



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *Cinematic pilgrimage in New Zealand: The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit (2010)*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/89434/>

Version: Supplemental Material

Conference or Workshop Item:

Tzanelli, R Cinematic pilgrimage in New Zealand: The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit (2010). In: Moral Economies of Creative Labour, 7th July 2011, Leeds, UK. (Unpublished)

Reuse

Unless indicated otherwise, fulltext items are protected by copyright with all rights reserved. The copyright exception in section 29 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 allows the making of a single copy solely for the purpose of non-commercial research or private study within the limits of fair dealing. The publisher or other rights-holder may allow further reproduction and re-use of this version - refer to the White Rose Research Online record for this item. Where records identify the publisher as the copyright holder, users can verify any specific terms of use on the publisher's website.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

OPENING SLIDE In this paper I want to shed light on the moral economy of this sort of creative labour that sustains interdependencies between distinctive cultural industries such as film and tourism. In particular, I wish to examine the moral underpinnings of cinematic art that is not entirely free of culturally and politically situated memories. I do not elevate morality into an analytical panacea – quite often moral economy debates end up recycling conservative stereotyping despite the best intentions of those who uphold and disseminate them. As a quite abstract and universal category morality can permeate quite specific cultural formations in need of global legitimation.

SLIDE 2 I focus on New Zealand, a country marginal on the global cultural scene until Peter Jackson and his transnational creative team transformed it into a media and tourism destination. New Zealand's global recognition thanks to the *The Lord of the Rings* cinematic trilogy was not without drawbacks, as J.J.R. Tolkien's literary creations instigated international competitions around issues of their custodianship. **SLIDE 3** As the *Lord of the Rings* is geopolitically attached to New Zealand's former colonial masters, its digital appropriation by yesteryear's colony is replete with political meaning: who steals here from whom? Above all, why? In such a short timeframe I will examine the biographical background of Jackson as a creative agent – a more solid base for a political sociology of creative labour. But biography here is also replete with politics, tying personal to collective memory. In this respect, Jackson is in this paper also an example of the ways nation-states use kinship to globally consolidate their prestige. I will only allude to the background of protesting in New Zealand against moving the shootings of the double Hobbit prequel of the *Lord of the Rings* outside New Zealand. These protests were reactions to a controversy over employment rights in the *Lord of the Rings* multi-industry in late 2010. The controversy appeared to be instigated first by an Australian union for reasons we are now left to retrieve from pieces of biased journalism. As it spread in New Zealand, it threatened to disrupt workings on the new films but also the country's tourist industry, giving it a bad name as a media and tourist destination. But what interest me here is not the employment aspects of this controversy, only how both the protesters and Jackson enacted forms of pilgrimage to the land that today claims Tolkien as its own heritage.

SLIDE 4 The *Lord of the Rings* has become New Zealand's pride: not only did it revise the global status of its peripheral areas such as Matamata and the South Island as tourist destinations, it also transformed its urban centers such as Wellington and Auckland into global media hubs and pop art centers. Here the urban centers claim leadership whereas the periphery which notably served as the cinematic background followed suit in its beautification primarily for tourists. The process assisted in what anthropology acknowledges as the production of a reputable public face, and tourist theory studies as the ability of social groups to interactively stage their authenticity. In the *Lord of the Ring's* case, the operation ran relatively smoothly, with the socialist government of Helen Clark assuming an active role in organizing the emerging tourist industry in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

SLIDE 5 The threat issued by WB in 2010 to move the Hobbit shootings to England, where Harry Potter is filmed, was thus a double insult for the country: the street protests of native workers and other New Zealanders in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch were infused with political meaning

that drew upon Jackson's digital world. I want to stress how images such as this are in fact references to the New Zealand's Arcadian past that is of immense commercial value for such a small country. I also want to stress how this hermeneutics of digital recovery is firmly embedded in deeper structures of European memory that center on war, genocide and forced migration. The overall controversy led to an interesting replacement of concerns about the future of creative labour in the country with a different sort of emotional labour that New Zealanders were invited to perform in urban streets. This is what I shall term the "labour of national memory work" that encouraged a pilgrimage of the cinematic trilogy's background landscape. This labour involved collective enactment of solidarity against the removal of a profit-making machine; this was followed by accusations that someone steals national goods. This someone was not always the actual instigators of the mayhem but the media industries who generated labour opportunities for New Zealanders in the first place. Under explosive conditions such as this, creative industries closely connected to state imperatives can function as memory-making machines.

SLIDE 6 Peter Jackson and his crew's involvement in the controversy was unfortunate. As a distinguished form of New Zealand's creative labour, Jackson's loyalties were split. A Wellington native who lives and breathes Hollywood, he is sufficiently detached from native agendas to produce hybrid forms of artwork. He did not act alone in the Tolkien venture, but as part of a transnational team to produce a fusion of narratives in music, image and performance. But Jackson's background brings him closer to a DIY spirit in which New Zealand reifies its national character. Film-making necessitates fusions of art (sustained by iconic creativity and story-telling akin to literature and history writing) and craft (sustained by technological manipulation of image and sound). Jackson is also notably familiar with the landscapes that he incorporated in his films, so he knew where to look for what. Intimate engagement with the cinematic background allows directors to speak from the heart before they use their head. Their immediate encounters with the world they know so well are processed as poetic narratives and better conveyed and marketed in foreign cultural contexts.

Undoubtedly Jackson's digital craft is not identical to the traditional national crafts we consume in our journeys as tourist commodities. His specialism in slapstick horror comedies in his early career, his experience in working as Wellington's *Evening Post* photo engraver and his foundation of Weta Digital, a company that won an Oscar in 2010 for digital work on *Avatar*, make him the perfect example of professionalized art and craft. The blend has sufficient public recognition to foreground today New Zealand's digital advertising campaign for tourism. Just as his once potential successor in the *Hobbit*, Guillermo del Toro, Jackson matured as an artist outside the confines of his homeland to become member of a transnational epistemic community. But just as the Mexican del Toro he came from a colonial background on which he drew inspiration. A Pakeha or Zealander of European stock from first world war immigrants, Jackson was knighted in 2010 for his contribution to the Kiwi industry, an act that shows how nation-states selectively recognize their citizens. By necessity, New Zealand's media and tourist industries have to be treated as national property, if the country is to survive in an already competitive world of multiple mobilities. **SLIDE 7** – change to **SLIDE 8** One can understand

why this protester's banner claims Gollum as a native creature about to lose its "home" (see poster). Here profit and kinship relations become interchangeable, forming a memory complex that is superimposed on colonial histories.

SLIDE 9 But I want to focus on the mythical overlaying that defines the transitions from Tolkien's work to Jackson's cinema, as both draw upon war memories and Europe's Christian heritage to do art. Tolkien's literary allegory on social "disenchantment" was mirrored in the end of Hobbit and Elfish eras due to warfare that destroys natural resources. His semi-Christian narrative of good and evil compensated on the symbolic level for the political and economic processes that had destroyed traditional social fabrics in England. Some claim Tolkien symbolised his war experience in the persecuted Hobbits that are allegories of village socialities in rural England. Tolkien's semi-religious nostalgia is in line with the Christian stories of his friend, C.S. Lewis, who was also cinematically adapted in New Zealand by the Zealander Andrew Adamson. If Tolkien's literature recorded Europe's traumatic experience Jackson's script turned the destruction of Hobbit socialities into a profitable landscape allegory. Images of rivers, lakes and the sea are sites of memory in Jackson's films but also a host of tourist and migration signs that populate New Zealand's history. Building on Tolkien's narrative, Jackson's digital narrative depicted the Hobbits as forced migrants, symbolizing thus his personal family history: his extended family network were post-First World War migrants from the UK; as he himself admits, he grew up with stories of war suffering that fed into his artwork. The fact that the Hobbit prequel is shot outside Wellington is telling of the strong hold national memory has in the venture: national land and tourist landscape are not separable but go hand in hand and are rife with contemporary political meaning. Not only has Jackson himself acknowledged Wellington as a Maori site of memory elsewhere, he also recorded in detail his fascination with the Oriental and ancient Greek exotic in his early career. **SLIDE 10** On top of these influences, one may add his fascination with ANZAC narratives of Zealandish heroism that de-colonization transformed into symbolic sites of nation-building. Jackson's future plans involve making a proper film on New Zealand's First World War history, but in many respects he has already created such a tripartite allegory from Tolkien's literature.

In a moral economy of creative labour, Jackson is exemplary of the competing loyalties political imperatives impose on artists. Interestingly, in October 2010 LOTR technician Richard Taylor told protestors that he hoped "The Hobbit would stay in New Zealand" and read a letter from Peter Jackson thanking the crowds for their support. Jackson and his crew had to tread softly the Faustian crossroads between nationalism and capitalism without taking sides. A transnational native, Jackson worked from these repositories of memory resurrected in the 2010 urban protests: the trope of foreign intrusion and de-sacralisation of New Zealand's Middle Earth was structurally present in the protests, even if the target seemed to be of indeterminate origins. Of course, Jackson employed the very technologies Tolkien critiqued in his novels to "do" and *sell* this art under New Zealand's *brand*. But his camera-work also focused on New Zealand's declining ecosystem in which the Hobbits are integrated and to which they give voice. This structural nostalgia is especially pronounced in his

masterly distant shots of Middle Earth - New Zealand's tangible heritage that makes great profit in the tourist trade. It is also constitutive of his visual tale between 'good' and 'evil', Hobbit Arcadia and Mordor – and by extension ethnic primordiality and colonial terror. Endorsing a tourist pilgrimage “from above” (as professional migrant) and “afar” (from Hollywood), Jackson is emblematic of a suburban intelligentsia that commercializes pre-national communitarianism through natural allegory.

SLIDE 11 The exotic dimensions of pre-national authenticity were constitutive of the venture's marketisation. Shifting from national land to landscape, the visual aspects of Jackson's symbolic pilgrimage were also encoded in the score 'May It Be' by composer Howard Shore. Performed by Enya, who is renown for artwork that capitalizes on Celtic myths, the lyrics encapsulate the cinematic shift from land to landscape while speaking of the hero's lonely travel through the darkness in a semi-religious style. In this respect, the trilogy looks to European, Christian and pre-Christian, classicist and pagan narrative nodes, narratives of primordial belonging also appropriated across the world in nationalist discourses.

Just as its Maori heritage that the good side of Gollum symbolizes for protesters, New Zealand's landscape is part of this allegorical memory complex. Primordiality, kinship and nature are closely connected here. **SLIDE 12** 85% of the population in New Zealand lives in urban areas. The country's landscape and endemic flora and fauna “constitute a powerful source of nation pride” that sells well to ecotourists, adventure tourists and backpackers. Under considerable market pressures, the environment has become more implicated in an ethno-nationalist program of conservation to which countries with rare ecosystems need to demonstrate commitment. Tolkien's and Jackson's Arcadian principles became implicated in this protectionist discourse that commenced long before the LOTR venture, with the British colonization of non-European lands, to become in more recent years politically constitutive of high civility standards. As these standards now incorporate the marketable transposition of national landscapes into a mechanical world, the Hobbits and the Gollums acquire extra significance for a state disadvantaged in the global scene. A visual celebration of New Zealand's Middle Earth, endorsed by its political center and aggravated by unionized action, shifted the focus of the 2010 protests towards a semi-nationalist discourse of reputation-building. This involved a form of imaginative travel by the protesters of New Zealand's tourist heritage that at the time threatened to obstruct tourist and business traffic. The very same emotional labour was performed by Jackson as a radical shift away from tradition with unexpected consequences when various interest groups stepped in to appropriate it. I would therefore like to conclude the paper with a controversial comment that cautions against the ubiquitous adaptation of moral economy debates on creative labour. Emotional labour might endorse this sort of rootedness that kills cosmopolitan belonging, turn communities inward and reproduces traditions no progressive citizen would normally endorse.