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Creating New Zealand from Aotearoa

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FORUM: MIGRATION, IMMIGRATION, AND MOVEMENT.¹

CREATING NEW ZEALAND FROM AOTEAROA

The seemingly simple question that was posed to this panel “Why do People Migrate” conceals behind it an array of complex problems that requires us to investigate the social, economic and political conditions that play a critical part in migration.

In this paper, I discuss British colonization of New Zealand, and the formation of a British colony out of the Maori land of Aotearoa - two bush-covered islands in the southern Pacific Ocean. Of critical importance is the cultural role that land played in the domination of a Pacific country and its native inhabitants by Euro-ideologies and their concomitant powers. Writers, painters, businessmen, politicians and newly-arrived immigrants viewed New Zealand with these ideologies in mind, predominantly within a 19th Century Arcadian tradition. This vision engaged with a process of *méconnaissance*,² that, combined with the economic interests of farmers, land speculators and the British government, created a landscape, both ideologically and materially, within three powerful fields of social forces expressing 19th. Century bourgeois British culture: the field of the aesthetic gaze which includes painting and literature; the field of social relations within new Colonial communities, which dotted the country beginning in the mid 1800s, and the field of economic and political structures.

The European colonists could not be said to have created the New Zealand countryside in what is sometimes referred to as its 'natural' state. Indeed, one must argue that a second-order physical and cultural landscape formed through a particular relationship to the Europeans, manifested in a system of production and reproduction. This relationship took place at two levels, the first, an idealized and symbolic 'gaze' that constructed the land as landscape, and the second that resided in the material construction of land as a foundation for the social relations of production. The historical and contemporary rural communities in New Zealand were created as a social space formed primarily to produce agricultural wealth, to sustain growth in newly developed towns, and to provide the basis, both materially and symbolically, for the transformation of social classes from their British antecedents. Land was the foundation for wealth, power, prestige and profits, but is also carried with it an

¹ This paper was written for the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association annual conference, October 20th, 2012 at Seattle University, Seattle, Washington. This paper provided a basis for discussion.

² Bourdieu's term to indicate misrecognition. The term is widely discussed, but Bourdieu points largely to the 'necessary misunderstandings' required of actors making sense of difficult, oppressive or unethical situations.

ideological gloss of civilization and enlightenment. While the earliest European inhabitants (the whalers, sealers and traders), did attempt to take control of large tracks of land, New Zealand rural communities and the effective control of land in agriculture really began in earnest with the arrival of the Wakefield settlements during the 1840's, and through other British immigrants who made their lives in farming and pastoralism. Dunlap comments : "From the late eighteenth century, natural history was the intellectual framework of exploration and settlement, the way to knowledge about unknown lands ... In Australia and New Zealand, it was at the base of settlement." (Dunlap 1999: 35-36).

To examine these questions of New Zealand Pakeha (white settler) migration and identity, I worked with Bourdieu's theoretical and methodological structure. Bourdieu posited that both objective structures and subjective structures are equally important to a deeper understanding of social practice, and in this case migration. Indeed, he argued powerfully against the division, seeing instead the implacable merging of the one with the other. This approach proscribes the need to consider personal habitus,³ as well as large social structures and social fields, and this further requires that we study the capitals that exist in such fields that individuals struggle to possess.

Bourdieu's theory of social fields allows me to arrange my argument into the domains of aesthetics, social relations and the economic-political realm, each comprising a distinct social field, in which unique strategies, capitals and struggles may occur.⁴ Ambitious residents used various strategies in the reproduction and transformation of their own interests. The defining social forces and capitals which constructed these fields, are first, the notion of New Zealand as an ideal landscape and an Arcadian dream; second, the domination of nature through particular forms of agriculture; and, third, given the group of immigrants who arrived, the emergence of the New Zealand class structure. The physical and symbolic creation of pastoral New Zealand was directly informed by 19th century Britain thought, and infused, at least on an ideal level, with an implied sense of moral purpose and English virtue. In contemporary rural communities, social values and events which underlie rural life are not only a transformation of this history, but also contain patterns of belief, which are still in evidence, and which continue to exist as social markers of class distinction today.

³ Dispositions, beliefs, orienting ideas.

⁴ Clearly the fields are inter-related.

The First Field :The Field of the Aesthetic Gaze: Landscape Genres: the Topographic and the Ideal

Dunlap says:

"The settlers brought natural history with them or imported it as part of the high culture they wished to emulate or reproduce, but like everything else it changed in its passage." (Dunlap 1999:35-36).

Studies of the land in topographic mapping, geological studies, and botanical and zoological studies manifest the image of New Zealand which settlers then attempted to create. Early painting of New Zealand (completed by British artists and explorers), expressed 19th century bourgeois British culture, and revealed a constructed reproduction of the individuals' imagined relationship to the means of production. The paintings can be historically and sociologically read as a particular class view of the land, which embodied a set of socially and economically determined values. Thus, there is a profound and corresponding connection between the creation of the physical landscape and the social space. The process of conceptualizing land into a landscape depicted nature within an Arcadian framework, in which the new country was ready and waiting to be used in productive British ways by hard-working British people. Even today Pakeha New Zealanders argue that their land is much more productive in British-settler hands than when it belonged to the local Maori.

One of the requirements in the creation of a new Britain from Aotearoa necessitated material changes to the land, and the importation of animals new to the country. With regard to New Zealand painting, one could say that early paintings also discovered the countryside. The Colonial Gaze was founded on the doxic understanding of 19th Century nature, and, in a very clear sense, immigrants already knew what it was that would be discovered. Their predetermined perceptions were shaped by artistic convention, which, in part, determined nature itself. In fact, one might argue that nature was invisible beyond the conventional genres of seeing, (Pound 1983).

The Second Field: The Field of Social Relations: Immigrants, Working the Land and Communities

Wilkes comments:

"One of the most obvious paradoxes of the New Zealand class structure is that it is at the same time quite different from the social structure found in Britain, and yet Britain also acts as a very powerful conditioning factor in shaping New Zealand society". (Wilkes, 1990: 13).

There were three main groups of immigrants who left Britain for the Colonies during the 19th century. They were the younger sons of landowners, large numbers of farm laborers, and finally, village craftsmen and tradesmen. This latter category included boot makers, coopers, implement makers, spinners, weavers, lace makers, tailors and other skilled workers. European immigration led to the widespread destruction of ancient native forests. In contrast with an earlier, imagined version of a New Zealand Arcadia as depicted in paintings and in writing, early land management was a brutal struggle against the natural landscape and the local indigenous populations. In the end, the natural habitat of the North and South Islands was completely destroyed and reconstructed with the importation of English grasses, Western domesticated animals, English flora, (i.e. oak trees, elms poplars, and flowers), English birds, rabbits and fertilizer ; even the deer were imported.

The colonial assault on the land and the Maori people was not only vicious but unrelenting. The creation of New Zealand as imagined by the British was an effort of extreme determination, personal greed and hard work ; huts were constructed of mud and branches ; tracks were pushed through any clearing, and if it were muddy, the horses often sank in up to their flanks ; huge tracts of bush were burned off ; sheep, driven along hillsides made their own terraced pathways, which contributed to erosion and land slips during heavy rains; men dug railway tracks by hand, with picks and shovels, and sluiced the gravel for gold with pans. There was an all-out assault on the local bird life, which was killed for food, and many died out due to the elimination of their natural habitat. (These consequences can also be laid at the feet of the Maori inhabitants as well.) Men who came into town from weeks in the bush had often lost their ability to fraternize peaceably in company. When these men went berserk, which they commonly did, they were put into a wooden wool press - surrounded by wool, like a minute padded cell - until they could be trusted to behave.

The Third Field: The Field of Economic and Political Structures: The Agricultural Base of Markets and Politics

"...they could speak of creating a 'new England' - a dream as marked in New Zealand, founded on the Wakefieldian vision of a transplanted and purified British society in the South Seas ...Read through their literature, newspapers, legislative debates and speeches. They were new nations populated by new men. (Women were physically present but rhetorically almost invisible). Everywhere there were the same appeals to the 'conquest of nature', 'progress', a particular kind of civilization, and until recently the virtues of an agricultural life and a society of independent farmers." (Dunlap 1999:1-2).

Few New Zealanders came from the British aristocracy. The measure of a New Zealand man in New Zealand was what he could do in practical terms, using common sense and hard work. The Arcadian imagery was full of masculinist bias, as evident in discussions of the 'pioneer man' (Philips 1987). Real Men (of the lower middle class, with aspirations to the petty bourgeoisie), would eschew urban and suburban life in Britain for an identity inherited from a rural past. As Phillips puts it, " it is the strong and the bold who go forth to subdue the wilderness and conquer new lands." (Philips, 1987:5). Underlying this shift was a concern about power and control. In British factories, workers could be controlled by managers and the clock. But the same powerless

workers felt that in rural New Zealand they could express their freedom. Male stereotypes in England itself were undergoing profound changes. In large part, this was due to the changes in land production, and which was coupled with the Enclosure Movement of the 1800's in England and Scotland, (E.P Thompson, 1963). Male occupations were becoming associated less with the outside physical labor of traditional rural work, and more with the inside work of clerks and shop assistants. The narrative of rural men versus city slickers, and of British men and women escaping from lives of social serfdom in Britain's factories and manor houses, to a life of freedom and property ownership in New Zealand was a narrative that carried the day, as small farms were founded. They had visions of living a British county life, reconstructed and remade in New Zealand.

The view of New Zealand as Arcadia was a justification of economic and social capital's transformation of nature - of the Maori Aotearoa. The owners of capital and land were not only the local landed Europeans. Indeed the entire system was based on the money of businessmen in Britain. The cooperation between business (industry) and the countryside (rural production) 12,000 miles apart was critical. The notion of Arcadia was the ideological gloss whereby institutions and social relations were simultaneously sustained and misrecognized. In reality, life in Arcadia was all about land, power, violence and the control of resources, all of which were dominated by the great landowners and the import-export businessmen. In 1843 a population of working men went on strike, and petitioned the New Zealand Company, the colonial and commercial power, saying that they came to New Zealand under the deception that it was a 'Splendid Country', one of 'Elysian Fields and Groves adorned with every beauty of Nature'. But instead of the bread fruit tree, there is the flax tree in a Swampy piece of Ground" (Fairburn 1989:21).

Most settlements turned to sheep rearing, and often grazing land was leased rather than sold as freehold land. Land ownership very soon became highly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer families, whose interests were merged with the interests of a network of urban banks and merchants, including land dealers and speculators. Thus, the British class structure did not disappear as immigrants moved into New Zealand. Under the auspices of the New Zealand Company and Edward Gibbon Wakefield's plan, the hope was, "... to have an adequate supply of laborers to complement members of the capitalist class", as they were then called. Rather than an eradication of class, therefore, the purpose was to make a new system of social classes work more effectively." (Wilkes, 1990:14).

Conclusion

European New Zealand is best conceived as a process of social construction, created through the sheer determination of its foremothers and fathers. Flora, fauna and other natural resources, including the labor and culture of local Maori people, were used to further personal ambitions within the context of what was viewed as the manifest destiny of British Colonists. Their future was inspired by firm beliefs in an imagined English and Scottish county life, and, simultaneously, profoundly constrained by local material circumstances. Vast portions of the naturally heavily forested hills were destroyed by fire. In the charred remains of this vegetation, the soil was rebuilt with imported fertilizer and imported grass seed. It was planted with English trees and grazed by English sheep and cattle.

Immigrants were both destroyers and creators, seeking to bring the land closer to their own ideal. Immigrants not only brought European household goods and social expectations, but European birds, deer, as well as horses, hounds and rabbits for their social hunts. They brought an entire way of life and then reinvented it. The created landscape was a mode of expression for a web of social relations that still exist. Not only early agricultural production but also cultural production, such as landscape painting, writing and personal letters, give us some genuine insight into these processes of creation and transformation.

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