

“NO WHITE MAN ON THE STATION BUT MYSELF”: WHITENESS AS A CATEGORY OF ANALYSIS FOR THE REVEREND FRANCIS TUCKFIELD

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Abstract

In 1840, the Reverend Francis Tuckfield (1808-1865) wrote to his supervisors in London lamenting that because of pastoralism, “a serious loss has been sustained by the natives ... [their] territory is not only invaded; but their game is driven back, their ... valuable roots eaten by the White man’s sheep and their deprivations, abuses and miseries are daily increasing.” Earlier in the same letter, however, he had celebrated that “454,260 head of sheep ... are already grazing” in Port Phillip. Three years later, Tuckfield became a pastoralist himself. Recent historiography on missionary endeavour in Australia has used the writings of Tuckfield to assess “failure”, “life”, and “education” on mission stations. In this article I evaluate whiteness as a category of analysis for Tuckfield, in particular as a window into the apparent contradiction between his humanitarian beliefs and his views on the necessity, inevitability and benefit of pastoralism. To the evangelical Tuckfield, whiteness entailed a settled, cultivation-based and thus “civilised” existence. Moreover, his notions of whiteness were formed in contrast to the “wandering habits” of “savage barbarity” which defined the “blackness” of those to whom his missionary endeavour was targeted.

This article has arisen as a response to the call from the 2006 Historicising Whiteness conference (Carey et. al.

2007: vii) that whiteness studies needs to be included among other approaches to understanding “race”. At that conference, the convenors Jane Carey, Leigh Boucher and Katherine Ellinghaus (2007: xv) proposed that “the construction of a racial other requires a concept of a racial self”. The presence of whiteness in the initial period of European settlement in the Port Phillip district of New South Wales (1835-1845) is explored in this article, with specific reference to the evangelical missionary Francis Tuckfield, his concepts of whiteness, and his sense of racial self. For much of the nineteenth century, European concepts of “race” were relatively undefined and fluid; European concepts of “the other”, however, were the forerunner of more concrete notions of “race”.

Calling for a distinction between “analytically invoked” and “empirically specified” whiteness, Leigh Boucher (2007: 21 & 14) has argued for “some historical specificity” in the study of racial difference in the initial four decades of European settlement in Port Phillip (later Victoria). Furthermore, Boucher (2005; quoted in McLisky 2007: 410) has concluded that the defining of the settler-colonial self permeated depictions of race in nineteenth-century European observations of life in Victoria. In her 2006 Historicising Whiteness conference paper, “All of one blood?”, Claire McLisky applied Boucher’s arguments to her discussion of the missionary Daniel Matthews, who worked on the Maloga Mission during the period 1874-1888. McLisky (2007: 410)

argues that Matthews' principal category of self-identification was Christian virtue rather than race. Matthews contrasted this category of Christian virtue with the categories of "the suffering and sunken blacks" and "wicked white men". This conforms to Boucher's argument that in the early nineteenth century whiteness was inferred rather than explicit; a consciousness of racial difference did exist during this period, however, it was an underlying one.

Francis Tuckfield arrived in the Port Phillip district of New South Wales as a missionary to the Aboriginal peoples of the area in 1838. He ministered to the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip until 1850, when the Bunting Dale mission station was closed. Tuckfield subsequently ministered to several churches in Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania before being appointed to the Wesleyan Methodist church in Portland, Victoria in 1864. On 21 October 1865, Tuckfield died aged fifty-seven, having contracted pneumonia and bronchitis while officiating at the funeral of a young child at the Portland cemetery a few days earlier. Through an examination of Tuckfield's observations during the first three years of the Bunting Dale mission (1839-1841) – as recorded in his personal journals, his official letters to his Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS) supervisors in London, and his private letters to his parents in Cornwall – whiteness in nineteenth-century south-eastern Australia is explored in this article. At the time the Bunting Dale mission was established, the Port Phillip district had only very recently been settled by Europeans; the Batman Treaties, which signalled the beginning of European settlement in the district, had been signed only four years previous.ⁱ An examination of whiteness as a category of analysis for Tuckfield thus provides us with an interesting

insight into what it meant to be white in the understanding of an evangelical missionary in the Port Phillip district in a period which historian Richard Broome (2005: 54) has labelled "one of the fastest land occupations in the history of empires".

Francis Lee Tuckfield was born in Germoe, Cornwall, in the southwest of England in 1808 and spent his early working life as a miner and seasonal fisherman.ⁱⁱ At the age of seventeen Tuckfield converted to Wesleyan Methodist Christianity and following a period of active local preaching, he was accepted as a candidate for the ministry. In November 1837, having attended the Theological Institute at Hoxton, London for two years, Tuckfield departed England bound for Australia to commence his role as missionary to the Aboriginal peoples of the Port Phillip district. After spending over three months at Hobart Town planning the mission with the Reverend Joseph Orton, the Chairman of the Van Diemen's Land district of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Australia, Tuckfield arrived in Port Phillip in July 1838. By late-1838 Tuckfield had selected an area for the mission station on the Barwon River, approximately fifty-five kilometres southwest of Geelong. The station was named "Bunting Dale" in honour of the zealous Wesleyan Methodist Jabez Bunting, the "chief architect" of the WMS (Piggin 1980: 19) and Tuckfield's London supervisor. The object of the mission – which began proper in mid-August 1839 – was "to induce the natives to abandon their erratic habits and settle near the Mission Establishment in order that we may teach them the arts of civilized life, and that by the blessing of Almighty God they may become ... acquainted with the doctrines and duties and privileges of our most holy religion" (Cannon 1982: 148). In other words, Tuckfield sought to "civilise" and

Christianise the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip.

Tuckfield's concern for the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip was evident before his arrival in the district. Less than a week after sailing out of sight of his native Cornwall, Tuckfield (23 November 1837: 18) reported in his journal that he "felt much liberty last night in praying for the natives of New South Wales". He expressed both interest in those he intended to convert, and the personal gain he believed he experienced through his desire to "save" the heathen. Tuckfield's choice of language here is also significant. Prior to arriving in the colony, and thus prior to having met any Aborigines, Tuckfield referred to those among whom he was soon to live as "natives".

In the early period following the establishment of the mission Tuckfield continued to refer to the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip as "natives", both in his official letters to his WMS supervisors in London and in his letters to his parents. In his letters to the WMS Tuckfield also labelled the Aboriginal peoples of the district "the comparatively unknown tribes of this extensive territory", "savages", "untutored barbarians", "half starved barbarians", "rude barbarians", "the aboriginal race", "aborigines", "wild hordes", "heathen", and occasionally "blacks". In his private journals and in his letters to his contemporaries located within Australia, however, the term Tuckfield most frequently used when describing the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip during this period, was "blacks".ⁱⁱⁱ

In his letters to the WMS during the early period of the mission Tuckfield most often referred to Europeans who had emigrated to Port Phillip as "Whites", while he occasionally referred to them as "civilised man" and "Europeans".

Tuckfield, furthermore, labelled the European "convict shepherds & stockmen" as "the outcasts of England" in his official letters. In his journal he identified Europeans living in the district most often as "Whites", although occasionally he labelled them "Europeans". This use of the coloured terms "blacks" (always lowercase) and "Whites" (always capitalised) perhaps indicates Tuckfield's adoption of the language of other Europeans in the colony. Tuckfield's use of the language of colour, however, also encompassed his notion of "the other", which was derived from his expanding knowledge of the local Aboriginal peoples' belief system and ways of life, and how these were in stark contrast to his own convictions.^{iv}

Tuckfield's usage of the term "White" is perhaps unusual in the context of Port Phillip in the first half of the nineteenth century. Leigh Boucher (2007: 19) has noted that in the "various writings and speeches" of his subject Thomas McCombie, "there is an almost complete absence of the designation 'white'" and that "[m]oving between 'Britisher', 'Englishman', 'settler', 'colonist', 'man', and 'mankind', the racial specificity of the coloniser population [of nineteenth century Victoria] was surprisingly vague". Thomas McCombie, a Scotsman from Aberdeenshire, arrived in Port Phillip in April 1841. During his time in Port Phillip, McCombie worked as a journalist and later as a politician after initially having been a squatter (Farrow 1974). In the writings of McCombie and his contemporaries, Boucher (2007: 17) argues, "the category of whiteness itself had little purchase". While Francis Tuckfield too used a variety of labels for the European population of the district, he differed from McCombie and Boucher's other case studies in that he often used the term "Whites" when

discussing the coloniser population. Claire McLisky's study of the missionary Daniel Matthews shows that, although whiteness had not yet emerged as a category of analysis in the late nineteenth century, Matthews regularly used the term "white" to describe men of European descent whom he believed were responsible for the degeneration of Aboriginal peoples. Matthews never labelled himself or his family as "white"; he used the term in the context of expressing disapproval of others (McLisky 2007: 410). Francis Tuckfield, on the other hand, perceived himself and other Europeans living in the district as "Whites".

Tuckfield's sense of identity as a "White man" was formed by his perceptions of the relationship between blackness, savagery and danger. One month after founding Bunting Dale, Tuckfield left the station to sit his ordination examinations and attend the Wesleyan Methodist District Meeting in Hobart Town. He lamented in his journal: "I left my dear family to day [sic] on the Mission Station surrounded by the natives and only two Whites and a female for the district Meeting. This seems, to be one of the trials of a Missionary to be obliged to leave his family in an unprotected state" (Tuckfield 18 September 1839: 81). Four months later Tuckfield recorded in his journal his concern at there being "no White man on the Station but myself" (10 January 1840: 107). Three days following that he reported that he had "spent the day in teaching the blacks" and concluded that "Mrs. T. & myself feel it rather lonesome to be left in this distant part of the World among Savages who scarcely know anything of the value of human life" (13 January 1840: 109). Later that week, after announcing that "[t]he dray has just arrived and another man with [the overseer] Williamson", he wrote: "[w]e are three Whites now which is a very great relief to our minds to have

company when there are so many blacks" (15 January 1840: 111). The blackness of the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip was, for Tuckfield, associated with savagery, barbarism and a potential threat to the safety of his family; the presence of whites, on the other hand, encompassed security.

It is important to note that Tuckfield described himself not only by the coloured term "White", but also in the gendered term "White man". Furthermore, when describing his relief at the arrival of two additional white men on the station, Tuckfield indicates that protection and safety are part of his understanding of whiteness and masculinity. Tuckfield's concern as a "White man" included a fear of leaving his family among the Aboriginal peoples who frequented the mission station; he feared those whom he was in the colony to Christianise. This is a reflection of what he understood to be his required role as a husband and a father – his duty to protect his family. It also signals his belief that women and children were vulnerable and thus needed protecting.^v

Tuckfield, furthermore, saw paternalism as common between the Aboriginal peoples of Australia and Europeans; he perceived his notion of his own role as a husband and father as a duty to protect his family to be present in Aboriginal gender relations. Tuckfield noted that often when Aboriginal men approached what they perceived might be a dangerous situation they left their women and children behind, away from the perceived danger in an effort to protect their families (e.g., Tuckfield 14 December 1839: 94; 12 December 1840: 178-79). The Christianisation and "civilisation" Tuckfield sought to convert the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip to, however, was based on a particular form of domestic and familial

arrangements. Tuckfield, therefore, also perceived Aboriginal women to be subjugated in a way which European women were not. When an Aboriginal man named Karn Karn built a European-style house on the mission station, several other Aboriginal men also expressed interest in building on the station. They told Tuckfield, however, that "as they *have three wives each* they should require a larger house than Karn Karn". Tuckfield "told them, they might have as large houses as they were disposed to build; but if they intended to imitate the White man in one thing they should in another viz in the disposal of two of their wives out of the *three*" (11 May 1841: 226; original italics). The Aboriginal men in turn informed the missionary that as it was appropriate for Europeans to strive to own a number of horses and bullocks, so too was it proper for Aboriginal men to have a number of wives, because, the men said, "we have no other animals to do our work". "Good Lord", Tuckfield later wrote, "when will this day of oppression pass away" (cited in Le Griffon 2006: 169). "Civilisation" and Christianity – here amounting to monogamy and the appropriate use of domestic animals – would, Tuckfield believed, improve Aboriginal gender relations by making them resemble European ideals.

In his pioneering work on whiteness studies, *The Wages of Whiteness*, David Roediger (1999) explored the definition of "civilisation" in opposition to "savagery" during the European colonisation of North America. Roediger (1999: 22), who uses whiteness as a category within labour history, asserts that "white" attitudes toward land use were influenced by perceptions of Amerindians. This is also true of the European colonisation of Port Phillip – and across Australia more generally – where European perceptions of whiteness and its links with the privilege

"civilisation" were defined in opposition to the perceived "savagery" of the Aboriginal peoples of the district. Roediger (1999: 21) has also argued that in the United States, "[s]ettler ideology held that ... 'lazy Indians' were failing to 'husband' or 'subdue' the resources God had provided them and thus should forfeit those resources. Work and Whiteness", Roediger concludes, "joined in the argument for dispossession". Again this holds true for the European invasion of the Port Phillip district and wider Australia, where it was argued that because the Aboriginal peoples of the area failed to use the land which they occupied, they had no ownership of nor right to the land. Tuckfield's concepts of whiteness were constructed in opposition to his understandings of the blackness of the Aboriginal peoples to whom he was in the colony to preach the gospel. "[B]lacks", he believed, were to be feared, while the presence of "Whites" provided him with a sense of security. Moreover, the "blacks" use of the land which they occupied was perceived by Tuckfield to be "uncivilised".

Tuckfield was not only afraid of the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip, he was also afraid of their becoming extinct; he believe the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip to be dying out. In 1840 Tuckfield reported to his London supervisors that it was "not at all infrequent" for tribes who regularly came and went from Bunting Dale to return to the station each time "fewer in number than they were when they left", and lamented that the site of Bunting Dale was once the "haunt of a small tribe but now with the exception of one family is depopulated" (Tuckfield 31 June [sic] 1840: 140-41, 155). Writing in 1842 to his Adelaide-based fellow missionary the Reverend B.J. Tiechelman, Tuckfield noted that Bunting Dale was "central for four tribes or rather the remnants of" those tribes,

as there were "not more than 260" surviving members (17 March 1842: 321-322).

Tuckfield blamed pastoralism for causing much depopulation among the Aboriginal peoples of the Port Phillip district. While he acknowledged that many Aboriginal deaths were caused by inter-tribal fighting, Tuckfield blamed what he perceived to be an increase in this on the "exterminating progress of the white man" – European encroachment into Aboriginal lands (Le Griffon 2006: 205). Not only did Europeans deny the Aboriginal peoples access to their traditional lands, Tuckfield believed, but sheep – which had been introduced by Europeans – ate food that traditionally sustained the game animals which were vital to Aboriginal sustenance. This concern was seemingly contradicted by his belief in the necessity, inevitability, and benefit of the introduction of pastoralism to Australia. Less than a year after the establishment of the mission station Tuckfield wrote to his WMS supervisors in London lamenting the negative effects of pastoralism. He reported that the "introduction of the numerous flocks", had meant that "a serious loss has been sustained by the natives". "[W]ithout an equivalent being rendered", Tuckfield continued, "there [sic] territory is not only invaded; but their game is driven back, their ... valuable roots eaten by the White man's sheep and their deprivations, abuses and miseries are daily increasing." The "appalling result" of this "contest between the feebleness of untutored barbarism, and the skill and power of civilized man", Tuckfield concluded, would be "the final and utter extinction of the aboriginal race" (Tuckfield 31 June [sic] 1840: 139-140). "[T]he blood of the black man", Tuckfield continued later that year, is "pouring forth and reeking up to heaven while the evils which the European

intrusion has inflicted are daily increasing" (Le Griffon 2006: 145). Tuckfield, therefore, blamed "White man's sheep" and their drovers for causing much depopulation among the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip.

Earlier in the same letter in which he had lamented the devastating effects pastoralism was having on the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip, Tuckfield had celebrated that Port Phillip's "physical aspect is of the most favourable character". This was, he believed, because it "enjoys from its position a genial climate, and an abundance of moisture" which had allowed for:

454,260 head of sheep and 35,000 head of cattle [to be] already grazing on its fertile plains ... If this is the state of things, with in [sic] the comparatively narrow limits of Australia Felix & within the short period of about three years, what a magnificent empire may Australia yet become. Let the capabilities of her geographical position be judiciously improved and the ... influence of the Christian religion be diffused, and Australia may be a happy home for millions of the family of man (31 June [sic] 1840: 129, 137-138).

Furthermore, upon learning that his brother Joseph had emigrated to North America in 1841, Tuckfield wrote "with surprise and regret" to his parents, lamenting that Joseph had not instead moved to Australia, where "those who wish to better their circumstances very materially should emigrate" (25 March 1841: 204).^{vi} Tuckfield's humanitarian beliefs – expressed in his concern that pastoralism was driving the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip to extinction – appear, therefore, to be inherently contradicted by his belief in the

necessity, inevitability, and benefit of the introduction of "White man's sheep", and, by implication, white men.

Tuckfield was concerned for the welfare of the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip; he was, after all, in the colony to "save" them. For Tuckfield – as for the vast majority of nineteenth-century evangelical missionaries – "saving" the heathen involved "civilising" and Christianising them. The nineteenth-century evangelical understanding of "civilising" is perhaps best defined as "Europeanising". As the historian Richard Broome (1994: 32) has noted, "the missionaries sought to make Europeans out of their black brethren". A major aspect in Europeanising the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip was encouraging them to replace their hunter-gatherer lifestyle with the settled existence of Europeans. Pastoralism was intended to encourage this by enabling them to live in a settled manner; allowing food to be provided for them without their having to travel in a nomadic fashion. Although Tuckfield suggested that the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip had managed "to subsist previous to our coming among them" and that it would therefore "be a disgrace to the British character, were our presence to doom them to starvation", he considered "civilising" and Christianising them to be the solution (31 June [sic] 1840: 143). Pastoralism and "the Gospel", Tuckfield believed, were "the means of raising these wild hordes to the rank of civilised man" (31 June [sic] 1840: 146). Tuckfield's notions of what it was to be white, then, included a belief that the privileged benefits of being "civilised" were enabled by pastoralism. Although he thought that pastoralism was driving the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip to extinction, Tuckfield also believed that it was pastoralism which could save them from extinction by enabling them to live in the "civilised" manner of whites.

Upon his arrival in Port Phillip Tuckfield had immediately noticed the differences between the Aboriginal peoples of the district and himself. Tuckfield categorised the Aboriginal peoples' traditional beliefs and lifestyle as savage and marked their differences from himself and other Europeans with the term "blacks", which he determined to be a marker of barbarism and danger. In opposition to this, Tuckfield perceived and categorised himself and other Europeans residing in Australia as "Whites", a term which for Tuckfield encompassed civilisation and superiority.

Although Thomas McCombie did not use the term "white", and the missionary Daniel Matthews used the label only in reference to Europeans whose behaviour he disapproved of, Francis Tuckfield defined himself as a "White man". This examination of whiteness as a category of analysis for Tuckfield does, however, conform to Boucher and McLisky's findings that in southeast Australia during the nineteenth-century, the presence of whiteness as a racial category was inferred rather than explicit. Tuckfield's notions of himself and others as "Whites" were constructed in opposition to his ideas about what constituted blackness; whiteness, for Tuckfield, encompassed the security of his family and the markers of "civilised man", to which he endeavoured to raise the Aboriginal peoples of the Port Phillip district. In investigating the feasibility of establishing a mission on the Goulburn River in 1842, Tuckfield had reported that he believed that pastoralism would reduce the cost of the mission (Le Griffon 2006: 205). Furthermore, in 1843 Tuckfield opened a subscription list to purchase sheep in order to help enable Bunting Dale to be self-supporting. By 1844 he believed that Bunting Dale's quantity of sheep and wheat were large enough, not only to allow the mission to become

self-supporting, but also to provide enough surplus to assist other mission stations. (Greenwood 1956: 15-16). Tuckfield believed that the privilege of whiteness – civilisation – was to be bestowed upon the Aboriginal peoples of Port Phillip by pastoralism.

Identifying, labelling, and exploring Tuckfield's concepts of what whiteness entailed has shown that these concepts were constructed in opposition to his ideas and experiences surrounding blackness. Exploring whiteness as a category of analysis for Tuckfield has strengthened our understanding of what it meant to be white in the perceptions of an evangelical missionary in the Port Phillip district of New South Wales during the period of initial European colonisation. These notions, and the links between them, were predecessors to the more concrete European perceptions of "race" which developed at the close of the nineteenth century.

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Notes

ⁱ Private entrepreneurs such as Edward Henry had been visiting shore across the Bass Strait from Van Diemen's Land from 1834. In May 1835 John Batman arrived in the area. On 6 June 1835 the first of the two Batman Treaties – which involved the lease of land around Melbourne and Geelong – were signed (Boys 1935: 39; Broome 2005: 11. See also Attwood 2009). While the Batman Treaties were later nullified, on 9 September 1836 New South Wales Governor Sir Richard Bourke issued a

Government Order authorising the settlement of Port Phillip under the Crown Lands Regulations of New South Wales (Boys 1935: 51).

ⁱⁱ Biographical information concerning Tuckfield found outside his letters and journals has been sourced from Greenwood 1956, Le Griffon 2006 and McCallum 1967.

ⁱⁱⁱ While Tuckfield's journals were forwarded to his WMS supervisors in London – as were most if not all nineteenth-century evangelical missionary journals – missionary journals often contain a more personal and less filtered account of events than do official letters and reports.

^{iv} Jessie Mitchell has explored the identifying and labelling of different populations in Australia during this period, noting that it is "possible that missionaries considered the division between 'white' and 'black' the most fundamental one on the Australian frontier" (Mitchell 2004: 224).

^v Angela Woollacott (2009: 11.1) has noted that "[i]n the settler colonies of the British Empire, frontier expansion added new tests and definitions of manliness". In arguing that Englishness has been constructed as a national identity through the recognition of themselves in relation to others, Catherine Hall (1992: 205-254) has also explored whiteness and gender within nineteenth-century British missionary cultures – specifically within Baptist missionaries in Jamaica in the 1830s and 1840s. Masculinity and whiteness has further been explored by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds in their recent book *Drawing the Global Colour Line* (2008).

^{vi} Tuckfield also wrote to his older brother William seven months later encouraging him to move to Port Phillip (14 October 1841: 305, 314). Interestingly, Tuckfield actively discouraged his sister from emigrating to Australia unaccompanied because her doing so might have caused scandalous gossip (Greenwood 1956: 14).