

Making Black White«. Sugar Consumption and Racial Unity in Australia

Stefanie Affeldt

The outgoing 19th century saw a well-nigh paroxysm of ›whiteness‹ in Australia. The resulting establishment of a ›white‹ nation codified in the ›white Australia policy‹ followed more than a hundred years of legitimization of British land taking. A process that had been consolidated by ideological structures imported from the British mother country and was fortified by the alleged ›yellow peril‹ made urgent by its location. Australia's geographical isolation, yet cultural proximity to the mother country assigned it a special position as the lone outpost of western culture.

The ›white Australia policy‹, however, was merely the political-ideological manifestation of a long-term development which included the everyday (re)production of ›race‹ and ›whiteness‹ as a social relation that found entrance into all societal levels and spheres of life. The exclusionist nation building could only be successfully achieved because the ideology it was based on was firmly embedded into a widespread ›white Australia‹ culture that comprised literature, music, theatre, museums and the sciences which all contributed to the dissemination of racist stereotypes and the stabilization of ›white‹ identity.

Against this background, the consumption of sugar became, quite literally, a consumption of ›whiteness‹: the colour of its crystals melted with the skin colour ascribed to its producers to the trope of doubly ›white‹ sugar. Its consumption was at the same time personal affirmation of the consumers' membership in the ›white race‹ and a moral duty to the ›white‹ nation. Its purchase was considered a contribution to the ›racial‹ homogenization and defence of the country, and was meant to overall serve the preservation of ›white supremacy‹ in a time of crisis.

Bio

Stefanie Affeldt has studied Social Economics at the University of Hamburg and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the Macquarie University, Sydney. She did her post-graduate studies in Cultural and Social History at the University of Essex and obtained her doctorate in Historical Sociology from the University of Hamburg. At the moment she works as a Visiting Lecturer, this semester at the Leuphana University in Lüneburg with a course called *The ›Woman‹ and the ›Ape‹. The Intersectionality of Gender and Race in the Discourse of Simianization*.

Her most recent publication, *Consuming Whiteness. Australian Racism and the ›White Sugar Campaign*, examines the entanglement of the political history of Australian nation building with the economic, cultural, and social processes of the time and investigates into the history of migration, mechanism of inclusion/exclusion of potential new settlers as well as questions of socio-political organisation, with a particular interest in the role of mass media and popular culture in the dissemination and everyday (re)production of ideology.

Besides the complexities of ›commodity racism‹ and the investigation of racism as a social relation, her current research project considers the impact of (colonial) scientific racism on Indigenous Australians, which continues to have an effect on their social situation until today, and centres on the issue of Indigenous Australians' human remains held in the United Kingdom and Germany.

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