Gordian Knot of Fantasies: Cultural Contact between Maori and Croats in New Zealand

If we re-articulate Ernesto Laclau’s well known formula ‘society doesn’t exist’ into ‘the postcolonial doesn’t exist’ we will come to the crux of my paper: how different cultural, ethnic and other entities ‘harmonise’ into the master allegorical narrative of postcolonial multiculturalism, which I call a Gordian knot of fantasies. I would like to ‘unknot’ this Gordian knot of fantasies through the exploration of Maori-Croatian contact in New Zealand.

These two peoples, the Northern Maori tribes of Te Aupouri, Ngati Kuri and Te Rarawa and ‘Austrians’ from Dalmatia met in the gumfields of the Far North of New Zealand between 1880 and 1940 and developed, what is usually described as a ‘harmonious relationship’ that was marked by a significant number of intermarriages.

In this paper I will try to outline how hegemonic space has been constantly fluctuating in New Zealand, as has Maori-Croatian contact, the contact very often painted in bright and romantic colours, which has unfolded from clear racist narratives of domination and control of the nineteenth century through assimilation politics of the middle of the twentieth century up to today’s post-modern oscillation between biculturalism and multiculturalism.

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