

*Counting stories, moving ethnicities: Studies from Aotearoa New Zealand*

Rosalind McLean, Brad Patterson and David Swain, eds.

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Reviewed by Kris Inwood

The title of this useful collection accurately conveys the way in which it seeks to advance knowledge about ethnicities in Aotearoa New Zealand. A series of engagingly written stories illuminate diverse aspects of the experience of ethnicity and ethnic-based differences in experience. The authors collectively provide three chapters on source and method, three chapters on particular experiences (two Scottish, one Irish) and another chapter that explores ethnic identities in the New Zealand asylum.

The volume begins with a thoughtful introduction by Dr. Rosalind McClean, who reviews the origins of thinking about ethnicity and the uses of this contested conceptualization in a variety of applications ranging from historical analysis to contemporary enumerations and questionnaires. McLean affirms (and in this she anticipates all of the authors) the subjective nature of ethnicities. Throughout the volume its authors accept ethnicity as a somewhat fluid category of personal identity that is often shifting, always constructed and occasionally hotly contested. McLean argues for the importance of ethnicity insofar as it underpins the narrative of a bi-cultural encounter between Maori and Pakeha that has largely replaced the nation state as a central organizing framework for New Zealand research in the human sciences. McLean goes to some length to point out that this duality cannot blind us to the importance of differences among Maori and among Pakeha and even among the British and Irish-born Pakeha who comprised the majority of immigrants until the closing decades of the twentieth century. A helpful afterword of concluding comments from Brad Patterson provides institutional context for the genesis of the volume and nicely caps the discussion.

The first of the methodological chapters by Tahu Kukutai summarizes the literatures on census-taking, the counting of ethnicity and on the construction of ethnic categories in general and then, in greater detail, in the New Zealand experience. This chapter is a tour de force that should be read widely by historians and social scientists with an interest in New Zealand. Kukutai argues for the complexity and plurality of census constructions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and for the importance of power in shaping the information collected and published by census authorities. A second methodological chapter by Michael Goldsmith reviews racial and ethnic identification in the New Zealand census, Blue Books and even military rolls. Goldsmith is particularly interested in the construction of 'European' just as Kukutai is primarily concerned to analyze the representation of Maori. Together, these two chapters provide much useful information about exactly how ethnicities have been constructed and counted in historical and contemporary sources.

Jo Barnes and David Swain collaborate in another methodological chapter that makes a case for the value to historical and social scientific research of data derived from family histories or genealogies. Barnes and Swain review literature that identifies long-term social mobility using family genealogical data internationally as well as discussions within New Zealand. The authors persuade me of their central argument but leave me asking for more. They

persuasively address questions about the quality of genealogical data arising from the accuracy of linking between sources but they do not consider the inevitable question of inter-generational survivor bias. Another unexpected omission is the use of ancestral data in the understanding of Maori history. The authors point to databases that have been assembled in collaboration with genealogists but they do not comment on the extensive, international, web-based crowd-sourcing that has made available so much data in the last 5-10 years. On this point, perhaps, the five-year delay since presentation of the papers in a 2007 seminar may be telling.

The chapter by Rebecca Lenihan demonstrates the use of genealogical data. Lenihan assembles a narrative that encompasses individual experience as well as a statistical profile of Scottish immigrants to New Zealand from two sources. One is a database drawn from the records of genealogists themselves while the other, smaller database is drawn from a random sample of deaths registered in New Zealand after 1875. Lenihan cleverly compares the two databases to illustrate particular biases arising from each. A deficit of single migrants in the genealogical data would seem to be an example of survivor bias, or the over-representation of people who have descendants. The paucity of family detail in the death register database is an inevitable consequence of relying on a single source. Lenihan effectively identifies strengths and weaknesses of each source and moves beyond methodological reflection to provide some highly interesting case studies and preliminary comments about the statistical profile.

Another author focusing on the Scots is the distinguished demographer, Ian Poole, who points out that Pakeha fertility in the third-quarter of the nineteenth century was much higher than that of their cousins who remained in Britain, but that the differences disappeared by the end of the century. The author uses Otago provincial data as a proxy for Scottish-origin Pakeha and acknowledges that he cannot control conveniently for age structure, nuptiality and timing of immigrant. The chapter is difficult to follow because of these data limitations and because the author shifts back and forth between total fertility and gross reproduction as measures, intermittently engages in debate with another author (whose views are not presented) and provides a distracting level of detail about the English and Irish. Nevertheless, Poole mounts a convincing argument that the principal explanation for the convergence of fertility with Scotland is the New Zealand transition from very early and near-universal marriage c1870 to the Scottish pattern of later and less-than-universal marriage c1900. The reasons for the change are less clear. The underlying causation, according to Poole, reflects declining mortality. Unfortunately, space does not allow Professor Poole to clarify exactly how mortality affected family formation or to demonstrate the change in comparative Scottish-New Zealand mortality that would seem to be needed for this hypothesis.

Gerard Horn addresses a 'classic' question of overseas Irish history: why are the Protestant Irish less visible as a community than the Catholic Irish. Like Lenihan, Dr. Horn deploys a succession of micro-level databases that allow him to understand general patterns as the outcome of individual behavior. In this case the sources are civil death records, both civil and church marriage records and migration data (some collected by himself and other data originally collected by others) focused on the city of Wellington. The evidence is not presented as engagingly as might be possible but the overall argument is convincing. More than 80% of Irish-born Protestants in New Zealand married someone born other than in

Ireland, while the corresponding rate for Catholics was less than 50%. Irish Protestant immigrants were much less endogamous than Irish Catholics because of a skewed gender balance in migration, greater opportunities for social advancement through marrying out, the fragmented array of Protestant churches with Irish adherents and proportionally more potential non-Irish marriage partners without straying across the Catholic-Protestant divide. Pakeha descendants of Irish Catholics nevertheless married out of the Church with increasing frequency as the generations advanced.

The final paper in the volume by Professor Angela McCarthy follows Horn and Lenihan in the collection and analysis of rich micro-data that documents the experience and behavior of large numbers of individuals in order to develop population-level generalizations. McCarthy's records are those of the asylum, in which she can examine the representation of different ethnic groups and their interactions. McCarthy notes the over-representation, relative to population of the Irish in asylums with New Zealand as elsewhere in the British Empire and in the United States. For this reader the most interesting section of this careful and well-written chapter was a brief but intriguing discussion of cross-cultural encounters within the walls of the asylum.

In sum, this is a diverse but fascinating collection of studies. Some papers (Horn, Lenihan, McCarthy) are based on the retrieval from archival sources of databases that sustain rich analyses of ethnicity and ethnic experience. Others such as McClean and Kukutai are more conceptual and frame-setting. Yet other chapters guide us toward particular sources (Barnes and Swain, Goldsmith) and toward the resolution of a particularly puzzling conundrum (Poole). The volume is published with a collective bibliography which itself is a considerable resource for anyone interested in the history of ethnicities in New Zealand. The volume serves as a useful reminder that ethnicity even among the Pakeha retains an important and interesting place within the new generation of New Zealand historical writing.