ONE NATION, TWO PEOPLES, MANY CULTURES: EXHIBITING IDENTITY AT TE PAPA TONGAREWA

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The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa presents a postmodern simulacrum. In Te Papa, New Zealanders can find their own reflections, their double, “a mirror on their lives, a place where their stories are told, a place to lose yourself and to find yourself” (MNZTPT 1998:1). Te Papa makes an effort to present New Zealand’s nation, to harmonise different historical narratives and to provide a display that reflects the national imaginary of biculturalism.¹

During the last three decades, biculturalism has been defined in official government policy as “a fundamental characteristic of New Zealand’s heritage and identity” (www.govt.nz). In commonsense language, biculturalism, as a national imaginary, is constructed on the back of the recognition of the historical interaction of two peoples, Māori (the indigenous people) and Pākehā (the settler population). However, in contrast to the commonsense understanding of this word, the official government policy defines biculturalism as a celebration of cultural diversity, a celebration that includes not just “Two” (that are celebrating and that are being celebrated), but “Many”: “We are One nation, two peoples and many cultures” (www.govt.nz): the One, the Two and the Many. By suggesting that biculturalism is not just about the TWO, but at the same time the ONE and the MANY, this statement powerfully touches the Real of New Zealand society.² In other words, beyond the One, the Two and the Many there are complex articulations, different imaginaries of New Zealand social space, different senses of closure that mark repressed histories of colonisation, racial violence, the trauma of colonial settler society and separation from imaginary homelands, immigration control, discrimination and so on.

In this essay I will explore a complex articulation that produced the MANY within New Zealand bicultural discourse through an analysis of the way it is represented in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. In doing so, I will concentrate on the Croatian community and the way it has been positioned as one of the MANY, its relation to the TWO (Māori and Pākehā) and its role in the construction of the ONE (the New Zealand nation). Croats, as one of the MANY minority ethnic groups in New Zealand, could serve as a sort of crystal, reflecting the complex interplay of power relations, the interplay of tolerance and intolerance, inclusion and
exclusion that is linked with all changes of New Zealand’s nation-building processes (colonialism, assimilation, multiculturalism or biculturalism).

WELCOME TO “OUR PLACE”

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa opened in 1998. A large building located in the “heart” of New Zealand’s capital city, Wellington, Te Papa is presented as the main cultural attraction of the country, for both foreign visitors and local people:

Te Papa is different from any other museum on the planet... playful, scholarly, imaginative, educational, interactive, bold—Te Papa speaks with a Kiwi accent (www.tepapa.govt.nz/who_we_are/nmonz.html).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998:139) points out that the word “museum” brings to mind all sorts of adjectives: boring, uninteresting, tedious, dull, drab, prosaic, monotonous and lifeless. Dead. Museums are very often regarded as places full of dead, forgotten things enclosed in glass cases, far from the bustle of life, interesting only to fastidious academics. But in Te Papa, the key words are experience and adventure:

Te Papa—passionate about learning, serious about fun—a place of exact imaginings.
Te Papa takes you inside the New Zealand experience (www.tepapa.govt.nz/who_we_are/nmonz.html).

As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, the word “experience” has become the most important symbol for the new consumer-entertainment orientated museology; it suggests a new link between museums and tourism, and “indexes an engagement of the senses, emotions and imagination. Museums were once defined by their relationship to objects. Today, they are defined more than ever by their relationship to visitors” (1998:138). Hundreds of thousands of tourists move around the world, most of them seeking an unforgettable experience. To attract their attention and to lure them into the museum, each country tries to define its uniqueness in a complicated and intricate world market, where varied places, cultures, landscapes compete among each other. What is most important to prove and to compress into a few vibrant metaphors is uniqueness. This uniqueness competes with thousands of other national uniquenesses in a seemingly coherent world of postmodern pleasure. Thus, New Zealand tends to present its uniqueness as a tourist destination as biculturalism, through indigenous Māori culture and Pākehā culture.
Te Papa plays a special role in both the tourism industry and in the national imaginary (see Goldsmith’s essay in this volume on New Zealand “culturespeak” and “cultural celebrationism”). Seen from the point of view of tourists, however, Te Papa is contextualised within a broad frame of consummations offered worldwide, as expressed in this visitor’s statement. “We have seen nothing to match Te Papa in the many museums we have visited in many countries. It is stunning!! Well done!” (MNZTPT 1998:2).

But from the point of view of New Zealanders, Te Papa offers a new way of imagining the nation, “one in which all New Zealanders are travellers” and “the destination is collective self-understanding” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:139). As one visitor put it: “Your concept of displaying Maori and European history is inspirational. It gives you shivers down your spine and makes you so proud (and glad) to be a New Zealander” (MNZTPT 1998:2-3).

A unique Te Papa “experience” is encapsulated and explicitly directed by a threefold concept:

PAPATUANUKU—The earth on which we live.
The earth, the sea, the flora and fauna and the environment of Aotearoa—New Zealand, the Pacific and the wider world.
TANGATA WHENUA—Those who belong to the land by right of first discovery.
The cultural identity of the Maori people of Aotearoa, including art, heritage, history, language, marae skills, science, society, technology and relationship with the land, and their place in the Pacific and the wider world.
TANGATA TIRITI—Those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty.
The cultural identity of the more recent settlers of New Zealand, including art, multicultural heritages, history, science, society, technology and relationship with the land, and their place in the Pacific and the wider world (Museum of New Zealand 1989:4-5).

This threefold concept shapes the politics of display. The first floor is devoted to Papatuanuku, to the land “where it all begins”. It highlights the natural environment of New Zealand, the “awesome forces” of nature, “spectacular geological events, such as earthquakes and volcanoes”. But in Te Papa information is not enough, visitors are encouraged to imagine how it all started, “the massive forces that broke up the southern super-continent, Gondwanaland, and moved New Zealand down into the Southwest Pacific”. They can “feel [the earthquake] in the shaking of the earth beneath [their] feet”, they can find themselves in the primeval forest, “filled with the
sounds of birdsong”, they can be given “eagle-vision” and “pursue the moa through the bush”, in short, they can have a most amazing experience of New Zealand (MNZTPT 1998:4-13). But, the “experience” of New Zealand cannot be fully imagined without its people, hence, the fourth floor is devoted to Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti, to the celebration of two peoples, many cultures and One Nation. The overall organisation of the floor literally illustrates the bicultural concept of the Nation.

In the central position is displayed Signs of a Nation, contemporary commentary on the Treaty of Waitangi, the very document on which the concept of biculturalism is based. The Treaty, signed in 1840 by the representative of the British Crown and representatives of the indigenous Māori people of New Zealand, the Treaty was written in two languages, Māori and English. The Māori translation failed to express the meaning of the English version and “each party to the treaty was left with expectations about the power they would exercise. Difficulties of interpretation dogged the colony’s early years and were to continue” (Orange 1988:1). It is not my intention here to discuss the gap between Māori and European expectations of the Treaty, but to outline the main narrative of Te Papa where different interpretations of the Treaty are offered through the interplay of different stories told by “ordinary New Zealanders”: “The Treaty of Waitangi is a living social document. Debated, overlooked, celebrated. A vision of peaceful co-existence, or the cause of disharmony?... [I]t is impossible to live here and not have an opinion about the Treaty” (MNZTPT 1998:34).

The space where the exhibition stands reflects on the meaning of the Treaty for the New Zealand nation. It is a “stunning space... underneath a very high, wedge-shaped ceiling”. The words of the Treaty are inscribed on the walls of “the monumental, cathedral-like space”. For Te Papa, “this place is sacred, powerful and dignified—a place where the clarity and simplicity of the actual words of the Treaty express the vision of two peoples seeking to co-exist peacefully in one country”. Visitors (moving through a thicket of pole clusters) can hear different recorded voices of people, voices of “ordinary New Zealanders”, expressing their views on the Treaty. These voices are “like snapshots in time, with quotes from the time of signing through to current opinions” (www.tepapa.govt.nz/communications /Press_Releases/pr_signs.html).

On the left side of the Signs of a Nation, visitors can enjoy the representation of Mana Whenua; they can experience “the living dimensions of Maori arts, language and culture” (MNZTPT 1998:36). The permanent display is supplemented by an ongoing temporary exhibitions of different Māori tribes (the Tuhoe exhibition on display in 2002, followed Te Ati Awa and Te Aupouri exhibitions) that aim to show the heterogeneity
of Māori society. On the right side of the *Signs of a Nation* under the section called *Passports*, different stories of people who migrated to New Zealand are presented:

The New Zealand story is about journeys and arrivals. A thousand years of people leaving home to come here. Now, concentrating on the 19th century and onwards, you can meet the immigrants. Who were they? What did they bring? What did they leave behind? How would you fare?....

*Passports* explores and celebrates the remarkable stories of the people who migrated to New Zealand.... As a visitor to this exhibition, you will embark on your own dynamic, interactive journey of discovery (www.tepapa.govt.nz/communications/Press_Releases/pr_passports.html).

Let me concentrate on this representation of immigrants, because the interplay of ONE, TWO and MANY in the construction of the New Zealand nation is related to this display. Pākehā, as an immigrant culture, are presented as One of the Two peoples who constitute the New Zealand nation, but there is an intriguingly different mode of presentation for *Tangata Whenua* and *Tangata Tiriti*. While for *Tangata Whenua* the display stresses their Māori heritage, it is emphasised that *Tangata Tiriti* have “multicultural heritages”, numerous cultures to be acknowledged. And these cultures constitute the MANY of New Zealand’s official discourse of the Nation, the MANY that in terms of multiculturalism within a bicultural nation belong (according to Te Papa) to the Pākehā side.

**PASSPORTS, PASSPORTS, PASSPORTS**

*Passports* starts with the story of British (English, Scots, Welsh and Irish) immigrants. Their stories are screened on video and maps. Stories and photos of immigrants other than British and Irish (Chinese, Indians, Dutch, Greeks, Croats and so on) are exhibited on huge panels and tell of their regional lifestyles. Visitors to *Passports* are encouraged to buy a passport in the Museum’s shop and “get involved in the great personal stories” of different people who are immigrants from different regions of the world.

The first time I visited Te Papa, I bought Greek, Polish and Croatian passports. On the cover page of each was written “our people came this way”. The Croatian passport tells the story of Vlado Barbalich, and how he arrived in New Zealand in 1951. I learned that he did not like the communist system in his country and escaped from the island of Krk to Italy, where he was based in a refugee camp at Trieste and was given opportunities to migrate to either Australia or New Zealand. “I chose New Zealand” he said,
“Why? Because it was about as far away from Yugoslavia as you could get”. Furthermore I learned that Vlado imagined New Zealand as a tropical paradise and his first impression of the new country was a shock, but he soon started to like his “new homeland”. He worked hard, he opened a coffee shop, he hired a Greek band and he served Mediterranean food and nice wine. When I entered the exhibition, I had “my passport” stamped and then moved to the place where the panels telling the Croatian story are placed. Through the Babich family story, I learned that Croats have been in New Zealand since the 1880s, that they worked hard as gumdiggers but that many of them also became good winemakers.

The passport, I suggest, is a sign of hospitality: immigrants do not get a passport by a birthright, but it is given to them. The Te Papa passport experience underlines this hospitality. Let me explain this point. Te Papa stresses that the Passports exhibition focuses on all nationalities other than Māori. And indeed, temporary exhibitions highlight the contributions made to New Zealand by different ethnic communities. (The contribution made by the Chinese community was followed by a celebration of the Dutch community, and since 2002, the focus has been on the “astonishing contribution made by the Indian community” [www.tepapa.govt.nz/communications/Press_Releases/pr_passports.html]). The exclusion of Māori from Passports explicitly constructs the idea of an indigenous New Zealand culture and the correlation that other cultures are “bicultural” (remember, Te Papa’s Mission is biculturalism) in relation to that “no-passport” Māori culture. So, this other element of the bicultural dichotomy, the “Passport” culture, is not a homogeneous one, but intrinsically diverse. There are further, critical divisions within this “Passport” culture expressed in the way it is displayed. Te Papa presents British and Irish migrants’ cultures as cultures that together with the indigenous culture of New Zealand produced something unique in the world, “Kiwiana”, that is represented under yet other sections such as Exhibiting Ourselves, Parade. Other ethnic groups, even though mentioned as a part of this new “Kiwiana” culture, are presented as locked into their ethnicity. They appear to “enrich” New Zealand society by their mere presence, or more precisely, they enrich “non-Māori New Zealand society” with their different “lifestyles”. In the case of Croats, this is through wine making.

Ghassan Hage’s (1998) analysis of multiculturalism in Australia is pertinent here. A children’s book, The Stew that Grew, aimed at explaining the multicultural notion of Australia, is taken as a text. In it an Anglo-Celtic couple (the Anglo male having primacy) cook a stew to which all ethnic groups add their ingredients. Hage explains that the discourse of enrichment expressed in this “Eureka stew” not only places “the dominant culture in
a more important position than other migrant cultures”, but “also assigns to migrant cultures a different mode of existence to Anglo-Celtic culture. While the dominant culture merely and unquestionably exists, migrant cultures exist for the latter” (Hage 1998:121, emphases in original). Similarly, in Te Papa different ethnic groups are included in the representation of the Tangata Tiriti side of the bicultural imaginary, but it is clear that temporary exhibitions are tied just to migrants from countries other than Britain. As minority groups, they give different flavours to immigrant culture and Croats contribute the wine industry to this flavouring. This discourse of enrichment operates also in the way Mana Pasifika is represented: “Many people of Pacific Island origin live in New Zealand, adding to the richness and diversity of life here. Mana Pasifika acknowledges the strong bonds between New Zealand and other Pacific nations” (MNZTPT 1998:24).

While Croats, Indians, Dutch, Chinese, Greek, Italians, Polish, Samoans, Fijians, Tongans and so on underline the richness of society by their mere presence, the culture of British immigrants and Māori culture are represented as “two very different cultural streams [that in early New Zealand] began to run together” (MNZTPT 1998:30), and whose traces can be followed to the present. Hence, in the Museum’s booklet we can read:

What we value depends on who we are.
What we like depends on who we are.
What we make depends on who we are
…and we are “ONE nation, TWO peoples, MANY cultures” (MNZTPT 1998:30).

“NATION” AND FANTASY

In its specific and entertaining way, Te Papa seeks to (re)define the national imaginary. Its rhetoric is clearly a political tool in the service of developing a sense of bicultural national identity. How can we understand this representation of national identity? Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s (1985) reflection on the concept of “identity”, or rather of different identifications, and the construction of the social emphasises how identities and the social do not exist as givens at any moment in time, but are always processes, always incomplete—a fissure. All societies and identities are constructed within specific discursive formations, and they are results of articulatory practices. The practice of articulation consists of different discursive attempts to fix the meaning of the social. Laclau and Mouffe call these partial fixations of the social “nodal points”. Hence we can recognise that biculturalism as an official policy in New Zealand is a “nodal point” that fixes all meanings in the society. Seen from this point of view, Te Papa’s
narrative presents the past in a specific way to construct a picture of society understood as the harmonious coexistence of different groups of people, in other words, a utopian ideal of contemporary New Zealand. According to Laclau and Mouffe, the full closure of society is impossible, but it is exactly the idea of closure that functions as an ideal. It is a fantasy that emerges in support of this ideal, and it is a fantasy that covers over the impossibility of any closed system. In Slavoj Žižek’s (1996) words, it is through fantasy that we experience our world as a wholly consistent and transparently meaningful order. Therefore, I argue that the display represented in Te Papa is structured by the fantasy of an ideal social vision in which all groups of people live peacefully and which is based on the discourse of tolerance. Žižek stresses that fantasy has a stabilising dimension, “the dream of the state without disturbances out of reach of human depravity” (1996:24). But at the same time, he reminds us of fantasy’s destabilising dimension that creates images that “irritate us”. In other words, the obverse of a harmonious community always produces some disconnected fragments, some stereotypes that try to conceal the lack in the “reality” itself. What is repressed in Te Papa’s story about nation building is exactly this destabilising notion of fantasy, a fantasy of nation building, where the discourse of tolerance has a different meaning. In the following pages I will explore the complex interplay of these two aspects of fantasy in the construction of the MANY cultures of the nation, through Croatian immigrants’ experience in New Zealand.

ONE (COLONIALISM)

The political debate about multiculturalism and biculturalism in New Zealand has been alive for the past 30 years. Until the 1960s, the most common story of national imaginary, expressed by various politicians, was a story of the unity of the peoples in one nation (Sharp 1997). It is important to say that this story of integration was based on the European idea of a homogeneous national culture but, as in all settler societies at the beginning of colonisation, also in New Zealand this idea was connected with “a transplantation” of the mother country’s culture—British culture. Thomas Richards (1993:6) argues that in the 19th century the British saw their Empire as a sort of unity, but that this unity was based on the imperial “fantasy of knowledge”. The Empire’s scientists and administrators collected much information (they surveyed, mapped, took censuses, they described different people and their customs, religions, languages, etc.) which they organised into a series of classifications. According to these classifications, mostly based on Darwin’s theory of evolution, some people were seen as
“good” and “superior” and others as “bad”, “abnormal” and “inferior”. That meant that the British race was put on the highest level, above all others, and domination of the “inferior” by the “superior” was considered a natural condition.

At the beginning of colonisation in New Zealand, according to these classifications, Māori were ranked “higher than most other ‘savages’”, due to their agricultural and some artistic skills (Sorrenson 1975:97). It was argued that they had capacity to be civilised through their contact with the “superior” British race. Some prolific writers on New Zealand expressed their opinion that, through marriages, New Zealanders (Māori) and Europeans could become one people (Wakefield and Ward 2000:29). But what we have here is, rather, inclusionary rhetoric combined with exclusionary practices. In reality, far from being equally included into the social, Māori lost most of their land, and by the 1890s, Europeans saw them as a “dying race”, owing to a sharp decline in their numbers. By that time, the British (predominantly English, Scottish and Irish) “outnumbered Maori by fourteen to one” (Sorrenson 1992:141). New Zealand nationalism emerged and gradually the feeling that New Zealanders (British by origin) were a distinct people with their own language (English with New Zealand intonation and a few Māori words) spread. Loyalty to the British Empire coexisted with this new national idea, and often New Zealanders talked about themselves as “the best British” (Bassett 1999:155). In the late 1880s, when the first groups of Croats arrived on New Zealand gumfields in search of a “better life”, the idea of cultural homogeneity based on British values, on which New Zealand tried to build its new nationhood, was very strong. Social divisions operated among the British population as well (based upon ethnicity, wealth, occupation, age, gender…), but the idea of cultural homogeneity excluded people whose origins were not British (Bassett 1999:155).

The construction of political space based on exclusions and inclusions can be analysed through Laclau’s and Mouffe’s concept of the logic of equivalence and difference. According to them, the logic of difference tends to expand political space, enabling a proliferation of different meanings and positions. By contrast, the logic of equivalence creates a second meaning by subverting each differential position. For example,

in a colonized country, the presence of the dominant power is every day made evident through a variety of contents: differences of dress, of language, of skin color, of customs. Since each of these contents is equivalent to the others in terms of their common differentiation from the colonized people, it loses its condition of differential moment...thus equivalence creates a second
meaning which… though parasitic on the first, subverts it, the differences cancel one other out insofar as they are used to express something identical underlying them all (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:127).

Clearly, in New Zealand at the time when Croats arrived, the logic of equivalence prevailed. This entailed the simplification of New Zealand’s political space and the expansion of the paradigmatic pole of meaning over different strata of population. We can say that almost everyone was ensnared by some kind of metaphor. The logic of equivalence, something identical to the ideal type of New Zealander, first operated on the level of “whiteness” and excluded indigenous people—Māori. But “whiteness”, in terms of creating the “we” of the nation, operated on different levels and at different intensities. There were “pure white” or “dirty white”, one white more equal than another. In this classification Croats, who were mainly working as gumdiggers in the far North of New Zealand, were considered “not white enough”, an inferior race, and consequently they were not welcome: “New Zealand for New Zealanders. Our ambition is assuredly not to colonize our country with Chinese or Kanakas or Austrians [Croats]. Neither are we ambitious to have a mixed race—a hybrid or mongrel people…. On the contrary we are all anxious to preserve the purity of our race” (New Zealand Observer… 1893b, 27 May, p.2).

Žižek’s (1993) analysis of nationalism and the idea of the purity of race are relevant here. For Žižek (1993:201) the element that links together members of a given community

always implies a shared relationship toward the Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated. This relationship toward the Thing, structured by means of fantasies, is what is at stake when we speak of the menace to “our way of life” presented by “the Other”: it is what is threatened when, for example, a white Englishman is panicked because of the growing presence of “aliens”. What he wants to defend at any price is not reducible to the so-called set of values that offer support to national identity.

There is something more there, something that is “present” in these values, something that “appears through them”. But, paradoxically, even though the nation always appears to us as “our Thing”, as something accessible only to us, as something “they”, “the others”, cannot grasp; nonetheless we believe that it is something constantly menaced by “them”, we believe that “the other” wants to “steal our enjoyment” (by ruining our way of life). Žižek argues that to the racist, “the other” is always either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living on our labour (1993:203).
Croats in New Zealand were certainly treated as “the workaholic other”, “the other” who wants to steal “the legitimate rights for work” of the British population. Croats worked in groups and their efficiency was highly visible, hence there was some fear that the “invasion of Croats” would seriously affect the economic growth of the young British colony. The following statements given by British diggers and published in various newspapers at the time serve as an illustration of this point: “The Austrians [Croats] on the fields are a great evil at the present time…. the North will be destroyed by the Austrians… (AJHR 1898: H–12:48).

Croats were called Austrians because, at the time of their arrival in New Zealand, Croatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But, as one of the British gum diggers put it, they were not Austrians and consequently according to the imperial classification of peoples “much more undesirable as colonists than Austrians would be”:

It is unquestionably time that the people of New Zealand woke up to a recognition of the evil consequences that must follow this influx of Austrians. Did I say Austrians? Well, I am wrong. They are not Austrians…. They are Russian Slavs…. The Russian Slav, like the Chinamen is “peculiar” in many of his little ways. He has a frugal mind, for example, oh very frugal! Lives, like John, on the smell of an oiled-rag. And like John again, he is extraordinarily industrious…. If steps are not taken to drive these Russian Slav invaders away the result will be this: These foreigners will band together to lease our gumfields… and they will boss the situation… (New Zealand Observer… 1893a, 13 May, p.2).

The writer of this letter compared Croats with the Chinese. There are certainly many parallels between the Croatian and Chinese migrations to New Zealand. At the beginning early Chinese labourers in New Zealand working in the gold fields were considered “industrious, frugal, moral, healthy, and law-abiding” (Pearson 1990:76), but by the 1870s their productivity was seen as an “economic threat” to the colony. Like Croats, Chinese immigrants were overwhelmingly male and they worked and lived in separate communities. If we read some of the stereotypes applied to Croats and Chinese together, we come to the conclusion that a deep psychic fear of “the other” was interwoven into the fabric of colonial New Zealand. Neither Chinese nor Croats met the stereotyped view of the “desirable coloniser” and, more importantly, they were blamed for all misfortunes colonisers faced (high unemployment, bad conditions of life). As Žižek (1993) argues, “the other” is very often constructed as somebody who prevents the community from achieving its full closure—the state of happiness and harmony. This creation of the fascinating image of “the
other” in colonial New Zealand, i.e., “the other” who steals our jobs and creates economic crisis, resulted in the constant control of all people who were not considered good enough to populate what was represented as a “working paradise”. Everyone was under constant surveillance. In the case of Croats, in 1898 the colonial government formed the Kauri Gum Investigation Commission to check them. In a remarkable series of encounters, the Commissioners questioned British settlers and diggers about Croatian behaviour on the gumfields. Even though they found that Croats were “laborious, energetic, resourceful, well behaved” (AJHR 1898 H–12:7), the Kauri Industry Bill was passed to reduce the number of Croats on the gumfields. In 1908 and 1910 other restrictive laws against “aliens” on the gumfields were passed, protecting the interests of British gumdiggers.

What was therefore at stake in the exclusionary politics in early New Zealand was the coloniser’s belief in the possession of the national Thing. This Nation-Thing staged a fantasy space of possible “fullness” of society, and all failures to reach this fullness were explained through the construction of “the other”, “the other” that stands in the way of achieving it. In colonial New Zealand, where the logic of equivalence predominated, society was clearly divided into two camps: us (the nation) and them (foreigners, strangers, others).

Interestingly enough, there were some arguments that Croats were a “danger” not just to colonisers, but to Māori as well. But on the gumfields, Māori and Croats connected and developed a relationship, marked by a significant number of intermarriages.

ONE (ASSIMILATION)

Colonialism, as one of the New Zealand’s “nodal points”, helps us to locate the notion of the new “suture” (assimilation), where the colonial ties of the homogeneous British community were torn and replaced by the new vision of a New Zealand whose constituents were well assimilated citizens united in one nation. It is important to stress that passing from one “nodal point” (colonialism) to another one (assimilation) cannot be analysed as “a story of progress” or “cumulative improvement”, because these points are constituted through antagonism. As Laclau and Mouffe argue, it is exactly antagonism that is the limit of the social order, “the limit of all objectivity” and “the negation of a given order”. But this limit of the social is not external to it. It “must be given within the social itself as something subverting it, destroying its ambition to constitute a full presence” (1985:126-27). For Žižek (1996), antagonism is the Lacanian Real, something that cannot be
incorporated into the symbolic and yet is created by the symbolic, something that cannot be signified and yet is shining through the very impossibility of a signifier. The moment of dislocation of the social, the moment of negation of the identity, is precisely what causes new social constructions that seek to suture the fissure created by dislocation. Laclau and Mouffe’s explanation of the logic of equivalence and difference in the social can again be a useful tool to analyse the new political space that emerged under the policy of assimilation, the logic that operated through the interplay between the promotion of an assimilatory inclusion of others and the exclusion of “non-assimilated” others. While in colonial New Zealand the interplay of equivalence and difference created a clear enemy/friend form, during the assimilationist period this interplay resulted in the combination of inclusions with exclusions. Let me illustrate the point by showing how this new “nodal point” created a new articulation of the Croatian position that simultaneously included their New Zealand past within the national space, but socially excluded them from the construction of the “we” of the nation.

When the gum industry collapsed, gumdigging became part of New Zealand history and a number of local museums mushroomed around the abandoned gumfields. Under the policy of assimilation, the past was perceived in a specific way: life on the gumfields was purified and shifted into the artificial museum scenery, presenting what now was seen as a “heroic pioneering past”. In this new context of reading the past, Croatian gumdiggers became the property of the mythical pioneering story, although a marginal part of that story, which portrays the world of the ideal coloniser who, by emigrating to the colony, had “a chance to face life in the raw, to show courage and physical strength” (Phillips 1987:5).

For example, in the Matakohe Kauri Museum, built in 1962 as a memorial to the district’s pioneers, there is “the typical way of the life on the gumfields” on display. The Kauri Gum Collection exhibited in Matakohe is described in a brochure written for visitors as “the largest display to be seen anywhere and unique in the world” (Sterling and Cresswell 1985: n.p.) There are two life-size mannequins of gumdiggers, modelled after real people, on display in the basement of the museum. One of them is a Croat called Stipe Yelavich. They are set in a corner against a mural backdrop of the gumfields. On the wall, behind the gumdiggers, is a framed poem:

The happy gumdigger who lived in shack
Ti tree for a bed and a mattress of sack…
An era has gone of the gumdigger’s boom
—and the ti tree brush he used for a broom
To sweep out his shack—that was the way
For the happy gumdigger of yesterday

The message is clear: the beginning was full of hardships but, despite these, gumdiggers had a good life and succeeded in establishing community. The memory that is repressed is not just the memory of exclusion and intolerance on the gumfields, but that gumdiggers as a class were not respected at all. The expressions “He is just a gumdigger” and “vagabond occupation” (Smith 1952) were common in earlier times. In this new setting, Croats are represented as “honest industrious Yugoslavs”, and it is mentioned that they developed “a good relationship with Maori”. So, this exhibition offers a singular vision of a highly romanticised past, using different elements to tell its story and clearly displacing the memory of the past in order to paint a new picture of New Zealand as “one happy nation” (Bell 1996).

But this “happy nation”, even though including the Croatian gumdiggers’ past in national space, contains an exclusionary intent as well. As in many other settler societies, the main purpose of assimilation politics in New Zealand was to legitimise a dominant group as naturally national. As in colonial times, this dominant group saw itself as a group that can judge others and their degree of assimilation. Croats, with their way of life and outlook were seen as a group that could not fully assimilate. Hence, in the New Zealand Encyclopaedia (1966) Wilson (1966:627-28) writes:

Some Yugoslav families have reached their second New Zealand born generation, but they are still a problem as their assimilation is not easy. This has been partly due to the feelings of loyalty to the Slav people and partly to the feeling that any government… is an unnecessary evil…. It will take time for the Yugoslav to have the same fundamental feelings and outlook as the British New Zealander.

It is interesting to note is that at the same time, many Croats were becoming economically successful, especially in the wine and fishing industry. This success again challenged the assimilationist concept of inclusion and exclusion in such a way that Croats were positioned as economically assimilated or included, but socially unassimilated or excluded from society. As Hage (1998:137) argues, this construction of the categories “assimilated” and “unassimilated” did not only indicate the division of the population between two sections—one seen as central/assimilated and the other as marginal/unassimilated. More
importantly, it also constructed non-assimilation such that it empowered the “assimilated” to see in the unassimilated a negative, problematic group and actively to exclude them from the social, political and cultural spheres of society.

MANY (MULTICULTURALISM OR BICULTURALISM)

The anticipation of a unique Te Papa experience, the context that would lead to the birth of a new national museum (as a response to the new play of equivalences and differences) was signalled by political changes during the 1970s and 1980s. The vision of the nation that is not just ONE but MANY, the shift to the concept of multiculturalism, was announced in 1973 by Prime Minister Norman Kirk. He proclaimed New Zealand a multicultural country and decided that 6 February would be a national holiday known as New Zealand Day. A special programme, a live performance called Aotearoa, was prepared for the Waitangi celebration. The main goal of the programme was to picture New Zealand’s “journey towards nationhood and the part played by peoples of many cultures on this great voyage of discovery” (Orange on www.nzhistory.net.nz). The programme started with the staged arrival of the first inhabitants, Māori, who were followed by English, Scots and Irish; other European peoples arrived on stage as well—Danes, Germans, Croats, Greeks, Dutch, Italians—and they were followed by Pacific Islanders and Indians. A giant moa was built that laid an enormous egg exactly on the place where the Treaty was signed. The egg symbolised the new nation, the New Zealand nation, where the harmonious coexistence of different groups of people was celebrated.

But this move towards multiculturalism and the interpretation of the Treaty as the unifying symbol of the new nation raised Māori protests that resulted in some constitutional changes and a shift towards biculturalism. This move towards biculturalism was not an easy one either. Some politicians clearly supported the multicultural idea. For example in 1984 Prime Minister Robert Muldoon said:

We take our culture from all the ancient tribes of Britain, as well as from the ancient tribes of Maoridom; but in addition, the Dalmatians who came to dig the gum and later made the wine; the Chinese who came to work the goldfields; the Dutch and the refugees…. Modern waves of Polynesian migration have also washed on our shores. So, we are a mixed people (Muldoon quoted in Sharp 1997:44).

Some Māori intellectuals strongly opposed this interpretation of New Zealand’s history because, as Ranginui Walker put it, “the reduction of
Maori to a position of one of many minorities negates their status as the people of the land and enables government to neutralise their claims for justice” (Walker 1995:292). So the concept of multiculturalism was seen as radically opposed to the Māori interest and justice in the country. In a pragmatically political piece written for the Institute of Policy Studies in 1988, Raj Vasil explains the tension between biculturalism and multiculturalism in this way:

For the present it is better to accept the notion of a bicultural New Zealand, as preferred by Maori, than to create an unnecessary and damaging controversy by insisting on multiculturalism…. Some Pakeha… insist on arguing with a certain vehemence that New Zealand, in view of the existence of many ethnic minorities, can properly be viewed only as a multicultural…. In many cases it is a fact that this argument provides a convenient means by which many Pakeha can deny Maori what they want…. It would be advisable for Pakeha to view New Zealand as a bi-racial and bi-cultural nation for the time being (Vasil 1993:1-2).

In 1988, the government decided to build the new national museum because the old national museum “no longer served the wider community” and in order to emphasise the essential biculturalism of the nation, a biculturalism that includes the celebration of many different cultures (see www.tepapa.govt.nz/who_we_are/history.html).

The concept of biculturalism in Te Papa, however, is highly problematic. A 1999 report prepared by Te Papa on bicultural developments in museums of Aotearoa says: “Te Papa… is working in partnership with museums, iwi and related organisations to promote bicultural development in museums of Aotearoa New Zealand”. But biculturalism as a concept is clearly seen differently by Māori and by Museums.

To museums, biculturalism is about bringing Maori and non-Māori together as one… for Maori there is a link between colonisation and current moves towards bicultural development…. Grievances relating to the loss of guardianship of artefacts are not seen in isolation from other grievances, such as those concerning land, language and cultural property (Murphy 1999: n.p.).

Te Papa’s concept of biculturalism that aims to bring Māori and non-Māori together is most visible in the display of Te Marae O Te Papa Tongarewa, a living, contemporary marae operating within the museum, a marae that gives sense of belonging not just to Māori but other migrants as well. The leaflet written for the marae is titled Nau Mai Haere Mai, Welcome to Te Marae o Te Papa Tongarewa, and reads in part as follows:
For Maori, the marae is a focal point for groups who share kinship—whanau, hapu, iwi. Here they can meet to discuss and debate, to celebrate, to welcome the living, and to farewell those who have passed on. Te Marae o Te Papa Tongarewa is like any other in the country, except that its “kinship group” encompasses all the iwi and cultures whose treasures and stories are held at Te Papa. Iwi will identify and relate to their ancestors through the striking contemporary carvings—so too can other cultures.

In one way Te Papa’s idea of building a new marae, dissimilar to any other marae in the country, and of a kind which we cannot find outside the museum world, is very similar to Kirk’s idea of building a giant egg as a symbol of a new nation. Both the moa’s egg and the marae can be understood as attempts to eradicate the previous symbolic order and to create a new one; one where all people of New Zealand will feel at home. “Through a shared whakapapa this wharenui embraces the peoples of this country, making Rongomaraeroa a forum for the nation” (MNZTPT 1998:38-39).

So in this context, the Croatian community enters the “we” of the New Zealand nation. The antagonisms of the past are replaced with a celebration of their cultural difference. In her analysis of multiculturalism in Australia, Sara Ahmed argues that in this new context “the nation still constructs itself as ‘we’ not by requiring that ‘they’ fit into a standardised pattern, but by the very requirement that they ‘be’ culturally different” (2000:101). Croats are not seen as “typical New Zealanders”, but together with other ethnic groups—Chinese, Dutch, Indians, Pacific Islanders, etc.—they fit into the New Zealand nation precisely because they allow the nation to imagine itself as heterogeneous. For example, commenting on the position of the Croatian community in New Zealand, Helen Clark, the present Prime Minister of New Zealand, said:

In one way New Zealand is a multicultural society… we have many different communities here, different people from all around the world live in this country and that’s good for us. We want them to keep their own languages and their customs. Difference gives richness to our society. The Croatian community is a good example, Croats have been in New Zealand for a long time but they have preserved their customs and language. At the same time they have fully participated in New Zealand society (Helen Clark pers. comm., Auckland 2001).

The Prime Minister’s statement was full of references to the need to tolerate difference and indeed the need to celebrate difference. But, as I have already mentioned, we need to ask the question about “who is tolerated” and “who is tolerating” and who is celebrating and what is celebrated (see also
Goldsmith’s essay in this volume). Hage (1998) argues that the discourse of tolerance in societies that celebrate diversity is not completely opposed to the discourse of exclusion and intolerance, as it may seem to be at first glance. According to Hage, both tolerant and intolerant discourses presuppose that the dominant group “practises the same imaginary position of power within a nation imagined as ‘theirs’” (1998:85). In other words, in the discourse of tolerance, the dominant majority is structurally placed in a position of power inasmuch as it is granted the active power to tolerate, while minorities can only be at the receiving end of tolerance. During the colonial era, Croatian difference excluded them from the “we” of the nation; during the assimilation politics their cultural difference excluded them, but economically they were included, while in contemporary New Zealand their cultural difference is celebrated and their business (wine-making and fishing) is seen as their tradition.

During the colonial era of New Zealand many Croats developed relationships with Māori and intermarriages were common. In 1999, Māori-Croatian descendants decided to build a monument to commemorate the close bonds established between these two peoples. They also discussed the idea of building a special marae for Tarara people (Māori used to call Croats Tarara but today the term is mostly used for people who are Māori-Croats).

* * *

There is nothing on display in Te Papa about this relationship. Te Papa built its own marae, one that tries to impose a shared whakapapa on all ethnic groups in New Zealand. But what is repressed in Te Papa’s narrative of a “shared whakapapa” of the nation is a constantly repeated trauma in New Zealand society. First, the trauma of the indigenous and colonised, on which everything is based; second, the trauma of the immigrant who is separated from his or her imaginary homeland; third the trauma of exclusion of non-British migrants; and finally the feeling of postcolonial guilt constantly reframed and rearticulated. All of these compose a political space where Te Papa, as the Museum of New Zealand, clearly functions as a phantasmic support of reality. It has reconfigured New Zealand’s history in such a way that national identity becomes a domain of fun culture or entertainment and an endless circulation of simulacra. This imagined reality ignores unpleasant intrusions of the past, yet it pretends to correspond with the past in a way that gives a new vision of New Zealand society. It is a representation of New Zealand identity as being in a process of becoming,
rather than being stable. In this sense, Te Papa is much more about “who we might become” than “who we were” and “who we are”. By shifting to this seemingly empty authority of the future, Te Papa hides the operation of discursive machinery in the present. Paradoxically, the most conservative traits of the new museology lie in this authority of the future, in its attempt to deny the traumas of the past, or even to project an imagined future into the past.

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NOTES

2. I am using “Real” in the Lacanian sense of the word as that which cannot be symbolised.
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Abbreviations

AJHR — Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives of New Zealand
MNZTPT — Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
NBR — The National Business Review
NZH — New Zealand Herald
TMTB — Tainui Maori/Maaori Trust Board


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