a major social change. The employment of Pacific Islanders in Australia was confined to tropical or semi-tropical agriculture by the Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1880 and the Amendment of 1884 further restricted the Islanders to manual labour in the cane fields, thus effectively banning them from skilled or semi-skilled work in the sugar mills or as supervisors.⁴¹ In 1885, an Act to introduce Indian labourers was repealed and an Act to end the recruitment of Pacific Islanders was passed, effectively abolishing the Pacific Island Labour Trade in 1890.⁴²

With the prospect of replacing Pacific Islanders by European labourers growing dimmer due to the lack of interest on the part of the workers, the sugar planters turned to Chinese, Japanese, Indian and other ›alien‹ labourers already present in the colony. When cheap European beet sugar

11.1.1879.

³⁸ Cf. Ann Curthoys: Conflict and Consensus, p. 48; Phil Griffiths: The heroic shameful role of labour, p. 3.

³⁹ ›Chinese Seamen‹, in: The Brisbane Courier, 25.11.1878. The cited text is a letter to the editor. Pacific Island labour is obviously not »more expensive« than European labour, hence the editor rightly annotated the passage with the here-cited question mark.

⁴⁰ Cf. Peter Griggs: Sugar demand and consumption in colonial Australia, pp. 77 f.; the following quote can be found loc. cit., p. 84.

⁴¹ Cf. Pacific Island Labourers Act 1880: Queensland, 44 Vic. No. 17; Pacific Island Labourers Act 1880 Amendment Act 1884: Queensland, 47 Vic. No. 12.

⁴² Cf. Pacific Island Labourers Act 1880 Amendment Act 1885: Queensland, 49 Vic. No. 17; see also ›The Queensland Parliament‹, in: The Argus, 30.9.1885.

collided on the Australian market with Queensland cane sugar, the missing protection against imported sugar and the rising labour costs brought the industry to the brink of collapse. One consequence was the repeal of the Act that ended the introduction of Pacific Islanders and the reinstatement of recruitment for the next decade; the other consequence was the breaking up of the large plantations into small farms and the erection of central mills financed by the Queensland government.⁴³

White Nation

Even though the reconstruction of the sugar industry was not explicitly necessitated by the desire for a ›white Queensland‹ but by the financial crisis in the sugar industry, it nonetheless enabled a racialized social change. The subdividing of the large plantations into small farms was the stimulus for white small farmers and their families to settle in Northern Queensland. A fostering of settlement in the north was seen as a crucial part of protection against presumed foreign powers' attempts to ›invade‹ the country via the thinly populated Queensland. The transformation of the Queensland sugar industry into »a great white-labour industry« was not least a cornerstone of the White Australia Policy because the »peopling of the vast empty spaces of country in the North by hundreds of thousands – aye, millions – of agriculturists, skilled workmen, &c.« could be used as a bulwark against »possible invasion by foreign foes«, predominantly from Asia.⁴⁴

Since »[n]o other industry possessed the same capacity to settle white cultivators on the soil of Australia's vast tropical areas« the conversion of the sugar industry »from a coloured to a white labour industry« was the solution to the question of national defence. The »Commonwealth owes a moral debt to the Sugar Industry of almost immeasurable gravity«, the sugar industry concluded, since it provided the »tropical north with a defensive garrison of great present and potential strength«.⁴⁵

Engagement in sugar cultivation now seemed more attractive based on the possible upward social mobility from settler or worker to planter.

⁴³ Cf. Pacific Island Labourers Extension Act of 1892: Queensland, 55 Vic. No. 38; The Sugar Works Guarantee Act of 1893: Queensland, 57 Vic. No. 18, ensured that the plantations controlled by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company were subdivided and rented to white settlers and families.

⁴⁴ ›Alien Immigration: The Truth About Queensland and Coloured Races‹, in: The Brisbane Courier, 2.2.1901 (›industry‹); Intelligence & Tourist Bureaus of Queensland: Queensland Sugar Industry, p. 10 (›peopling‹).

⁴⁵ The Sugar Industry Organisations: The Australian Cane Sugar Industry, pp. 7 (›capacity‹), 20 (›debt‹ etc.).

Nonetheless, demand for cane cutters still exceeded the supply of European workers. The presumed unfitness of whites for employment in the tropics was called on when Robert Philp, premier of Queensland, warned that white workers »would ›gradually sink below the level of the civilization [. . . and] to the level of [the Islanders] they were called to displace«.⁴⁶

Willing to engage in cane cutting during the depression, in better times the European workers generally preferred to work in railroad work and on goldfields.⁴⁷ The labour movement's campaign for the engagement of white workers – supported by the legislation's gradual restrictions of Pacific Islanders to tropical agriculture – was at this stage promoted for merely ideological reasons. As a matter of fact, during the period of the first abolition of ›coloured‹ workers around 1890 and also at the time of the final repatriation between 1906 and 1908, ›white‹ labour in Queensland's cane fields was desperately searched for.

The white workers of Australia were not keen on engaging in the arduous, tropical labour – »the Queensland working-man firmly refuses to touch sugar« and would »not accept such wages as an agricultural industry can afford to pay«. The planters »would gladly employ whites«, stated Thomas McIlwraith, former Prime Minister of Queensland, »but there is a prejudice against doing blackfellow's work, even at more than twice the blackfellow's money«. Moreover, the employers feared a class conflict actually employing whites because not primarily of questions of climate or wages but because of the fear that »white labour would try to virtually get control of the plantations by refusing to harvest the crop except upon their own terms«.⁴⁸

In a broader perspective, the last decade of the nineteenth century was dominated by arrangements for, and negotiations about, possible federations of the Australasian colonies which also involved New Zealand and Fiji. In the years 1890, 1891 and 1897 delegates from the colonies debated over the membership and conditions of the emergent Commonwealth of Australia, with four themes running through the conferences: defence of Australasia, fiscal union of the colonies, immigration restrictions (especially of Chinese), and the relationship to Britain. While the

⁴⁶ Lyndon Megarrity: *White Queensland*, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Cf. Vanda Moraes-Gorecki: ›Black Italians‹ in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland, p. 315.

⁴⁸ ›Black Labour‹, in: *The Graphic*, 20.2.1892 (›touch sugar‹); ›White Labour in Queensland Canefields‹, in: *The Brisbane Courier*, 4.1.1894 (›such wages‹, ›get control‹); ›An Interview with the Ex-Prime Minister of Queensland‹, in: *The Brisbane Courier*, 24.9.1884 (›prejudice‹).

necessity of a united defence against an external foe was agreed upon, the unity seemed endangered by internal border duties.

The intra-Australian duties influenced the outlook of the sugar industry and the relationship of Queensland to the other colonies. Queensland was the pioneer zone of sugar production in Australia and by the end of the nineteenth century it produced almost enough cane sugar to supply the rest of the Australian colonies, but if exports under a federal government were taxed, Queensland would have to carry almost the whole burden.⁴⁹

Not surprisingly, during the debates over taxation of exports and the imposition of excise duties within Australia, the question of Queensland sugar loomed large.⁵⁰ It also had a bearing on the question of a ›white Australia‹. James T. Walker, a representative from New South Wales, remarked that ›the employment of colored labor‹ had also fostered the employment of white labour and that, without it, ›many white people would not have been where they are now‹. At least one of his colleagues was of different opinion. Into a federated Australia, remarked Henry Dobson, a representative from Tasmania, Queensland could only be admitted on the basis of the status quo achieved with ›regard to her sugar plantations‹, i.e. on the basis of the abolition of the Pacific Island labour trade.⁵¹

Prime Minister Edmund Barton was emphatic that the issue of the sugar industry was to be settled by a federal Australia since ›[q]uestions which relate [...] to the purity of race, to the preservation of the racial character of the white population, are Commonwealth questions‹, and the ›preservation of every inch of the shores [...] from immigration‹ was ›one of the most desirable powers to place into the constitution‹. Charles C. Cameron from South Australia added that ›in view of our proximity to the crowded millions of the East‹ the question of ›absolute prohibition‹ should be discussed ›in the interests of what is generally and properly known as the white Australian‹.⁵²

The Federation, then, was based on a policy of restricting immigration, i.e. Asian migration, and a policy of exclusion, i.e. the repatriation of the Pacific Islanders. Already at the first effective meeting of the House of Representatives on 10 May 1901, the necessity to design ›Bills for

⁴⁹ Cf. Australasian Federal Convention 1891, 11.3.1891, p. 252.

⁵⁰ See for example Australasian Federal Convention 1891, 13.3.1891, pp. 348 f.; 16.3.1891, pp. 354, 365 ff.; especially Australasian Federal Convention 1897, 19.4.1897, pp. 840-858 and 6.9.1897, pp. 93 f.

⁵¹ Australasian Federal Convention 1897, 30.3.1897, p. 310 8 (›Walker‹), Australasian Federal Convention 1897, 9.9.1897, p. 272 (›Dobson‹).

⁵² Australasian Federal Convention 1898, 27.1.1898, p. 232 (›Barton‹); Australasian Federal Convention 1898, 28.1.1898, p. 248 (›Cameron‹).

the firm restriction of the immigration of Asiatics and for the diminution and gradual abolition of the introduction of labour from the South Sea Islands« was asserted. During the following sittings, the Immigration Restriction Bill and the Pacific Islands Labourers Bill were the frontrunner bills to be passed.⁵³

The deportation of the Pacific Islanders was supposed to force the sugar planters to resort to European labourers and thereby ›whiten‹ the Queensland sugar industry. A protective tariff was also placed on foreign sugar entering the Australian market.⁵⁴ The Excise and Rebate System that was created encouraged the sugar planters to replace the Pacific Islanders with European labourers and helped to finance the higher costs of white labour.⁵⁵ The Excise Tariff of 1902 stipulated that an excise duty of three pound per ton on all sugar consumed in Australia was to be charged. According to the Sugar Bounty Act of 1903, rebates were only paid for ››white‹ sugar«, meaning ››white grown‹ cane [. . .] as the product of ››white labour‹«. ⁵⁶ When in 1904 the bonus for white grown cane was about to be discontinued, farmers and millers foresaw the end of the desired ›white‹ sugar industry and a displacement of white labour by Asians, thus ›taking away the black man simply to replace him by the yellow man‹.⁵⁷

By the end of 1908, more than seven thousand Pacific Islanders of the circa ten thousand present in Queensland and northern New South Wales in 1901 had been returned to their respective home islands.⁵⁸ Even before they had left the country, they had already been written out of the ›white‹ success story of sugar cultivation when a Labor politician stated that ›all the pioneering work has been done by the whites« with the ›undesirable immigrants‹ entering the stage afterwards.⁵⁹

In the first years of the Commonwealth, jobs for whites in the cane fields were created with the help of legislation (excluding Pacific Islanders from Australia), financial levies on the wider society (the Excise and Rebate system paid for and enforced the transition from ›black‹

⁵³ Cf. The Parliament of the Commonwealth, No. 10 Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives, 11. and 12.12.1901, pp. 271, 273.

⁵⁴ Cf. Alan Birch: *The Implementation of the White Australia Policy*, p. 204; Lyndon Megarrity: *White Queensland*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ For the excise and rebate system, see Adrian Graves: *Cane and Labour*, pp. 59 f.

⁵⁶ See *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia 1911*, p. 398. The payment of bounties was extended until 1912 by the Sugar Bounty Act of 1905. *The Advertiser*, ›Rebates on ›White‹ Sugar‹, 1.1.1903, p. 5 (›white grown‹ etc.).

⁵⁷ Doug Hunt: *Exclusivism and Unionism*, p. 88.

⁵⁸ Cf. Clive Moore: *The South Sea Islanders*, pp. 167-181; id.: *Kanaka*, pp. 288 ff.

⁵⁹ Cit. in Henry Reynolds: *North of Capricorn*, p. 164.

to ›white‹ labour) and ideologically justified by the nationwide desire to »keep Australia white« and thus protected from supposedly hostile invasion.⁶⁰ The ›wages of whiteness‹, however, were still confined to the possibility of employment. For the newly-founded sugar workers' unions the fight was far from over.⁶¹

White Wages

After 1907, the Islanders' deportation had led to increasing numbers of European workers in the cane fields but predominantly these workers were Italians.⁶² With regard to them their right to the ›wages of whiteness‹ seemed uncertain to large parts of the British-shaped labour movement. The cause of this was, without doubt, the fact that they were brought to Australia as cheap labourers. Already in 1890 ›The Worker‹ had bewailed: »First the coolie, then the kanaka, now the Italian! Isn't it time our own flesh and blood had a chance?«.⁶³

›Flesh and blood‹, at that, was not only a figure of speech. In fact, both words symbolized the convolution of class and race elements in the white Australian struggle for fair wages. They ought to be high enough to reproduce their own ›flesh‹. And, they ought to be distributed in due consideration of lineage and not benefit foreign ›blood‹.

The Italians were considered, as were non-white workers, in terms of cheap labour. In 1901 this was reason enough for ›The Worker‹ to see them as »coloured alien[s]« who have »driven the white worker almost out of the market«. In terms of sugar production, it was held that »Japs act at mills and lengthsmen on tramways, kanakas do the ploughing, and low-grade Italians do the mill work«.⁶⁴

This role of the Italians was not only considered to undermine ›white‹ solidarity, it was also underpinned by arguments of race science which led to doubts about the ›whiteness‹ of Italians altogether. Such arguments drew on Italy's own race-ideological division of its peninsula into a European north and an African south. This was made accessible to

⁶⁰ Since no »black or piebald« Australia was to be allowed, »some hardship« in the sugar industry with the »abolition of colored labor« was to be faced but »white Australia was worth the sacrifice« – ›The Federal Elections«, in: *The Advertiser*, 13.3.1901.

⁶¹ The first unions were formed in Mackay and Cairns in 1905; see Doug Hunt: *Exclusivism and Unionism*, p. 89.

⁶² Cf. Gianfranco Cresciani: *The Italians in Australia*, p. 45.

⁶³ (Untitled), in: *The Worker*, 13.12.1890 cit. after Kay Saunders: *Masters and Servants*, p. 106.

⁶⁴ *The Worker*, 24.8.1901, cit. in Doug Hunt: *Exclusivism and Unionism*, p. 84.

Anglophone readers by – for example – William Z. Ripley's characterization of the ›Mediterranean race‹. This seemed obvious to the ›Australian Worker‹, and in 1925 it extended this ›theory‹ to cover the whole of Southern Europe. There, in the east the Turks, and in the West the Moors, had supposedly ›left a racial imprint‹. After all, it was argued, many Italians originated from ›the enormous slave population‹ of the Roman Empire.⁶⁵

In the sugar industry the racialized wage question led to a scurrile melange. On the one hand, as late as the mid-twenties, sugar mills occasionally defamed Italian-produced sugar as ››black‹ sugar‹ and refused to process it.⁶⁶ On the other hand, even those who were denied their racist symbolic capital earned tangible ›wages of whiteness‹. The unions had to insist fiercely upon the maintenance of ›white‹ wages after it had become obvious that the conflict between capital and labour persisted in the ›white nation‹ of the Commonwealth. Many entrepreneurs wanted to see the ›wages of whiteness‹ confined to their symbolic role, i.e. as a badge denoting membership of the nation. Numerous workers saw their racist symbolic capital, however, as an assignment to them of a higher share of social wealth. A labour conflict was unavoidable.

The 1911 ›Sugar Strike‹ was the ››first major, prolonged and acrimonious industrial dispute‹ in the Queensland sugar industry and was discussed in newspapers nationwide.⁶⁷ Even though the employment of non-European labourers in the sugar industry was discouraged by both legislation and unions, a number of planters still relied on the cheaper ›coloured‹ labourers.⁶⁸ The cane cutters demanded increased wages, an eight-hour day, and sustenance during the slack season; the employers conceded to all but the rates of wages.⁶⁹

With the clamour for the complete exclusion of ›coloured‹ labourers, improvements in wages and working conditions and regulated working hours, however, the strikers asked not only for economic improvements but also for full recognition as white Australians. The white workers

⁶⁵ Cf. William Z. Ripley: *The Races of Europe*, pp. 246 ff.; *Australian Worker*, 21.1.1925 cit. in Andrew Markus: *Australian Race Relations*, p. 146 (›imprint‹, ›slave‹) – see also Wulf D. Hund: *Mit der Weißheit am Ende*, p. 604.

⁶⁶ Vanda Moraes-Gorecki: *Black Italians*, pp. 315 f.

⁶⁷ See for example ›Sugar Strike‹, in: *The Argus*, 20.6.1911; ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: *The Advertiser*, 23.6.1911; Kay Saunders: *Masters and Servants*, p. 96 (›dispute‹).

⁶⁸ In 1902, less than fifteen per cent were European workers, in 1908 their proportion rose to eighty-eight per cent, and three years later only six per cent of the workers were non-whites – see William A. Douglass: *From Italy to Ingham*, p. 66; Jürgen Matthäus: *Nationsbildung in Australien*, pp. 277 f.

⁶⁹ ›Sugar-Workers' Strike‹, in: *The Argus*, 6.6.1911.

fought for »fair wages [. . .] under fair conditions« just like the Australian Natives' Association strove to secure »fair wages, fair values, and fair profits«. ⁷⁰ This served an ambiguous purpose: not only did the workers want to be paid sufficiently to maintain their living standards, they also wanted to be paid as white workers. The Sugar Growers' Union, representing the employers, argued that their position was hardly better than that of the employees since they only received a low price for their cane. Though they »recognized that the men were entitled to better conditions« they were unable to grant improvements. ⁷¹

At the end of June 1911 the sugar workers of almost all cane sugar producing districts were engaged in a strike which involved more than »the whole of the industry«. Railway and waterside workers joined the strike by refusing to handle non-union sugar, also called »scab« or »black« sugar, on the wharves of Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart. ⁷² This was backed by the Acting Prime Minister William M. Hughes. ⁷³ Furthermore, the Federal Parliament – the first parliament with a Labor Party majority – stood »by the white worker« in this strike and criticized the police magistrate's dealing with the strikers. The ›Sydney Morning Herald‹ declared the debate about payments to sugar growers and sugar workers to be »a large national question, in which the whole of Australia is an interested party«. ⁷⁴ The workers were supported by the local people who refused to rent out rooms to or serve strike breakers and received financial support from other unions. ⁷⁵ To acquire labourers during the strike,

⁷⁰ ›Strikers and Politicians‹, in: The Brisbane Courier, 20.6.1911 (›conditions‹); ›The Referenda‹, in: The Advertiser, 7. 4. 1911 (›values‹); for a reflection on Australian ›fairness‹ see the essay of Wulf D. Hund in this volume.

⁷¹ ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: The Advertiser, 1.7.1911.

⁷² The first to go into strike were the men of the Lower Burdekin district on 4.6.1911; ›Sugar-Workers' Strike‹, in: The Argus, 3.6.1911; ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: The Argus, 17.6.1911 (›whole industry‹); ›Action by Wharf Labourers‹, in: The Argus, 1.7.1911; ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: The Advertiser, 4.7.1911 (›scab‹), ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: The Advertiser, 21.7.1911; ›Black Sugar‹, in: The Sydney Morning Herald, 8.8.1911 (›black‹), ›Sugar Strike‹, in: The Argus, 9.8.1911.

⁷³ See William H. Hughes, also president of the Waterside Workers' Federation, cit. in ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: The Mercury, 21. 7. 1911; see also ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: The Sydney Morning Herald, 1.8.1911 on Hughes' »awkward position« between parliament, employers, employees, unions and the Colonial Sugar Refining Company.

⁷⁴ ›Queensland Sugar Strike‹, in: The Argus, 11. 7. 1911, p. 7 (›workers‹); ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: The Sydney Morning Herald, 1.8.1911 (›question‹).

⁷⁵ ›Society of Free Workers‹, in: The Argus, 25.7.1911 (›free workers‹); Kay Saunders: Masters and Servants, p. 108. Among others the Australian Miners' Association, the Tobacco Workers' Union, the Builders' Laborers' Federation, and the Cordalba railway employees donated money to the strikers – see ›The Sugar Strike‹, in: The Advertiser, 29.6.1911, p. 11; ›Tobacco Workers‹, in: The Advertiser, 30.6.1911; ›Builders' Labor-

the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) fostered the large scale introduction of Italians for field labour but also appealed for Australian workers. These »free workers« were recruited from the southern states via advertisements in several newspapers.⁷⁶

Throughout the strike, the white workers emphasized their distinctiveness by racistly stereotyping not only Japanese and Chinese but also Southern European, in particular Italian, workers. British immigrants introduced as replacements for workers on strike were not perceived as »blacklegs« since they soon joined the trade unionists. Matters were different with non-Europeans and Southern Europeans. These groups were denied membership in the unions and kept from participating in the strike action.

Rather than on class solidarity the unions relied on the racist convictions underpinning their wage expectations. In this regard they could count on the support of broad parts of the public. Recognizing »sugar [...] as a household necessity«, the »Sydney Morning Herald« was in »no doubt that the people of the Commonwealth are heavily penalised« by the excise and rebate system but nevertheless declared the protection of the sugar industry to be »really a large national question, in which the whole of Australia is an interested party«.⁷⁷ The »Argus« questioned the CSR's »picture of the company in relation to white workmen« by quoting its director and chairman who expressed the company's readiness to relocate to Fiji and there to produce »with the aid of its coloured brother [...] the good white sugar that the white Australian desires to eat«. Labor politician and future Prime Minister William M. Hughes, in taking a stand against the CSR, stated that »the people of Australia want Australian sugar and they are certainly entitled to have it«, not through the employment of »coloured« workers but through the »employment of white labour at white men's wages in the industry«. The workers' wage demand lay slightly higher than the agreed daily minimum wage – thus, »if the sugar company cannot support married men it is not an industry fit for the white men, or fit for the white man's country«.⁷⁸

In August 1911 the Sugar Strike ended with conferences in several sugar districts and the granting of an eight-hour day along with a min-

ers' Federation«, in: *The Advertiser*, 15.7.1911; »The Sugar Strike«, in: *The Advertiser*, 8.7.1911; »Assistance form Sydney Unions«, in: *The Mercury*, 29.7.1911.

⁷⁶ See for example »Advertising«, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13.7.1911; »Advertising«, in: *The Argus*, 24.7.1911; Kay Saunders: *Masters and Servants*, p. 104; »Assistance form Sydney Unions«, in: *The Mercury*, 29.7.1911 (»free workers«).

⁷⁷ »The Sugar Strike«, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1.8.1911.

⁷⁸ »Sugar Strike«, in: *The Argus*, 3. 8. 1911 (»picture« etc.).

imum wage of thirty shillings per week for workers at the mills.⁷⁹ In the years following the Sugar Strike, several pieces of legislation were passed which effectively reduced the numbers of non-European settlers and employees in the sugar industry. The last step in the non-Europeans' exclusion from the sugar industry was the Sugar Cultivation Act of 1913 which made it unlawful to »engage in or carry on the cultivation of sugar cane« without the certificate of a dictation test and which imposed penalties on both the unlawful employer and employee.⁸⁰

The Governor of Queensland, William MacGregor, was assured by the Premier »that both Commonwealth and State Governments [are] determined to make Queensland sugar [an] exclusively white men industry, and already differentiate by giving [a] bounty on white persons only«. In his explanation as to who should be excluded he remarked that the »Premier stated that the object of the Bill was ›to absolutely exclude coloured labour from employment in sugar in field and mill«. With regard to ›coloured‹ labour, it was predominantly »Kanakas, Japanese, [and] British Indians« who were of concern.⁸¹ The Prime Minister advised that to facilitate a »white labour industry« it was not intended to »apply the Education test to white races [...] unless there is some specific reason for their exclusion«. ⁸²

For the first time in the sugar industry, the white workers successfully demanded that their racist symbolic capital was transformed into tangible ›wages of whiteness«. The whiteness that was established in the laws of the newly-federated Commonwealth of Australia was now expected to benefit the European workers of the sugar industry. They united to demonstrate to the sugar planters that they were no longer willing to do »nigger work for a dog's pay« or be treated »like kanaka slaves«. The achievements of the Sugar Strike and the consequent laws were to place the last pieces in the puzzle of a thoroughly ›white‹ Queensland sugar industry. Eventually, the »desire [...] that it might be wholly a white man's industry« seemed fulfilled.⁸³

⁷⁹ Cf. Kay Saunders: *Masters and Servants*, p. 110; ›The Sugar Strike«, in: *The Mercury*, 15.8.1911; ›The Sugar Strike«, in: *The Argus*, 16.8.1911, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Cf. the Sugar Cultivation Act 1913 An Act to Prohibit the Employment of certain Forms of Labour in the Production of Sugar and for other incidental purposes, 4 Geo V No. 4.

⁸¹ MacGregor, 23.7.1913, Sugar Cultivation Act 1913 (Qld.), p. 23 (›industry‹); 12.7.1913, Sugar Cultivation Act 1913 (Qld.), p. 19 (›Premier‹ etc.); Harcourt, 22.7.1913, Sugar Cultivation Act 1913 (Qld.), p. 22 (›Kanakas‹).

⁸² MacGregor on the proceedings in Parliament on 17.6.1913, Sugar Cultivation Act 1913 (Qld.), p. 17 (›white labour industry‹); Queensland Sugar Cultivation Act 1913, *Discrimination Against Japanese*, p. 134.

⁸³ Kay Saunders: *Workers in Bondage*, pp. 63 (›dog‹), 182 (›slaves‹); ›Sugar Production«,

White Sugar

At the beginning of the 1920s – after the physical, demographic and social ›whitening‹ of the industry – sugar was, in itself and in the manner of its production, ›white‹. During the first half of the twentieth century the sugar industry proved to be a model plant for the achievements for ›White Australia‹ and white sugar became a symbol for white consumerism acting as ›ethnic communal whiteness‹ put into practice. Nonetheless, the boundaries of whiteness remained a matter of debate.

In general, ›consuming‹ whiteness meant joining in the exploitation of non-whites. Following the lifestyle of the British Empire, white Australians consumed large amounts of tea. This tea often was not only chemically black but, and this went without saying, it was also produced by non-white labour. While there were no objections to importing ›non-white‹ tea, the sugar added to the tea could not be white enough.⁸⁴ In particular therefore, in the Australian context, consuming whiteness moreover meant the financial support of ›white‹ sugar and its conjunction with the ideology of ›White Australia‹: since the latter's scope remained disputed, ›whiteness‹ had to be constantly re-appraised.

In consuming ›white‹ sugar the consumers supported the *population politics* necessary to avert what was seen as the danger of an Asian invasion. Each teaspoon of sugar, however, was made bitter by the thought that a *high price* had to be paid for this means of defence. Added to the costs was the uncertainty regarding whether the producers, especially *the Italians*, could really be seen as ›white‹ Europeans. In an attempt to rebut the accusations against them that they exploited the consumers, the cane growers played down the high price of their commodity, using *newspaper campaigns* to draw on invasion fears and appeal to the consumers' sense of nationality.

in: The Argus, 18.12.1909, p. 21 (›desire‹); see also Intelligence & Tourist Bureaus of Queensland: Queensland Sugar Industry, p. 46.

⁸⁴ In the case of Australia, this tea came from Ceylon, India, Java, but also from Japan, China and Hong Kong; see Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics: Official Yearbook No. 13, pp. 585 ff.

Population politics had been a concern since the 1880s when the ›Empty North‹ was recognized as a danger to the white occupation of Australia. The closeness of the thinly populated northern parts to highly populated Asian countries seemed to necessitate a population politics that fostered the white settlement of the northern parts of the country. The sugar industry after its transformation from a sector based on large plantations to one comprehending small, family-owned farms was seen as the ideal foundation for European settlement in Queensland. The maintenance of »the standard of living and the general conditions that induced people to come to the north« was to be ensured by »industries suited to the climate, and one of the greatest of these industries was the sugar industry«. ⁸⁵

Prime Minister Stanley Bruce suggested that the »continuance of the sugar industry was bound up with the very existence of Australia as a nation« and that it »stood in a unique position« as the »first line of defense and the bulwark of their most cherished policy of a White Australia«. The printed media of Queensland agreed: »Every intelligent person knows that the maintenance of a White Australia depends wholly and solely upon populating the North with virile white people, just as every one knows that that population can only be induced to settle there through the prosperity of the great, growing, and promising sugar industry«. ⁸⁶ Prime Minister William M. Hughes claimed that the sugar industry »was the only industry that could people the north« and expressed his belief »that the tropical north could be settled and occupied permanently by men and women of the British race« thus disproving the myth that »the far north was unsuitable for white settlement«. ⁸⁷

For the cane growers the prosperity of Europeans in Queensland was seen as an absolute necessity. Since »[p]ractical experience [...] proved that sugar is the only industry that can be successfully carried on along our tropical coasts, it is essential to maintain it; a ›White Australia‹ is impossible without such settlement, and ›White Australia‹ is the declared policy of the Commonwealth«. ⁸⁸ The demands of the labour movement, though initially merely ideological due to the lack of white workers willing to commit themselves to Queensland sugar, took the same line with regard to this broad desire for a ›White Australia‹. For one part of the Australian nation, it was the economic and social benefits of a possible

⁸⁵ ›Mr. Hughes at Cairns: Sugar Growers' Request‹, in: *The Argus*, 29.5.1922.

⁸⁶ ›Importance of Industry‹, in: *The Argus*, 7.6.1923 (›continuance‹ etc.); ›Struggling en Bloc‹, in: *The Brisbane Courier*, 2.6.1922 (›intelligent‹ etc.).

⁸⁷ ›Mr. Huhes‹, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30.5.1922.

⁸⁸ ›Sugar Position‹, in: *The Brisbane Courier*, 30.9.1922.

social upward mobility into the ranks of the planters that incited European settlement. The sugar workers, meanwhile, were not only providing the nation with sweetness but also built the »great white walls« against hostile take-overs.⁸⁹ Working in the sugar industry was thus not only working for ›white‹ sugar against ›black‹ sugar but also working for white Australia against alien invasion.

A *high price* of sugar was considered »adequate to maintain a ›White Australia««. It had to be paid unless the sugar industry was to be allowed to vanish and »the tropical North to revert to its primeval state«, declared the sugar lobby. ›The Argus‹ claimed that »›White Australia‹ and sugar became inseparably associated years ago« and any taxpayer objecting to the subsidization »was denounced as a poor Australian«.⁹⁰ Australian-ness was thus measured according to the willingness to support the sugar industry as a truly Australian industry and consumption of expensive sugar became its symbol.

Even though Australia's annual sugar consumption per capita made the country one of the top ten consumers of cane sugar, with a national sugar price of »£ 20 a ton above the world's parity«, support for the racist national sugar project was heading for a crisis.⁹¹ The legitimacy of ›white‹ wages, allegedly causing the high costs, was questioned and it was argued that only the sugar industry as the »spoiled child of Australian politics« was provided with such special treatment. The Prime Minister was allegedly »spoonfeeding one industry at the expense of others, and [to] the detriment of the whole community« while the embargo of foreign sugar maintained »an artificial rate of wages« and »imposed upon the consumers an unnecessarily high price«.⁹² The public had to carry this burden since it »must pay the piper in dear sugar for home consumption«. This was a »direct tax on the people« whereby »one industry [. . . was] guarded by the Government and by the taxpayers against the ordinary vicissitudes of the season and the market«.⁹³ For this mismanagement »[t]here would be no necessity«, argued ›The Argus‹, »if canefield

⁸⁹ Charles A. Price: *Great White Walls*, p. xii.

⁹⁰ ›Sugar Position«, in: *The Brisbane Courier*, 30.9.1922 (›price‹); (Untitled), in: *The Argus*, 28.10.1918 (›inseparably‹ etc.).

⁹¹ Peter Griggs: *A Natural Part of Life*, p. 152; see also ›Price of Sugar«, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29.10.1921.

⁹² ›Why Sugar is Dear«, in: *The Argus*, 18.7.1922 (›spoiled‹); ›Sugar and White Australia«, in: *The Argus*, 10.6.1922 (›spoonfeeding‹); ›Sugar Agreement«, in: *The Argus*, 22.4.1922 (›artificial‹).

⁹³ ›Suggestion to Save Crops«, in: *The Argus*, 28.10.1922 (›piper‹); see also ›Sugar Question«, in: *The Argus*, 25.9.1922; ›Northern Territory«, in: *The Argus*, 29.4.1922 (›tax‹); ›Big Business in Log-Rolling«, in: *The Argus*, 1.5.1922 (›industry‹).

workers [...] were not paid wages out of all proportions to the value of their services«. ⁹⁴

The high sugar prices were not only criticized as being to the detriment of the consumers. The jam-making company foresaw cut-backs in their employment and productions if the high price level was maintained. ⁹⁵ The Fruitgrowers' Association claimed that the »high price of sugar [...] was ruining the Australian export trade«, putting »thousands of acres of fruit land [...] in danger of going out of cultivation«. Queensland was seen as »poisoned by the sugar interests« and the embargo against foreign sugar as the »most outstanding swindle in Australia today«. ⁹⁶

Repudiating the critics' accusations with race-ideological justifications, Prime Minister William M. Hughes declared that »Queensland sugar was a matter of life and death, and an outward and visible sign in tropical Australia of the White Australia policy«. He exhorted his countrymen of the necessity to carry the financial burden for the sake of the nation since »you cannot have a White Australia in this country unless you are prepared to pay for it. One of the ways in which we can pay for a White Australia is to support the sugar industry of Queensland«. ⁹⁷

In the light of the monetary impositions and the critique of the legitimacy of both dear sugar prices and the allegedly inflated wages in the sugar industry, it was easy to address the doubts smouldering beneath the surface of a supposedly united sugar consumption and call into question once more the ›whiteness‹ of the sugar. That was done by questioning the ›whiteness‹ of the cultivators and producers – namely the Southern Europeans and especially the Italians – and the recalling of former stereotyping and discrimination.

The Italians' unsettled state of whiteness evidenced the contested boundaries of racism as a social relation. In the international context, Australian sugar was produced by Europeans and was thus ›white‹. On the Australian national level, however, this assertion was fragile. When the Italians' whiteness was questioned, the focus of discrimination switched direction. No longer did it face outwards (against Chinese, Japanese and other Asians) but inwards (against Southern Europeans) and

⁹⁴ ›Why Sugar is Dear‹, in: *The Argus*, 18.7.1922

⁹⁵ ›High Price of Sugar‹, in: *The Argus*, 16.9.1921.

⁹⁶ ›Fruitgrowers' Position‹, in: *The Argus*, 2.8.1921 (›price‹ etc.); ›High Price of Sugar‹, in: *The Argus*, 22.1.1925 (›swindle‹).

⁹⁷ ›World Conditions‹, in: *The Argus*, 21.4.1922 (›sign‹); ›Mr. Hughes in Queensland‹, in: *The Argus*, 11.11.1922 (›support‹).

shed light on the alleged contradiction between the payment of ›white‹ wages and the employment of ›black‹ Italians.

This was based on the accusations that Italians were, if anything, only »marginally« white.⁹⁸ The discussions surrounding the price of sugar allegedly caused by high wages reflected this malleability of whiteness. For industrial and political critics of the sugar agreement, the wages paid were so ›white‹ that they were groundlessly dear; for the British Preference Movement, a high standard of wages secured the maintenance of a labour force which could not be white enough; but for the Federal Housewives' Association, concerned by the high price of sugar, the recipients of these ›white‹ wages were not even white.

The British Preference Movement, fuelled by the Australian Workers' Union, attempted to enforce a rule that sugar planters who wanted to hire cane cutters first had to exhaust the roll of the Australian Workers' Union before they could contract newcomers.⁹⁹ The fact that in the late-1920s non-British labourers in Queensland represented only eleven per cent of the workforce with eighty-nine per cent of this constituted by British and Australian labourers,¹⁰⁰ is evidence of the predominantly ideological content of the allegations of a supposed Italian takeover of the sugar industry. Nonetheless, the British Preference League – born out of the ›Gentleman's Agreement‹ between the Australian Workers' Union and the Employer Associations to privilege British employment – warned of the high percentages of non-British workers which allegedly caused the »foreignisation« of the main sugar districts by Italians and other Southern Europeans. The Italians in North Queensland »exhibit neither inclination nor ambition to become readily assimilated with the inhabitants of Australia«, argued the president of the Innisfail branch of the British Preference League; he also argued that »Italian customs have become harmful to Australia's economic, cultural, and industrial welfare«.¹⁰¹

At the same time, the Federated Housewives' Association threatened to withhold the support for »an Italian industry« and rather preferred to have the embargo on »black-grown sugar« lifted to ensure a sugar price »that would enable workers to live decently«. A member of the Rockhampton Housewives Association complained about the numbers of Ital-

⁹⁸ Warwick Anderson: *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, p. 159.

⁹⁹ Cf. William A. Douglass: *From Italy to Ingham*, pp. 147 f.; ›Italians in Queensland‹, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11.6.1930; ›Preference League‹, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12.6.1930; ›Work on Canefields‹, in: *The Argus*, 18.6.1930.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Warwick Anderson: *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, p. 159.

¹⁰¹ For the ›Gentleman's Agreement‹ see Anthony Paganoni: *The Pastoral Care of Italians in Australia*, p. 48; ›Foreigners‹, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18.6.1930 (›foreignisation‹); ›The Sugar Embargo‹, in: *The Canberra Times*, 4.8.1930 (›assimilated‹ etc.).

ians who »are getting the preference of the employment, to the exclusion of [...] our own Australian men«. At the same time she referred to the »cry coming from Queensland for a White Australia«, thus implying that the employment of Italians would oppose the ›whiteness‹ of the nation.¹⁰²

These doubts about the producers' whiteness were further reflected in the ›quality‹ of sugar itself. When during the mill strikes at South Johnstone in 1927 the millers refused to handle »black‹ sugar produced by Italian farmers«, the ascribed colour functioned on two levels.¹⁰³ Firstly, the denial of the Italians' whiteness was transferred onto their product. Secondly, the alleged betrayal of the labour movement by ›non-white‹ blackleggers hired during the strikes was also incorporated in this ›scab‹ product. The ›blackness‹ of the sugar was hence both racistly and socially determined.

Newspaper campaigns were supposed to smooth away the questioning of the sugar industry's subsidization and its allegedly not-white-enough employees. Critics and sceptics forced sugar growers time and again to reassure their customers with justifications drawing on the ›White Australia‹ ideology and to call up a uniting of sugar consumers against external foes until, when visiting the northern parts of the country, it was »almost a matter of decency to fill one's teacup with lumps of sugar«. ¹⁰⁴

In the ›white‹ sugar promotion campaigns the sugar growers utilized the fear of invasion and the industry's contribution to the defence of Australia. The newspaper articles of September 1922 on the benefits accruing to Australia from the sugar industry and the 1932 »Sugar Growers of Australia for the Information of the People« were mainly directed at consumers in the southern states and appealed for their support in order to maintain Australia's ›racial‹ purity.¹⁰⁵

In calling on the readers' sense of nationality the sugar industry repudiated the criticism offered by other industries and warned of the consequences of a collapsing sugar industry, thereby heavily drawing on the

¹⁰² ›Housewives Oppose the Sugar Embargo«, in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22.9.1927 (›Italian industry‹, ›black-grown sugar‹, ›decently‹); ›Cost of Sugar«, in: *The Argus*, 12.4.1923, (›preference‹, ›cry‹); see also Judith Smart: *The Politics of Consumption*, p. 24.

¹⁰³ Vanda Moares-Gorecki: *Black Italians*, p. 315 (›black sugar‹).

¹⁰⁴ Cit. in Peter Griggs: *A Natural Part of Life*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁵ Six articles were published on a daily basis between 18.09.1922 and 23.09.1922 in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Argus*. For the Sugar Growers' Information see for example (untitled), in: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12.04.1932, or (untitled), in: *The Argus*, 2.6.1932.

moral obligation of a ›good‹ Australian. »Vital to a White Australia« the »great national task« was to strengthen the northernmost industry against an Asian take-over. »For the sake of nation and race« the sugar industry was »worth the loyal support of every Australian who wants to see Northern Australia occupied by white men instead of yellow or black men« and who »loves his country and honours his race«. ¹⁰⁶

By the same token, another campaign by the Queensland sugar growers in the 1930s again addressed the people of South Australia and New South Wales to emphasize the importance of the northern industry as both a ›bulwark‹ against Asian invasion and a catalyst for the economy. To open the gates to cheap foreign sugar would not only mean to import ›black grown‹ sugar but also to endanger North Queensland ›happily settled by a white people«. ¹⁰⁷ Not using Queensland sugar therefore also allegedly meant endangering the exclusively white society.

For much of the twentieth century Australians were global leaders in per capita consumption of sugar. ¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, it seemed necessary to constantly remind the consumers of the reasons why they ought to consume ›white‹ Australian sugar in order to counter doubts about the legitimacy of its price as well as to counter attempts to discredit the ›white‹ industry by the casting of aspersions regarding the whiteness of the labour force. The campaigns which asked Australians to consume whiteness for the sake of white supremacy in Australia, brought against the critique of high sugar prices the pressure-group politics of ›racial purity‹ and utilized the prevalent invasion fears. It was thus able to bring about a more expensive employment of white labour as a sacrifice for a ›White Australia‹.

Ultimately, consumption of ›white‹ sugar and consuming ›Australian‹ meant consuming for Australian ›whiteness‹: consumption against foreign commercial competition within Australia, consumption against imports from outside Australia, consumption for the employment of white workers, consumption for white settlement in the north of Australia and consumption against hostile takeovers by non-whites from outside Australia. Moreover, consuming whiteness also meant sugar-coating the unstable consistency of whiteness. ¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ ›Do Australians Know the North‹, in: The Argus, 23.9.1922, p. 30 (›support‹); ›Australia's Wealth in Sugar‹, in: The Argus, 19.9.1922, p. 8 (›country‹).

¹⁰⁷ ›The Tide Rises While Australia Sleeps‹, in: The Argus, 15.10.1930 (›bulwark‹); ›This talk of robbing you is all bunkum‹, in: The Argus, 22.7.1932 (›black‹ etc.).

¹⁰⁸ Peter Griggs: A Natural Part of Life, p. 125.

¹⁰⁹ I wish to thank Wulf D. Hund and Jeremy Krikler for their helpful comments and objections.

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