

*Throwaway Labour. Blackbirding and a white Australia*

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**Abstract:** In a time when a white labour-force was lacking and fear for the survival of the white man in Tropical Australia was widespread, when a cultural and economic hegemony in the Tropical North was still to be achieved, and slavery in the British Empire was outlawed, the transportation of often forced native labour from the Pacific Islands to Queensland's plantations (1860s-1900s) became the best solution to guarantee two important effects: 1) the availability of an (almost) unwaged, racialised and segregated labour-force; and 2) the eventual return home of this labour, so its presence would not threaten Australia's design of racial autarchy.

My article investigates the connections between that particular system of production (sugar and cotton plantations in Queensland), its correspondent model of exploitation (indentured labour), the colour assignment in the Pacific, and the particular characteristics of Australia as a white settler colony. Its focus is on blackbirding, that particular system of labour recruitment and exploitation that involved Pacific islanders as indentured labourers between 1863 and 1904.

**Keywords:** Blackbirding; logic of exploitation; white autarchy; Brown Pacific.

### **Introduction**

Tanks Christ that's over and that's the last of the black bastards.  
Edward Wybergh Docker, *The Blackbirders* 269.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia a white labour-force was lacking and fear for the survival of the white man in the Tropics was widespread. Cultural and economic hegemony in the Tropical North was still to be achieved, and slavery in the British Empire was outlawed (*Slavery Abolition Act* 1833). As a result of this situation, people from the Pacific Islands were taken and pressed often into forced labour on Queensland's plantations (1860s-1900s). This secured the availability of an (almost) unwaged, racialised and segregated labour force. And, most importantly, that the labour force would eventually be returned home, so its presence would not threaten Australia's racial autarchy.

This article investigates the connections between a particular system of production, that of sugar and cotton plantations in Queensland, and its correspondent model of exploitation (indentured labour). More broadly it is concerned with colour assignment in the Pacific, and the particular characteristics of Australia as a white settler colony. The focus is on blackbirding, that particular system of labour recruitment and exploitation that involved Pacific islanders as indentured labourers between 1863 and 1904. Pacific islanders were from Melanesia – Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the Loyalty Islands of New Caledonia and Niue – a few islands from Polynesia, like Samoa, and from Micronesia. The recruitment process almost always incorporated an element of coercive recruitment and indentured servitude,<sup>1</sup> but blackbirding also included voluntary self-recruitment (see Moore 73). As Mark Finnane and Clive Moore have maintained,

it is impossible to distinguish between recruits lured by beguiling recruiters, but really legally enlisted, and those obtained by a level of deception and false promises, who should be placed into the illegal category. And we have also to grapple with what Moore has termed “cultural kidnapping”: Europeans taking advantage of Melanesian’s small scale societies, aspects of which coincided with the requirements of the labour trade. But there can be no doubt that the majority enlisted voluntarily, many more than once. (Finnane and Moore 144)<sup>2</sup>

The ships brought Pacific Islanders to Townsville, Maryborough (Hervey Bay) and Brisbane, in Queensland, Melbourne in Victoria and Sydney in New South Wales, mostly bought by sugar planters and cotton growers. However, if blackbirding was initially aimed at plantations in Queensland (62,500), and Fiji (annexed to Great Britain in 1874; 27,000), then Australian, French and the US recruiting were soon heading for Hawaii, Peru and Guatemala (7,300), French New Caledonia (15,000) and French and Australian New Hebrides (or Vanuatu; 2,500), German Samoa (12,500), and Australian plantations in the Solomon Islands (1870s-1880) (see Brown 185). The end of the phenomenon coincided with the creation of the Australian Federation, the introduction of the White Australia Policy (through the *Immigration Restriction Act* and the *Pacific Islands Indentured Labours Act* in 1901).

In investigating a racial, productive and geo-cultural topography that – as drafted by the practice of blackbirding – seems to neatly separate the ‘Brown Pacific’ from its white extremities (the US and Australia), my analysis is also a survey of the topicality of the articulation in the Pacific of what has been called “the global colour line” (Lake and Reynolds, see also Anderson 2009). In this, the term ‘global’ is meant to stress the world-wide nature of the intersection between raciologies that produces discriminating effects along a number of global dynamics. Instead of “colour line” I will use the plural ‘colour lines’ to acknowledge the existence of a number of racial distinctions incardinated in the fundamental settler colonial binary distinction, that is, in Australia, the one between *black-as-Aborigine* and *white-as-settler*, and, in the US, the one between *black-as-slave* and *white-as-human/citizen*. The shift between a single colour line – as W.B.E. Du Bois phrased it (16) – to a plot of lines, establishes the Pacific as a

multifaceted racialised reality that makes it possible to confront the peculiar Pacific-Australian set of colour lines with the equally peculiar Pacific-American one.

The survey in this article is not an exhaustive investigation of the topicality of the Brown Pacific. Such an undertaking would involve the comparison of the plantation-systems as well as the particular racilogies which existed across the Atlantic and the Pacific. This would possibly reveal dynamics and meanings of the re-articulation of the historical trope of black-as-slave into the trope of the Pacific brown-as-(acceptable)-semi-slave that was a consequence of the end of the Atlantic slave-trade. The article concludes with a discussion of the clash between two different versions of white supremacy that strongly differ from the single-faceted definition of it that, for instance, has been offered in Australia by Ghassan Hage (1998, 2003). It argues for the existence of a 'broad' white supremacy that, founded on the logic of elimination of the prior indigenous inhabitants, includes the possibility of the presence in the country of non-white people as exploitable subjects. I argue also for the existence of a 'strict' white supremacy (or white autarchy) that, equally founded on the same logic, precludes any non-white border-crossing.

In this scheme, white supremacy does not merely correspond to the 'white power' described by Hage, which reproduces itself through a white privilege-based multiculturalism (Hage 1998 20). Rather, it is interconnected with the 'camp' where the tension between the logic of exploitation and the autarchic solution is recombined. This camp is where white supremacy negotiates its ideological assumptions and its own taxonomies along with the interests at play and the cogent material contradictions (see Palombo 3-4). It results from the polarization of a racialised conception of production and reproduction. Given the white supremacist dogma of the maintenance of a 'purely white' reproduction, the term in question is production. As I will discuss later, in the autarchic solution, production is meant to be white. Only white labour can be employed. On the contrary, in a white supremacist model grounded on the logic of exploitation, highly exploited non-white production is seen as the best way to guarantee, in this historical phase, the white's higher quality of living and establish racialised social hierarchies that consolidate white supremacy.

### **Colours in the Pacific**

In a recent survey on the particular articulation of the colour lines in settler colonialism, my own research highlighted the very peculiarity of the assignment of colours to the Pacific bio-diversities. These bio-diversities were mostly defined as brown and black. First formulated by French and British scientists (see Douglas 2003 15-17, 2006 4, and Douglas and Ballard parts 1, 2), the colour assignment was further elaborated by independent Queensland's scientists and doctors. It drew a sort of 'melanin' line between enslavable (primitive, darker brown or almost black) Melanesians (or Kanakas<sup>3</sup>) and quiet and more civilised Polynesians (lighter brown). According to this taxonomy, the supposed cannibalistic habits of Melanesians were opposed to Polynesian alleged mildness, and the colour black was associated with an assumed wildness and

ferocity that had been deployed elsewhere to sustain the idea of black human beings as lacking the racial capacity to govern themselves (see Biber, Banivanua-Mar 2007 3).

The trope of the colour black as signifier of the incommensurability with civilisation was given new life through the Australian experience of the Pacific labour trade (1860s-1910s). Yet it continued to be associated predominantly with the history of the Atlantic slave trade (and associated with Africans, African slaves, and Americans of African descent).<sup>4</sup> In fact, although the American trope of the 'negro fear' – that is, the fear of white-black miscegenation due to the black physical presence in the US – was transduced to the Pacific, it was translated into a 'lighter' brown fear (a sort of containable threat). This is due, as I will argue later, to the fact that Melanesians' alleged quasi blackness was perfectly consistent with the rejection of the trope black-as-slave after the outlawing of slavery in the British Empire. Pacific quasi blackness was less overwhelming than enslaved blackness: unlike Afro-American slavery, it could be contained numerically and symbolically through a very much controlled indentured labour trade. As a result, the topos of the 'brown fear' in Australia was mostly referring to a non-sexualized fear for epidemic contagion and not associated solely with the 'almost black' Melanesians but with a larger externalised community. This community included 'yellow' and 'brown' migrants from Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Included in such a large group, Pacific indentured workforce in 1860s-1910s did not signify that absolute diversity (blackness-as-enslaved-condition) that produced an exceptionally dehumanising racism, rather it constituted a more general brownness for legitimated exploitation. Nevertheless, as Tracey Banivanua-Mar highlights, the proximity established between Pacific Islanders' racial identity and Afro-American blackness legitimised a system of forced labour that resonated with the enslaved condition (Banivanua-Mar 2007 141 and ff.). The industry of cane-growing employed a number of different racialised indentured and waged labourers who all suffered the inhuman condition of the plantation work. But in the case of the people from Melanesia, the violent recruitment as well as the bound nature of their labour and the methods of coercion and restraint used against them (see Saunders 1975 192-207) escalated the plantation system's violence in a way unparalleled in Australia by any other system of exploitation involving externalised racialised groups.<sup>5</sup>

The racial distinction which operated in the period 1860s-1910s between Melanesians, Polynesians and Australian Aborigines, needs to be explored in its correspondence and functionality to the integrated bio-politics of racialised production and reproduction that was operating in Australia at the time. This racialised bio-politics permeated every aspect of Australian public and private life: founded on the 'appropriation of the land' through the elimination of the native, it could privilege a broader white supremacism based on the logic of exploitation or an idea of white autarchy. White supremacism refers to a racialised system of production for a white supremacist Australia that privileges racialised labour exploitation over racialised reproduction. White autarchy on the other hand refers to a racialised system of reproduction that strives for the closure of Australian borders and society to all non-white and black outsiders.<sup>6</sup>

The difference between the two polarizations of that integrated racialised bio-politics

tallies strikingly with the meanings attached to the Pacific anomaly mentioned above, of the colour differentiation between Polynesians (Malays and Micronesians) and Melanesians. While the Polynesians are often compared with Greek and Roman bodies, the Melanesians are depicted as the brownest (that is, quasi black) and ugliest race in the area (Douglas 2006 25-26, Manderson and Jolly 8). The 'black brownness' associated with Pacific Islanders signified them contextually as both a reservoir of racialised labour for a white supremacist settler colony (logic of exploitation) and a threat to the racial purity of Australia (racial autarchy). Wildness/warrior-ness/bloodthirstiness/sexual licentiousness associated with (monstrously ugly quasi black) Kanakas (Douglas 2006 6) substantiated the fear of Islanders "on the Pacific frontiers" (Banivanua-Mar 2005 307). Such imagery suggested that "the Melanesian is too much of a wild beast to appreciate anything but the logic of violence" (Banivanu-Mar 2005 307). This served to legitimate the situation where the plantation system worked as a guarantee for the fully controlled and disciplined non-white exogenous presence.<sup>7</sup> And it ensured the closure of the external frontier to an uncontrolled penetration of Asia-Pacific populations.

To justify the entry of dark-skinned and blood-thirsty Pacific islanders, quasi black Kanakas needed to become 'acceptable' in a scheme that neatly separated them from both African enslaved 'negroes' and Australian Aborigines, considered by British, US and Australian commentators to be positioned at the bottom stages of the 'negro' section of the Great Chain of Being (see Anderson 2007 77, 133-135). This was possible through the assignment of a lighter complexion to these people that indicated their assumed biological and cultural superiority. In the case of Aborigines, the racial differentiation in theoretical and practical terms between blackness-as-indigeneity (dispensability) and blackness as functional to the logic of exploitation (indispensability) was crucial to the racial imaginary, especially in Queensland's plantations, where Pacific Islanders and Aborigines ('blackfellas') often worked side by side. In sociological terms Pacific islanders and blackfellas occupied opposing categories (Veracini) and this needed to be made apparent. As Tracey Banivanua-Mar maintains, the debate on the racial status of Kanakas and Blackfellas

was more than simply a semantic exercise. [...] Here was a settler society intent on appropriating land from indigenous landowners, who were equally as intent on not being displaced and dispossessed [...]. Because [Islanders] were black however, their presence did not sit easily with a settler population for whom an ongoing concern was internal defence and the racial sanctity of the borders in the inside districts. If nothing else, [Islanders'] presence gave emphasis to the uncomfortable paradox of white settlement in the tropics, where success was seen to be dependent on the absence (to vacate the land), as well as the presence (to work the land), of blackness, which needed in turn to be both protected and restricted and, above all, contained. (Banivanua-Mar 2007 71)

By comparison to African and Afro-American blacks, the Queensland plantation Kanakas' alleged docility and mildness made them closer to the 'freed negro' of the US abolitionist narratives, than the enslaved blacks. Blacks' experience of enslavement was

no longer replicated and their employment as indentured labour allowed white workers to avoid being exposed to the hardship of the labour in plantations. Their docility could be 'used' to civilize them, to teach them how to become humans within the plantation-system and once back in the Islands. So, although they were seen, alongside the African blacks, to represent an "exploitability to death" (on this see Graves 100 and ff., Banivanua-Mar 2007 131 and ff., Banivanua-Mar 2005 7-11, Saunders 1975 181) they were also conceived, in a post-abolition age, as capable of a circumscribed progress through temporary and officially volunteer plantation-labour. Violence against them was considered legitimate because of its potentiality in shifting Islanders to a condition of humanity that was conceived as impossible for Aborigines as well as black people in the US South. The only condition for this achievement was their return back to the Islands. They appeared instead unmanageable, violent and dangerous when they were staying. When roaming freely out of the plantations after the end of their contract, they were cause of fear and anxiety for the white community. This led to their relabelling as aggressive and over-sexualised and as having a cannibalistic physicality. They went back to their conventional stereotype of 'bloodthirsty savages' the way freed negroes of the US South reverted to animality in the anti-abolitionist narratives.

Dark-skinned Kanakas occupied a position as not quite black because on the one hand they could not be physically eliminated – they did not belong to a "dying out race" like Aboriginal Australians (Anderson 2007 142-145, Wolfe 2006) – while on the other hand they could not be openly and lawfully enslaved like African blacks. Instead, like Indian and Chinese coolies, they could be used as labour in a regime of temporary semi-slavery. The particular meaning attached to this 'not-quite' blackness is confirmed by the noticeable differences existing in North American and Australian attributions of colour to Pacific Islanders in the post-slavery age. Euro-Americans, and especially former Southern slave ship owners, in search of new holds after the abolition of slavery, "viewed the region's indigenes as being quite similar to those who had been enslaved in the United States, the latter providing a template for how to proceed in bonding labour" (Horne 12). Anglo-Australians, by contrast, seemed to prefer 18<sup>th</sup> century French and British racial theories, from which they drew their definition of Kanakas' "lighter" (that is dark brown) skin colour (Douglas 2006 4). This racial differentiation offered Australians the opportunity to claim, as Marilyn Lake has extensively explored, their distance from the US experience of slavery as well as their respect for the British Empire's regulations on indentured labour (see Brown 187-188). But, most importantly, it enabled them to envisage a solution that prevented a multiracial democracy that would have seen Melanesians – like freed slaves in the US – staying, freely roaming, and even claiming to be Australian (see Lake 2003 254, Lake 2008 281).

### **Logic of exploitation meets white supremacism**

The premise of my analysis so far has been the tension between two forms of racialisation, the altero-referential and the auto-referential, that are given in every racist phenomenon (Guillaumin). Altero-referential refers to a process of racialisation that is founded on the other's difference. This produces generally the apparent evanescence of the self, made neutral, invisible against the un-concealable other. Auto-referential to a

process that identifies the self as racialised (the only human race's representative in a given context). In the current context this tension can be rearticulated in the following way: the geographical inscription of racial taxonomies is always functional to the expansion and consolidation of a market economy that is undoubtedly global but that coagulates in these areas as a set of national interests related to the settler nation-State. This coagulation is particularly eventful when a contextual situation – a symbolic or actual tension on the borders of the encamped space of the settler nation – triggers or reinforces an imaginary of invasion. This imaginary, in turn, compels a consolidation (or a re-definition) of the encamped society's racial identity (auto-referential racialisation) that needs to drop the logic of exploitation (of altero-racialised subjects) in favour of an idea of white autarchy that reconfigures the whole system of race relations.

This particular understanding of the national geo-body as an isolated and racially self-consistent geo-political unit derives from a symbolic excision, as Suvendrini Perera has brilliantly outlined, that separates it from its geo-political context (Perera 2009 21). This symbolic “excision”, together with its claim of racial supremacism, prevails on the logic of exploitation in the relationship with the ‘racialised’ neighbours. This is mainly because of a set of geopolitical and economical necessities that are related, as I have argued elsewhere, to the essence itself of the settler geo-body.

Incomprehensible languages and alien corporealities spoiled the symmetry of the racial landscape, while traces of an Asiatic other hovered at the edges of the northwestern coastline to trouble the certitudes of the white island and seep dread into its dreams. (Perera 2009 30)

Consistent with this understanding – that conceives of Australia as a white civilised spot surrounded by racialised bio-diversities that threaten its purity with chaos, germs and barbarity (see Anderson 2006 91-94) – neither of the two logics of elimination or exploitation is meant to create a corollary of colonies for exploitation, or settlements. The goal is not that of extending the settler colony ‘eliminating’ prior indigenous inhabitants, nor that of creating colonies for ‘exploitation’. Rather this understanding aims at producing a set of spheres of control.<sup>8</sup> Surrounding seas, territories and populations are seen as spaces over which the settler nation needs to establish a strong cultural, economical and political hegemony aimed simultaneously at containing the external threat and fortifying the newborn nation. In Australia, this geography entails a logic of exploitation that is always in tension with the autarchic solution. It legitimises the utilization, within the national borders, of a racialised, cheap and segregated labour force from Asia, the Pacific, and the Middle East, as long as this system is able to contain Australian anxieties for its external hegemony and internal (white) supremacy. In that sense, in contrast to what Marilyn Lake states (Lake 2003 353), the fear that the two ‘white’ shores of the Pacific shared was not related to the “post-colonial world to come” but, rather, to the very possibility that ‘the settlement’ could indeed ‘exist’ at all and become that ‘safe and prosperous’ new Pacific ‘*Utopia* for white men’ it was meant to be (Giuliani 2010c 148).

In this schema, the reading of the biological as well as geographical ‘allegedly natural’

unevenness of the 'outside' (the Asia-Pacific areas) corresponds, as Perera has outlined (2009), to a sort of naturalisation or 'essentialisation' of the political and cultural diversity inhabiting the surrounding territories. This diversity becomes absolute incompatibility, and as such it establishes the absolute exceptionality of the settler body politic. The 'natural' differentiation expressed through colour variation explains why in the areas outside the body politic's borders settler colonialism is not possible, has been defeated, or cannot be further extended. In all those areas, where no empty space can be created for white settlement, or where no white settlement is meant to be, brown and yellow signify what is inherently indispensable for Australian racialised self-representation. The darker pigmentation-as-backwardness is taken as the mark of the (racial and historical) incommensurability between settler society and its racialised neighbourhood and, thus, as evidence of the indubitable absolute superiority of the settler society.

So, similarly to the position held by black slaves in the US, this coloured labour force guarantees the homologous sovereign subject a higher standard of life. But it also destabilises white supremacy as it endlessly challenges the bio-community's self-reflexivity and 'co-extensiveness' with land. It is precisely the latter contingency that became an absolute priority and pushed Australia as well as the US into what could be defined as a 'throw-away labour' system after the abolition of slavery. Temporary employment of bound labour could preserve the national space from the menace without depriving it of exploitable coloured hands. In that sense, similarities can be seen between, on the one hand, Pacific, Chinese and Indian indentured labour in both the US and Australia, and, on the other, both legal and undocumented migration of unskilled labour from Asia or Central America. This indentured labour was kept temporarily available and under strict social control through a very restrictive regime of migration policies and alien labour employment rules.<sup>9</sup> The differences between the three examples of alien temporary labour lie:

1. in the methods of recruitment – mostly (but not only) by deception or kidnapping (in the case of Melanesian women/men/children) and sometimes voluntary migration (in the case of 'temporary migration');
2. in the contract – written for indentured and unwritten for illegal migrant labour, although we know that the contract could be oral as in the case of blackbirding;
3. and in the colour lines that define contextually an extra-degree of exploitability for each subject, depending on the racial-taxonomy at play.

What these different forms of labour share is the structural tension between capital and whiteness that deeply informs each of them and prompts conditions and dynamics of labour, as well as conditions and dynamics of exogenous labour's inclusion/exclusion in the settler society.

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Since its beginning and during its boom (1864-1880) *Blackbirding* was bitterly contested by a large part of Queensland society. The importation of coolie labour in the British Empire, after Natal, had been eventually formalised in the Asia-Pacific through the *Coolie Act* in 1862. Still, Robert Towns, the founder of Townsville/Townsville



plantation, like the other planters who had inaugurated the Pacific Islands indentured labourers' trade, was fiercely criticised for establishing a system that was close to slavery, and that needed to be more rigidly disciplined to avoid Kanakas running away and settling down illegally in the country. The principal objection to Towns' and other Queensland plantation-owners' schemes was, as many scholars have highlighted (first of all Kay Saunders 1975 192-207), driven by concerns over a shortage of work for white Queenslanders and newly arrived Europeans. They, indeed, could not compete with the Kanakas' 12 hour shifts and a salary often commuted almost entirely to food, water and tobacco supplies (no cash was received by indentures, just a wage at the end of the 'contract').

In this discursive economy, what appeared as anti-slavery sentiments against Kanakas often corresponded to the sapient use of the abolitionist discourse to enhance an idea of Queensland and Australia as the white outpost in the Pacific. This is confirmed by the speech of one of the most strenuous anti-Kanaka (and self-proclaimed anti-slavery) activists, William Brookes, who said that "more important than the sugar industry [...] was the future of Queensland as a British [white] colony" (quoted in Docker 104).

Justifications of the Queensland planters' recourse to cheap black Pacific indentures in recent studies (Docker) put emphasis on the absence in Queensland of a class of small cane-growers, in contrast to New South Wales, where cane-growers were able to do the most of the work themselves. The selling of Queensland's land by the local Government for a very cheap price and in big plots to people who might not otherwise have attempted to establish a cotton plantation fostered the use of Kanakas as cheap labour force. Against this argument, the historian Andrew Graves argues (19) that not only did plantations increase in number and size in this phase, but also that the entry of large-scale capital (supported by substantial British financial institutions) led to a concentration of plantation ownership. This makes it clear that the need for a racialised labour-coercive system depended on the will of maximizing of profits, as the history of blackbirding in the horrible drought years 1874-1875 tells us.

But my argument here would be, also, that the tension between the white-autarchic solution and the logic of exploitation underlying the indentured labour system also reveals the possibility of the system's ultimate accomplishment in its own extinction. Since the beginning, in the temporariness of the Kanaka indentured labour needed by the white supremacist discourse and system of race relations was its own abolition. Abolitionists, in that sense, were just setting out what would be officially formalised later with the approval of the *Pacific Islands Labourers Act* (1901) by the newborn Federation. But this was not predictable in the early 1880s, when more labour was needed, as confirmed at a meeting in 1882 between the Mackay Farmers representatives (the richest sugar-growing district in Queensland). By that time, the three options envisaged were "to abandon Kanakas and try again to get coolies from India (Ceylon) under an officially sponsored Government immigration scheme; to import Chinese from Hong Kong on a contract basis despite the additional expense; or to reform the existing recruiting system". The response was "more Kanakas" (Docker 163).

After the massive immigration during the Gold Rush of those who were seen as

“inextirpable” Chinese, and after the “experience in Mauritius, where indentured Indian labour had been originally introduced in 1834 and appeared then so tenaciously dug in as to be beyond all hope of removal” (Docker 165), Kanakas remained the more suitable, throwaway labour force. Pacific blackbirding was still perfectly consistent with the understanding of the time of a good balance between non-white production and white reproduction. But to keep the Kanakas it was necessary to prompt a full control system of them that could limit their self-determination.

The new *Pacific Islands Labourers Bill* (1880), which was supposed to stop the diffusion of deadly diseases amongst the Kanakas (for example, epidemic dysentery) and ameliorate their employment conditions, ended up focusing instead on impeding Kanakas, especially those who were “ticket holders” – that is, the “time-expired”, “overtime”, “walking about” or simply “free” labourers who had finished their contract – from drifting around the countryside or congregating in the large towns. This was needed by farmers and planters in order to calm down the ardour of the Anti-Coolie League and Samuel W. Griffith (1845-1920), the new Premier of Queensland. Against the planters’ and labour traders’ argument that no white man could be suitable labour for tropical agriculture, Premier Griffith (1883-1888) had passed his *Pacific Island Labourers’ Amendment Act* (1885) that aimed to stop the introduction of Pacific Islanders and, implicitly, to give way to a large-scale importation of Northern European labour (see Docker 211).

But whiteness had not won the struggle yet. Griffith had to take a step back and acknowledge the indispensability of Kanakas for Queensland and its sugar. The high salaries requested by the white workers’ organisations and the steep drop in sugar prices called for readmitting Kanaka labour. Clearly, it needs to be said that a victory by either the logic of exploitation or the autarchic solution could not be decisive. In the case of the importation of non-white labour in Australia, the negotiation between the two positions was made visible when the material indispensability of Kanaka labour was substituted, in the regime of autarchy inaugurated by the *White Australia Policy*, with ‘almost’ white labour that was selected and made white through a new set of colour-taxonomies (see Giuliani 2010b 137-138).

At that time, the centralised milling system that would dominate later was in its infancy. Through it the independent small producers that mostly peopled Queensland’s fields and produced sugar and tobacco with inadequate techniques of cane cultivation, would be gathered together in an extensive system of corporate land properties where more expensive machinery and progressive techniques of production could be extensively introduced. Besides, costs of recruitment increased as much as six-fold (1863-1889) for a series of reasons, not least of which was the scarcity of the Pacific labour force and their higher wages (see Graves 29-33). But instead of supplying plantations with a white (unionised) labour force, planters still preferred to turn to freed Kanakas, reducing, at the same time, the relative capital of labour-expenditure (food, medical care, clothing, accommodation).

In the Queensland sugar industry and at large, Kanakas could not be supplanted by

Blackfellas, whose labour was not considered productive (see Graves 35-36; Banivanua-Mar 2007 76, 84, Wolfe 1999 ch. 6). Chinese, who had been displaced from Australian gold fields and were reduced in number especially after the imposition of the first set of discriminatory legislations (1870s-1880s), were still too expensive (with almost the same wage as whites). Increasingly, skilled Europeans were employed in the sugar industry – especially after the 1884 legislation that restricted Pacific labour to unskilled tasks. In general, although at that time labour from India, Ceylon, Canton, Singapore, Java, Malaya, Germany, Scandinavia, Japan, and later Italy, Malta and Portugal, was introduced in Queensland, this labour was still unable to replace the Kanakas (see Graves 37-39 and Perera 2008 271-290).

In 1896 the Parliament of New South Wales passed a bill designed to extend the provisions of the anti-Chinese Act of 1888 to “all persons belonging to any coloured race inhabiting the Continent of Asia, or the Continent of Africa, or any Island in the Pacific or Indian Oceans”. Yet no sudden influx of coloured peoples had occurred or seemed imminent. In Queensland the number of Kanakas remained steady, but half of them were time-expired. As Banivanua-Mar reminds us, “the legislative changes provided with the new Act were underpinned very obviously by fears in settler society that found public expression in themes of miscegenation, invasion, takeover, plague, and being socially and biologically swamped” (Banivanua-Mar 2007 87). The common complaint was (as in the 1860s), that time-expired and “walkabout” Kanakas were coming into towns where they “were allowed to compete with white population” (Saunders 1984 234). Black men were taking white jobs, and what was worse, they were taking white women’s jobs and working as “washerwomen, housemaids, laundresses, and nursemaids”. In this scenario, “the American South was frequently evoked as evidence for the sinister potential of not controlling this free-roaming and masculine blackness” and also for the bastardization and dilution the Australian white settlement was doomed to suffer (Banivanua-Mar 2007 88, 89; see also Saunders 1975 152-156).

At that stage, the local Labour party, together with the new Queensland Premier, Robert Philp (1899-1903), started working hand in hand to make sure that retention of the Kanakas would no longer be tolerated. Queensland became the biggest promoter of the Commonwealth Act on the “Regulation, Restriction and Prohibition of the Introduction of Labourers from the Pacific Islands”. This Act provided that “no Pacific Islander shall enter Australia after the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1904” and “No agreement shall be made or remain in force after 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006”. Petitioning planters produced astonishing arguments to sustain their position, such as long-resident Kanakas belonging more to Queensland than the Islands. But the Australian Federal Government decided that solely white labour could be employed. The deportation had already been prepared with the Federal *Pacific Island Labourers Act* approved in 1901. Recruiting ceased in 1904, deportation would start in 1906 and last until 1908, and black labour was definitively supplanted by white hands.

## Conclusions

The territorialisation of the settler community, together with both the creation of the political borders of its homeland and the re-spatialisation (through excision of surrounding territories) of the area where the homeland comes into being, are political procedures entailed in nation-building. Settler societies like Australia produce a sort of naturalisation in the fixation of a set of colour-lines that distinguishes from the moment of first arrival, the white (British, Australians) from black indigenes, while Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Chinese, South-East Asian, Indonesian, and Pacific become labelled as quasi-black, non-white, brown or yellow inferiors. Thus, this colour-line, in dismissing indigeneity and the extraneousness of what is outside, establishes the racial self-reflexivity of settler bio-community, its homologous relationship with the settled homeland where the new nation-State is founded, and reinforces the binomial of whiteness/superiority and sole humanness. In particular, it strengthens the binomial of non white-as-exploitable/eliminable. In first case, that of non-white as exploitable (of etero-referential racialisation and the logic of exploitation), it legitimises an idea of the exogenous non-white incomers as a permanent supply of a 'diverse' (cheaper, segregated but officially free) labour-force, as testified by the particular case of Pacific quasi-black indentured labourers. Here, the label 'quasi-black' signified a particularly high exploitability in an extraordinarily violent environment that distinguished Pacific islanders from any other exogenous racialised components. But when so-called inferior stocks enter the settler body, and stay, this homology is seen to disappear, a disappearance that questions the existence of the settler body politic itself. In the case of Pacific indentured labourers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was this fear, together with the autarchic solution based on the auto-referential racialisation and sustained by a balance of interests, that fixed the terms and conditions for "migrant" free and indentured labour, which temporality, bound to the limitations established by London after the abolition of slavery, depended on the will of "wiping out all evidence" of the black-kanakas' presence on the settled land.

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## Notes

1. Recruiters of the *Uncle Tom* (1864), the *Don Juan* (1863) or the *Black Dog* (1865) were shooting at canoes and dragging the occupants into the slave-boats or they disguised themselves as missionaries in order to get ashore.
2. On the pattern of Kanakas' recruitment to Queensland (1863-1904) see also Saunders 1982 20-39.
3. The term Kanaka is conceived nowadays as a very offensive definition as it entails the typical reductionism of "altero-racialisation" and its Orientalism [or, better, *Melanesianism*, as Banivanua-Mar phrases it 2007 3]: it grouped Melanesians, Polynesians and Kanakas (Hawaiians, Fijians) or distinguished them on an alleged colour-base.
4. On the chromatic distinction between Malaysians, Melanesians, Australians, Tasmanians and Papuans and the reticence in using the word "negro", replaced with

“negrito” for darker Melanesians see Ballard 157-201. This is confirmed by Douglas 2003 6, 2006 4).

5. For reasons of space I will not enter here the lively debate on the nature of indentured labour – whether it corresponded to a waged or an enslaved labour system. This crucial issue has been explored more recently by the supporters of the first position, for instance Saunders 1975, 1982, 1984, Finnane and Moore 144-148, and Graves 224-225, and by the supporters of the other, see Banivanua-Mar 2007 141 and ff.

6. The opposition between internal white and external coloured does not erase the complicated landscape of internal racial differences along class, gender, urban/rural lines (see Anderson 2009 69) but allows a self-perception of the *ideal* settler as belonging to an increasingly homogenous racial identity. In that sense *white autarchy* means “one people in one polity in one territory”, in a regime of racial “self-sufficiency”, a condition that somehow accomplishes on a race level its being economically, culturally and politically “self-sustaining” (see also Pearson 5, 10).

7. With few exceptions, like the pearl-fishing, *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber), sandalwood and tortoise-shell collection, or copra planting that, for instance in Solomon Islands were practised locally in small European settlements. See Corris 99.

8. The very isolated annexation of New Guinea (1883) by Queensland could be seen in the light of this “siege mentality” (Banivanua-Mar 2007 9; Perera 2009 105) and as a sort of instrument to better control the neighbours and prevent any possible unpermitted non-white penetration.

9. This is also the approach maintained in general by scholars like Saunders, Evans and Cronin, and those of the collective led by Christopher, Pybus, and Rediker (see Brown).

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