

NEW ZEALAND IDENTITIES: DEPARTURES AND DESTINATIONS
Edited by J.H. LIU, T. MCCREANOR, T. MCINTOSH
and T. TEAIWA
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Identity, whether indigenous or immigrant, ethnic or national, presents New Zealand with some significant policy and political challenges. The last two decades of the twentieth century put questions of indigeneity at the centre of political debate and produced some interesting policy developments, including what should be done about breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi and how best to deliver services to Māori. But that hardly exhausts the issues. The arrival of Pacific peoples and then the change from preferred source countries for immigrants in the wake of a review of immigration policy in 1986 have created a new cultural diversity, especially of what the Canadians call “visible minorities”. The nation has been de-hyphenated from the state, and major questions have been raised about what exactly constitutes the nation and therefore nationality, as well as how best to identify and recognise cultural difference. Anything that contributes to these debates is to be welcomed. A book which indicates that it wants to explore how identity is socially constructed, that such constructions inevitably “carry” ideology, and that they constitute questions rather than statements, offers promise.

The problem with edited works, almost by definition, is that they are uneven in their focus and interest. The same is true with *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*, although there is more than enough in this book to attract readers who will, at least, feel satisfied with the bits that most interest them. There are chapters that deal with the broad sweep of issues, including citizenship (Pearson, Zodgekar), biculturalism (Liu, Levine) and the Treaty of Waitangi and the Waitangi Tribunal (Byrnes, Barclay). National identity is the focus for Ward and Lin, and Paul Morris notionally explores spirituality, although the chapter is more about the imagined nation. Māori identity receives the attention of McIntosh and of Borell. The first deals with the marginalisation of Māori and makes an interesting distinction between forced and fluid Māori identities. Borell looks at young Māori in south Auckland (“living Southside”), although it would have been good to have details of when the research was done and a reference to what is obviously a thesis. McCreanor provides an analysis of Pākehā discourses, mostly in relation to Māori, while Ip and Pang look at the history of the Chinese in New Zealand. Teaiwa and Mallon look at Pacific peoples.

The book ends with three chapters that are quite different to the rest of the book. The first, written by Capie and McGhie, is concerned with foreign policy and this chapter does not fit easily with the rest of the book. The second is written by five authors – Frame, Molisa, Taylor, Toia and Wong – and is called “100% Pure Conjecture”. It provides a set of four scenarios outlining possible futures for New Zealand, and it is different and interesting. Joris de Bres provides an afterword.

If I were to pick a favourite, I would opt for the chapter by Teaiwa and Mallon on Pacific peoples. It is well written and it looks at the ambivalence that is a consequence of migration for Pacific communities, especially the presence and influence of the New Zealand-born. This is exemplified by instances from sports and the arts. The construction and ideologies of identity provide interesting material in many of the chapters, but do raise the question of what to call those identities.

The attribution or claiming of ethnic labels is inherently fraught, as it has come to mean not simply the classification of the self and others but a claim for resources and attention. Recent political campaigns demonstrate the competitive and contrary nature of such claims. Many of the chapters acknowledge the issues, but the authors do not always focus critical attention on their own practice or that of the state. For example, the popular use of the label “Pākehā” to refer to the majority group is rightly seen as being a matter for academic analysis. Pākehā resonates for some and is rejected by others.

However, first-order (popular) usage is often at odds with second-order (analytical) use, and in many cases it is unclear whether the term “Pākehā” can operate as a higher-level or analytical concept. For example, in the Ward and Lin chapter the label “New Zealand European” is used until midway through the chapter. when “Pākehā” makes an appearance. Whether the use of either label is appropriate as a second-order concept is not debated. Their own research shows that there is a preference for using national labels (37% preferred Kiwi, 30% New Zealander), but when labels for the majority group were acceptable, Pākehā (14%) edged out New Zealand European (12%). Moreover, Statistics New Zealand, a key state player in defining ethnic label usage, currently no longer uses “Pākehā” at all, even as a bracketed label, and exclusively uses “New Zealand European”.

There are at least three issues: common (including political) usage of ethnic labels, the choice of labels by official agencies and the legitimacy this conveys, and what works for analytical purposes. The first is given some attention but the latter two, little at all. Given the focus on identity, this is surprising.

The next issue is the question of what policies might be appropriate given the diversity that now prevails and the moral and political issues raised by colonialism. This is not a book about policy but many of the chapters deal with policy debates. The difficulty is that there is now a complex raft of policy initiatives and responses, and some chapters offer a simplistic rendering of state policy practice. A small number of chapters are frustrating for a different reason. When Barclay writes of imagining “democratic spaces” or that the Treaty of Waitangi does not “sit flat”, what does that mean? Barclay also argues:

[It is important] ... to expand a relational vision which speaks to the issues of politicisation/depolicitisation of culture and indigenous rights in relation to democracy rather than to address these issues directly.

Why? In the context of a general election in which conservative parties seek to dismiss any notion of indigenous or ethnic rights across a range of spheres, where the Māori Party reflects quite the opposite and there is a certain caution and ambivalence in centre-left parties, the political consequences for the nature of democracy do need to be addressed directly. The argument of this chapter, and the language in which it is presented, does not make a compelling case.

Finally, there is one other aspect that constitutes a gap. A reference point for many of the chapters is the speech by Don Brash at Orewa in 2004, and rightly so. It marks a clear conservative position which departs significantly from the Bolger government’s liberal stance and is a continuation of the “one citizenship” approach of Bill English. But this is only one side of the conversation. How do various audiences react to such messages? Does such a position reflect a significant constituency and who makes up that constituency? What is the role and contribution of the media, both mass and side-stream?

Despite the above qualifications, this is still a book that I would recommend. It does contribute to contemporary debates, although it might not be attractive to what appears to be a growing conservatism on ethnic/indigenous identity recognition. There are some appealing elements: the significance of *bro’ Town* in Teaiwa and Mallon’s chapter, the personal reflections of a Chinese-American migrant (James Liu) and the speculation of “100% Pure Conjecture”. Despite the attempt to transcend boundaries, there is still plenty of evidence of disciplinary silos and a lack of reference to those who have worked in related areas locally. Let us hope that *New Zealand Identities* contributes to informed discussion and leads to other publications in what is an exciting, if fraught, aspect of contemporary Aotearoa.