

**IN SEARCH OF ETHNIC NEW ZEALANDERS:  
NATIONAL NAMING IN THE 2006 CENSUS**

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**Abstract**

In the 2006 census the number of people reporting New Zealander as their ethnic group increased five-fold, making it the third most frequent response behind New Zealand European and Māori. The magnitude of the increase was surprising, but followed similar surges in national naming in the Canadian and Australian censuses. In this paper we ask: Who chooses to ethnically identify in the name of the nation and why? In so doing we emphasise the constructed nature of ethnicity and ethnic groups, and the political context within which ethnic identification decisions are made. Our analysis suggests the New Zealander incline was a phenomenon driven primarily by multi-generational New Zealanders who formerly identified as European. We discuss some reasons for why the national identifier appears to have selective appeal as an ethnic label, and reflect on how this may change in coming years.

**INTRODUCTION**

Users of ethnic and racial data worldwide have long been inured to the vagaries of identity reporting in official statistics. Changes to the census instrument, an increase in multiple-ethnicity reporting and inconsistencies in how individuals identify themselves have made the analysis of ethnicity data in New Zealand increasingly tricky (Callister et al. 2005). Even so, the sharp rise in the number of people recording a New Zealander-type response (e.g. New Zealander, Kiwi) in the 2006 census was surprising. Between 2001 and 2006 the number increased five-fold to nearly 430,000, making New Zealander the third most frequent ethnic group response behind New Zealand European and Māori. As Table 1 shows, prior to 2006 the number of people rejecting the listed tick-boxes in favour of a write-in New Zealander response had never exceeded 90,000. In the absence of obvious demographic (e.g. growth through migration and fertility) and operational (e.g. changes to the questionnaire) factors, the vast majority of the increase in New Zealander responses can be attributed to individuals changing their ethnic identification.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Based on historical patterns, the expected number of New Zealander responses in 2006 was about 135,000, which was 300,000 lower than the actual number recorded. People recording a New Zealander response in 2006 were predominantly people in New Zealand at the time of the 2001 census. The proportion of non-response to the ethnicity question in 2006 (4.2%) was comparable with 2001 (4.0%).

**Table 1 New Zealander Responses<sup>1</sup> to Census Ethnic Group Question, 1986–2006 censuses**

Census year	N	% of total population <sup>2</sup>	% change
1986	20,313	0.6	–
1991	20,800	0.6	2.4
1996	58,600	1.7	181.7
2001	85,300	2.4	45.6
2006	429,429	11.1	403.4

<sup>1</sup> Respondents who reported a New Zealander-type response (e.g. “New Zealander”, “Kiwi”) alone, or in combination with some other ethnic group (e.g. “New Zealander” and “New Zealand European”).

<sup>2</sup> Population specifying their ethnicity (N = 3,860,163).

Most public debates about New Zealander ethnic identification in the census have focused on whether it should be recognised as a bona fide ethnic group in official statistics, with the key criticism being that New Zealander is a national rather than ethnic identifier (Callister 2004, Johnston 2007, Misa 2006, Middleton 2006). Rather than adjudicate over whether New Zealander is a nationality or ethnic group, we ask for whom such a designation resonates and why? Our exploration is timely. With the next census just two years away, Statistics New Zealand has recently embarked on a review of the ethnicity classification standard, and has flagged New Zealander ethnic identification as a priority issue.

We begin with a select review of the literature, focusing on the constructed nature of ethnic groups and the dynamics of national naming in the censuses of other settler states, notably Canada. Using census data, we describe the key characteristics of those giving a New Zealander ethnic identification and consider the qualitative literature for insights on what such a designation may mean. Our interest is in what national naming in the census may signify with respect to ethnic inter-group relations, rather than the psychological meanings individuals assign to such labels. We conclude with some reflections on what New Zealander ethnic identification may mean for future relations.

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC GROUPS AND CATEGORIES

Within the social sciences, ethnic groups are generally conceived of as social constructions. Ethnicity and ethnic groups are neither primordial nor static, but are created and sustained through inter-group processes that involve competitive as well as intimate relations. To state that ethnicity is socially constructed does not deny its importance in the lives of individuals, nor does it deny the ubiquity of ethnic and racial inequality and divisions (Rallu et al. 2006). Rather, it draws attention to the subjective ways in which cultural markers are imbued with social significance and used to construct ethnic boundaries that delineate “us” from “them” (Barth 1969).

The national census is a key forum in which ethnic boundaries are rendered visible or invisible by the state. Ethnic groups are constituted in the census by grouping people on the basis of their identification decisions, usually made in response to a pre-specified set of options. Though such data may be presented to the public as objective reflections of the nation’s social reality, there are at least three ways in which ethnic data are political. First, the purpose for which ethnic data are collected invariably has a political dimension. Ethnic data have been used at various times and places to justify and sustain systems of ethnic inequality (e.g. apartheid in South Africa), although these days it is more common for ethnic data to be seen as integral to efforts to ameliorate discrimination (Morning and Sabbagh 2005). In the

settler states of Australasia and North America, data collected on the basis of ethnicity are used in multiple ways for policy and political purposes. In New Zealand this includes measuring equity of access to services such as health and education, and monitoring outcomes for particular ethnic groups and communities (Callister 2007).

Second, categories with which people identify may be the product of political processes. An explicit example of identity politics is lobbying to get a category listed on the census questionnaire. In the U.S., Mexican-American groups successfully lobbied for the inclusion of a separate Hispanic Origin category in the 1980 census, while Asian interest groups pushed for the inclusion of specific race categories in the 1980 and 1990 censuses (Nobles 2000). A more subtle form of political action is the strategic use of “identity frames” by social movements (Snow and Benford 1992) that heighten the appeal of an ethnic category, often in a way that resonates with a particular constituency. The motivation may be to maximise the counts associated with an established category in the pursuit of resources, or to push for the legitimisation of a category not yet recognised by the state.

Third, the process of statistically constituting ethnic groups is political in terms of consequences. As Kertzer and Arel note, “Censuses do more than reflect social realities, they also participate in the social construction of these realities” (2002:2). The constitutive aspect of “nominating groups into existence” extends beyond listing names on a census form to include the post-censal aggregation of categories for public dissemination. In New Zealand, the categories “Asian” and “Pacific peoples / Pasifika” exemplify how statistical categories are imbued with ethnic meaning, but are also selectively and strategically employed by those so categorised to denote a political community.

In recent decades the counting of ethnic groups in the New Zealand census has undergone dramatic change (see Statistics New Zealand 1993, 2004). The biggest change has been a shift from a system that required people to report their race or ethnic origins in fractions (e.g. “3/4 Māori and 1/4 European”), to one based on self-identification with an ethnic group or groups. The *Statistical Standard for Ethnicity* defines an ethnic group as people who have some or all of the following characteristics:

- a common proper name
- one or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified, but may include religion, customs or language
- a unique community of interests, feelings and actions
- a shared sense of common origins or ancestry
- a common geographic origin (Didham 2005).

Ethnicity is defined as the “group or groups that people *identify with or feel* they belong to” (italics added). The emphasis on self-identified ethnicity sits somewhat uneasily alongside the substantive notion of an ethnic group as a community of shared descent and cultural practice. It also raises an interesting sociological question germane to our investigation: Is self-identification with an ethnic category sufficient for the category to be considered a group?

Posing the question “are ethnic groups real?”, Fenton (2003) argues that what makes a collective of individuals a “group” is as important as defining what makes a group “ethnic”. In his view, the important distinction between ethnic groups and categories is too often fudged. To illustrate, people who recorded “Pakistani” on the British census form might be described in official statistics as the Pakistani ethnic group. However, whether in fact such

people constitute a corporate group or community, versus a “diffuse” identity category, is a matter of sociopolitical investigation rather than census definition.

Although the politics of ethnic counting and classification has usually been seen as the domain of minorities (Doane 1997, Kertzer and Arel 2002), there are signs this is changing. In Australia and Canada, patterns of national naming in the census have focused attention on the construction and mobilisation of majority group identities. In those countries Canadian and Australian have become, respectively, the most commonly reported ethnic origins and ancestry groups in the census (Lee and Edmonston 2007, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, Kunz and Costello 2003). In Australia, ethnic self-identification in the name of the nation has been largely confined to people who previously recorded English ancestry. In Canada, the pattern has been more complex, divided between the nation’s two charter groups: Anglophones and Francophones (Boyd 1999, Lee and Edmonston 2007). In seeking to understand the emergence of national naming in the New Zealand census, the experiences of other settler societies offer some useful insights. Given space constraints, we focus our comparison on Canada.

### NATIONAL NAMING IN THE SETTLER STATES

As in New Zealand, national naming in the Canadian census is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the 1986 census just 0.5% of the Canadian population recorded their ethnic origins as Canadian, very similar to the proportion recording New Zealander ethnicity in the 1986 New Zealand census.<sup>3</sup> In 1991 the share increased to 4%, prompting some commentators to ponder whether Canadian was an “evolving indigenous category” (Pryor et al. 1992). According to Boyd (1999), several structural changes occurred during the 1980s that heightened the appeal of affirming Canadian ethnic origins, including an increase in levels of migration, a shift in the source countries of migrants, and the increasingly conservative political climate. The catalyst, however, seemed to be a “Count-me-Canadian” campaign run by the *Toronto Sun* newspaper in the lead-up to the 1991 census, urging readers to state “Canadian” on their census forms. Analysis of “Canadian” responses suggested the campaign resonated most with a distinct segment of the Canadian population: people with a multi-generational presence in Canada residing in areas settled by British origin groups.

Following the increased reporting of Canadian ethnic origins, Canadian was listed as the fifth example response to the 1996 ethnic origin question in the English-language questionnaire, and Canadiene on the French version. Subsequently, the share reporting Canadian ethnic origins increased dramatically, from 4% in 1991 to 31% of the population in 1996. Given the regional selectivity of national naming in 1991, analysts were surprised to find Canadiene was the most popular ethnic origin choice (47%) in the Francophone province of Quebec. The finding was all the more surprising in light of historical demands for the recognition of Quebec sovereignty and a 1995 referendum on separation that had narrowly failed. Boyd argued that the pattern of national naming rested on the different “symbolic representation” of the terms Canadian and Canadiene. The former invoked location within the borders of the Canadian nation; the latter was a historical expression used by Francophones to denote their foundation status and distinguish them from Anglo politics, language and institutions.

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<sup>3</sup> Prior to 1981 the ethnic origin question in the Canadian census was specifically asked in relation to paternal ancestors and, from 1986 to 2001, in relation to ancestors generally (Statistics Canada 2002). The New Zealand census help notes specifically state that the ethnic group question concerns cultural identification, not ancestry. Response patterns to the Māori ancestry and ethnic group questions suggest that recognition of Māori descent is a determinant of Māori ethnic self-identification, but not vice versa (Kukutai 2004).

Irrespective of the potentially different meanings, the Canadian/Canadiene identifier surpassed British as the most frequent ethnic origin response in 1996. As a result, Canadian appeared as the first-listed example question in the 2001 census. Canadian ethnic origin responses peaked at 37% of the population, before dropping to 32% in 2006 (see Lee and Edmonston 2007 for a detailed analysis of 1991-2001 data). The Canadian experience underscores a point germane to our argument: ethnic identification in the census is not merely a matter of individual psychological processes, but is tied to the structure of group relations. The emergence of Canadian as the nation's largest ethnic origin response also points to the ways in which question design has the potential to dramatically influence ethnic identification patterns.<sup>4</sup>

Like the 1991 Canadian census, the 2006 New Zealand census was preceded by heightened public debate around the ethnicity question. Prior to the 2006 census, Statistics New Zealand decided to discontinue the practice of coding New Zealander-type responses into the New Zealand European category and code them as a separate category – a decision that was picked up by primetime news (TVNZ 2006).<sup>5</sup> In the month preceding the census a widely circulated “Declare your pride” email campaign encouraged people to state their ethnicity as New Zealander. The email rejected the division of people into sub-categories and voiced objections to being “treated as foreigners in our own country” (Middleton 2006). It stated that many people had been in New Zealand long enough to be able to claim New Zealander as “who we are”, regardless of ancestral origins or skin colour. The campaign lacked the institutional support of the Canadian campaign, but was given a significant, if varied, hearing through the mainstream media. At the same time, National party politician Gerry Brownlee added his voice to the debate, claiming officials were “perpetuating the myth that we are a country that is ethnically divided” (cited in Middleton 2006).

Similar to the “Count me Canadian” campaign, the “Declare your pride” campaign seemed to be a catalyst for the surge in New Zealander identification in the 2006 census. However, the reasons why the call was answered so readily by some also points to structural changes occurring throughout the 1990s and the years immediately preceding the census. In an earlier paper we argued three changes were especially influential in drawing sharper distinctions between Māori, immigrants and New Zealanders of European descent during that period (Kukutai and Didham 2007; see also Pearson 2000, 2002). They were:

- Māori identity politics and Treaty settlements, as well as their reactions – the latter included challenges to historical settlements and so-called “race-based” funding (Brash 2004)

<sup>4</sup> In the Australian context, Kunz and Costello (2003) describe the potential effects of form design and question sequencing on ancestry responses. In 2001 a number of ancestry tick-boxes, including Australian and English, were listed on the census form. In that census the number of people recording Australian ancestry surpassed English for the first time. The questionnaire design also appeared to influence the ancestry responses within the Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander population. Of those who responded to the ancestry question on the standard census form, a mere 7% recorded Aboriginal ancestry, compared to 67% recording Australian ancestry. Aboriginal origin peoples living in indigenous, usually remote, areas completed a different census form, which did not include an Australian tick-box. Among those people, 99% recorded Aboriginal ancestry.

<sup>5</sup> The decision to separately code New Zealander responses was one of the recommendations in the 2004 Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity, which received more than 120 submissions (Statistics New Zealand 2004). From 1991 through to 2001 New Zealander-type responses were coded as European at level 1 of the ethnic classification and New Zealand European at level 4, the most detailed listing. In 2006, New Zealander responses were coded as a separately named category at level 4 of the classification, and included with the Other ethnic grouping at level 1 (Statistics New Zealand 2005).

- rising immigration from “non-traditional” source countries, particularly those within Asia
- the shift to a more permissive system of ethnic self-identification in official statistics.

These factors, and the experiences of Canada and Australia, suggest national naming in the New Zealand census is more likely to resonate with multi-generational New Zealanders of European descent than with indigenous Māori or recent immigrants. To empirically examine this proposition, we undertake descriptive analysis using aggregate census data. Though we are unable to link responses across censuses, we can extrapolate from findings based on the recent censuses to make some informed interpretations.

## DATA ANALYSIS

We begin our analysis by comparing the distribution of ethnic group responses for the 2001 and 2006 censuses. To do so we employ level 1 coded data, which collapses more detailed ethnic responses into six ethnic categories: Māori, European, Asian, Pacific, MELAA (Middle Eastern / Latin American / African) and Other. The vast majority of those in the focal European category identified as New Zealand European.

**Table 2 Level 1 Ethnic Categories, 2001 and 2006 Census**

Level 1 category	2001 <sup>1</sup>	2006 <sup>1</sup>	% change
European	2,871,429 <sup>2</sup> (2,786,129)	2,609,589	-9.2 (-6.3)
Māori	565,281	565,329	+7.4
Pacific peoples	231,801	265,974	+14.4
Asian	238,176	354,552	+49.3
MELAA	24,084	34,743	+44.3
Other	802	430,881 <sup>3</sup>	-

1 Based on total responses, which includes all responses given for each ethnic category (e.g. a Māori and European response is counted in both categories).

2 Includes the 85,300 New Zealander responses.

3 Includes the 429,429 New Zealander responses.

Table 2 shows an obvious relative *and* absolute decline in the European grouping, providing support for the view that New Zealander ethnic identification was largely a European phenomenon. This view is hardly novel or contentious. Until the 2006 census, it was implied by the official practice of allocating New Zealander responses to the level 1 European category, rather than to Other. For inter-censal comparisons to be valid, however, the change in coding practices needs to be taken into account. If we assume the number of people who reported a combined New Zealander–European response in 2001 was negligible, and simply subtract the 85,300 New Zealander responses from the 2001 European category, we see a more modest, but still significant, decrease of 6.3% (figure in parentheses). By contrast, all of the other level 1 categories increased between 2001 and 2006, suggesting non-European groupings were not greatly affected by the large increase in New Zealander responses.

Additional insights into the characteristics of those recording a New Zealander response may be gained by considering more detailed level 4 ethnicity data. Table 3 shows the number and percentage constituted by the 10 most popular New Zealander responses.

Overall, there was a relatively low proportion of hyphenated New Zealander responses, with just 12.9% of New Zealander responses recorded as part of a complex ethnic identification. Though this was slightly higher than the level of multiple-ethnic reporting in the total population (10.4%), it was far below levels observed in Canada. There, about 40% of

Canadian responses in the 1996 and 2001 censuses were reported in conjunction with other ethnic origin groups (Lee and Edmonston 2007). Of the combination New Zealander responses, New Zealand European was by far the most commonly recorded group – almost five times larger than the next biggest combination. In addition, more people reported a multiple-ethnic affiliation of New Zealander, European and Māori than simply New Zealander and Māori. Comparatively few people recorded New Zealander in combination with an Asian or Pacific ethnic group.

**Table 3 Top 10 New Zealander Responses, Level 4, 2006 Census**

<b>New Zealander responses<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of New Zealander</b>	<b>% of total population<sup>2</sup></b>
New Zealander only	374,061	87.1	9.7
New Zealander / NZ European	27,897	6.5	0.7
New Zealander / NZ European / Māori	5,685	1.3	0.1
New Zealander / Māori	5,613	1.3	0.1
New Zealander / Chinese	1,500	0.3	0.0
New Zealander / Indian	897	0.2	0.0
New Zealander / Samoan	879	0.2	0.0
New Zealander / Dutch	654	0.2	0.0
New Zealander / English	609	0.1	0.0
New Zealander / Cook Island Māori	465	0.1	0.0
<b>Total New Zealander</b>	<b>429,429</b>	<b>99.1</b>	<b>10.6</b>

<sup>1</sup> Level 4 ethnic group responses with New Zealander

<sup>2</sup> Population indicating their ethnicity (N = 3,860,163).

The limited appeal of New Zealander as an ethnic option for Māori<sup>6</sup> is confirmed by considering the pattern of New Zealander responses by Māori ancestry. Table 4 shows 18.1% of the total population responding to the ethnic group question in the 2006 census, also recorded Māori ancestry. The proportion of New Zealander respondents recording Māori ancestry was significantly lower at 10.7%. Though we do not show tables for Europeans, we note this was very close to the proportion of Europeans recording Māori ancestry (11.8%). Age structure can be dismissed as an explanation because the proportion of New Zealanders with Māori ancestry, relative to the total population, was lower at every age group. This comparison suggests Māori were not strongly represented among New Zealander responses. We note, however, that only 28% of those who recorded a New Zealander response and acknowledged Māori descent did so in combination with Māori ethnicity.<sup>7</sup> This is much lower than the proportion in the overall Māori descent population that recorded Māori as part

<sup>6</sup> This does not mean Māori lack an attachment to New Zealander as a non-ethnic identity; e.g. national identity. When forced to choose between New Zealander and Māori identity, several surveys have shown that a significant number of Māori choose the former. In wave 1 (1995–1997) of Te Hoe Nuku Roa, the longitudinal study of Māori households, respondents were asked “If you had to choose one of these options that best describes you, which would you choose?”. The majority (51%) selected “a Māori”, but a sizeable share (25%), opted for “a New Zealander” or “a Kiwi” (Te Hoe Nuku Roa Research Team 1999). Similarly, a 2008 Marae Digipoll survey of 400 in the Māori electorate of Hauraki–Waikato asked respondents to self-prioritise an identity. The question asked: “Do you think of yourself as...”, with response options including “Māori first” (70.6%), “New Zealander first” (17.2%), “Both” (11.9%), and “Don’t know” (0.2%) (see TVNZ 2008). The non-specific nature of the identity question in both surveys means we do not know on what basis people responded. In both cases, respondents were defined as Māori by descent rather than ethnic affiliation.

<sup>7</sup> In the 2006 census, 41,819 people who recorded a New Zealander response also recorded Māori descent. Of those, only 11,854 also reported Māori ethnicity.

of a dual or multiple ethnic group response. It is likely that some people who identified as Māori in 2001 changed their ethnic identification to New Zealander in 2006, but the extent of the loss cannot be reliably ascertained here.

**Table 4 Māori Ancestry by Age Group, New Zealander Responses and Total Population, 2006 Census**

<u>Age group (years)</u>	<u>% of New Zealander</u>	<u>% of total population</u>
0–4	17.5	30.4
5–9	18.1	29.3
10–14	17.0	27.7
15–19	14.6	24.8
20–24	13.2	20.4
25–29	13.1	20.1
30–34	12.0	18.4
35–39	11.1	16.5
40–44	10.2	15.3
45–49	8.4	14.0
50–54	7.2	12.6
55–59	6.2	10.7
60–64	5.1	9.5
65–69	5.2	9.2
70–74	4.7	7.6
75–79	4.0	5.4
80–84	3.4	3.9
85+	2.1	3.4
<u>All ages combined</u>	<u>10.7</u>	<u>18.1</u>

One of the most striking aspects of the New Zealander responses shown in Table 5 is the predominance of the New Zealand-born. A massive 94% of those identifying as New Zealander were born in New Zealand, compared with just 77% of the total population. Among the 24,000 or so overseas-born people who identified as New Zealander, more than half were born in the United Kingdom. Very few were born in Asian countries, though both regions were equally represented in the total population. Geographic differences in the claiming of New Zealander identity is likely to reflect, in part, the different migration histories of groups, with the vast majority of overseas-born New Zealanders having lived in New Zealand for 20 years or more (see Allan 2007).

Clearly, nativity is a fundamental – almost universal – element of New Zealander ethnic identification, but does this extend to multi-generational ties? One way to assess the influence of generational attachment is to consider the representation of the first generation (individuals born overseas), second generation (New Zealand-born individuals with one or two immigrant parents), and third generation (New Zealand-born persons with parents who were also New Zealand-born) among New Zealander responses. Because a question on parental birthplace is not asked in the census, we limit the following analysis to “children” (in the familial role, rather than life-cycle sense) who were living in the same household as their parents in the 2006 census, and for whom country of birth was recorded.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> There is a strong age bias in this approach because most children in families are young people. There may also be bias because of our choice to restrict this comparison to two-parent families, when a significant proportion of families in New Zealand have one co-residing parent.



**Table 5 Geographic Region of Birth, New Zealander Responses and Total Population, 2006 Census**

Geographic region of birth	New Zealander		Total population	
	N	%	N	%
New Zealand	401,142	94.4	2,960,217	77.1
United Kingdom	11,004	2.6	251,688	6.6
Europe	2,097	0.5	68,067	1.8
Pacific	4,386	1.0	198,594	3.5
Asia <sup>1</sup>	2,475	0.6	251,130	6.5
Other	3,915	0.9	110,064	2.2
Total <sup>2</sup>	425,022	100.0	3,839,760	100.00

1 Includes South-East, North-East, and Southern and Central Asia.

2 Limited to those who specified country of birth.

Table 6 shows that of the 82,845 children recorded as New Zealander, 78% were born in New Zealand to New Zealand-born parents. This was significantly higher than their representation in the total population. As expected, very few of the children recorded as New Zealander were foreign-born children of foreign-born parents. Taken together, Tables 5 and 6 suggest ethnic identification as a New Zealander is heavily influenced by nativity and generational ties.

**Table 6 Migrant Generation for Children in Two-Parent Families, New Zealander Responses and Total Population, 2006 Census**

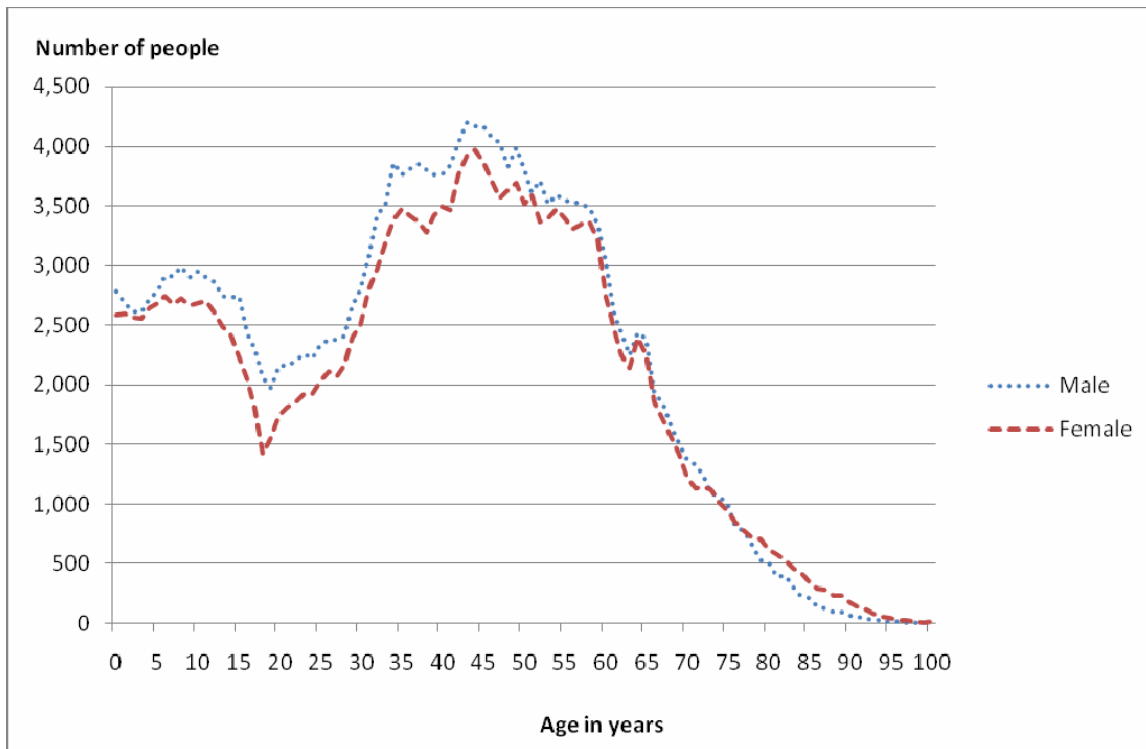
	New Zealander		Total population	
	N	%	N	%
<i>1st generation</i>				
Child and parents born overseas	888	1.1	96,336	12.3
<i>2nd generation</i>				
Child born in NZ, both parents born overseas	3,321	4.0	87,195	11.1
Child born in NZ, one parent born in NZ	13,863	16.7	118,395	15.1
<i>3rd generation</i>				
Child born in NZ, both parents NZ born	64,773	78.2	481,494	61.5
Total*	82,845	100.0	783,420	100.0

\* Only includes families where country of birth was recorded for child and both parents.

Finally, examination of the age-sex structure and regional distribution of New Zealander responses provides additional evidence of the selective nature of national naming (see Figures 1 and 2). The figures show New Zealander ethnic identification was especially marked among middle-aged men residing in the South Island. The number of New Zealander-identified males exceeded females at nearly every age, particularly in the middle ages of the lifespan. This is significant given the excess of women relative to men at these ages in the total population. Regions noted for their European dominance, notably the West Coast, Southland and Marlborough, also had a higher proportion of their populations responding as New Zealanders, in part reflecting the higher median age in those areas. These demographic features suggest the appeal of New Zealander ethnic identification does not have generic

appeal for all Europeans, but is more likely to resonate with older people living in areas that are overwhelmingly European in composition.

**Figure 1 Age Structure of New Zealander Responses, by single year of age, 2006 census**

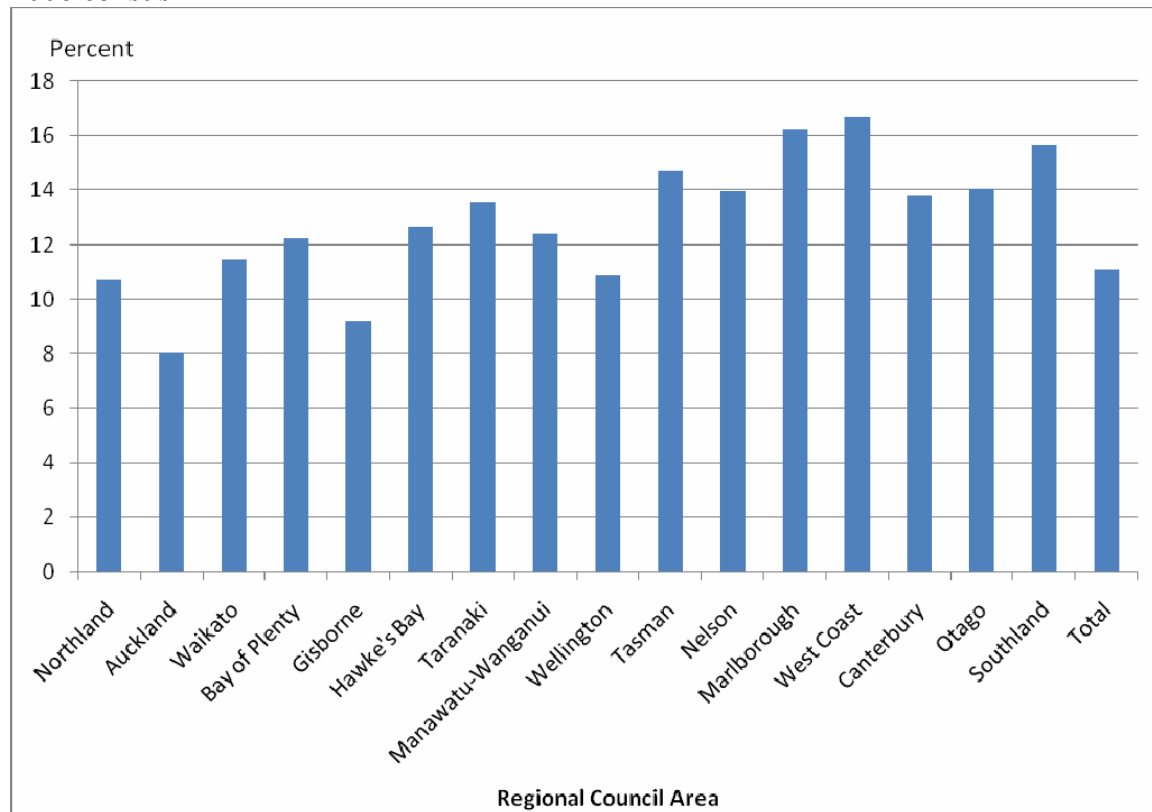


Source: Statistics New Zealand 2007, Figure 4.

Taken together, our findings suggest people who formerly identified with a European ethnicity were the dominant force behind the rise in New Zealander responses. We acknowledge, however, that probabilistic matching across censuses is desirable to more accurately assess the flows, including the potential contribution of people formerly recording Māori or Pacific ethnicities.<sup>9</sup> The patterns observed in our analysis raise a second and more difficult question: Why does national naming resonate with some groups and not others? These questions cannot be answered by census data, but require analysis of a qualitative sort. It is to this we now turn.

<sup>9</sup> Studies of shifts in ethnic identification (Coope and Piesse 1997) have shown significant inflows and outflows across the boundaries of the Māori and Pacific ethnic groups. Our analysis is unable to account for these sorts of flows; for example, an outflow of Māori to New Zealander may have been masked by an inflow to Māori from other groups.

**Figure 2 Proportion of Region's Population Recording a New Zealander Response, 2006 census**



Source: Statistics New Zealand 2007, Figure 11

## THE DYNAMICS OF NEW ZEALANDER ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

### Rejection of Ethnicity

In seeking to account for the European dominance of national naming, one potential interpretation of New Zealander identification is that it signals the rejection of ethnic labelling. Bonilla-Silva (2003) has argued that colourblindness – or the denial that ethnicity or race matters – is an ideology used by many members of the dominant group to counter the perceived threat posed by ethnic pluralism and minority group rights. In New Zealand, the refrain “we are all New Zealanders” was historically deployed at various times to deny Māori claims to distinctiveness, while glossing over persistent racial inequality and the institutional dominance of British culture (Pearson 1990). In 2006, a colourblind construction of New Zealander ethnicity might manifest as a response to the twin threats of Māori politicisation and growing ethnic diversification through rising Asian immigration. The reference to ethnic divisions in the New Zealander email campaign would appear to be consistent with the rejection of ethnic distinctions.

A slightly different interpretation is that the resistance to ethnic self-ascription reflects a more passive tendency for members of majority groups to see themselves as being without ethnicity or race. In the United States context, Doane (1997) has argued the low visibility and salience of the dominant White identity lies in the group's dominant status. Because dominant groups have the power to influence national institutions (e.g. schools, laws, the media), their preferences and standards come to be seen as natural or objective, rather than

tied to a particular group. As a result, the distinction between national identity and ethnic identity tends to be less marked.

Similar observations have been made in New Zealand in relation to White New Zealanders of European descent (Bell 1996, Liu 2005, Wetherell and Potter 1992). Survey research undertaken by Liu found that 15 to 35% of people he referred to as “Pakeha/New Zealand Europeans” refused to report an ethnic label, referring to themselves as New Zealanders or “just kiwis”. Noting the absence of similar claims among Māori, Pacific or Asian New Zealanders in his samples, Liu concluded it was “only the majority group that seeks the prerogative and has the power to go ethnically unmarked” (2005:78). In the context of national naming patterns, the distinction between ethnic self-identification (i.e. what I say I am) and ethnic ascription (i.e. what others say I am) is not trivial. Processes of ascription play an important role in how individuals experience ethnic labels and the privileges or disadvantages that attach to them. There is an abundance of research showing that “ethnic options” are greater for some groups than for others, with more flexibility tending to be associated with greater political and social status (Waters 1990).

### Ethnicity Reconfigured

Rather than signal the rejection of ethnicity, New Zealander ethnic identification may denote a process of ethnic reconfiguration or formation. Pearson (2000, 2002) has written persuasively about how British-descent New Zealanders have had to renegotiate their identity within a complex of changing relations that includes the distancing of ties with England. He argues that for much of New Zealand’s colonial past, settler élites and most of the Anglo masses were “comfortable with a transnational civic and ethnic identity, as imperial and local British” (2002:1004). In many legal and political contexts, the distinction between New Zealand-born people of British descent and British immigrants was minor.<sup>10</sup> However, weakening economic and political attachments to Britain, coupled with Māori politicisation and intensified immigration, spawned a search for a new identity and legitimating myths. Pearson suggests the renegotiation of settler identity has primarily involved a reassessment of relations with two “intimate others” – “Britons past (and present) and Māori” (2000:104).

Over the last two decades multiple frames have been provided for the renegotiation of dominant group identity. One is through discourses that have framed multi-generational New Zealanders of European, but mostly British, descent as the nation’s second indigenous peoples. Initially this re-imagining of indigeneity was invoked in relation to Pākehā identity. During the height of Māori political activism the term Pākehā was self-consciously used as “the basis for a nationalist project seeking a bicultural or bi-national accommodation with Māori” (Pearson 2002:1005). Pākehā, thus conceived, represented what Moran (2002) calls “indigenizing settler nationalism”, according indigenous peoples and their claims a central position in national identity.

The clearest articulation of Pākehā indigeneity can be found in the work of the late historian Michael King (1985, 1999). According to King, Pākehā indigeneity has emerged out of a multi-generational presence in New Zealand, an emotional attachment to the land, and values and culture that are *distinctly* New Zealand (italics added). King’s formulation of a second indigenous people has had several detractors, with the key concern being that it minimises the

<sup>10</sup> Women who were British subjects and married a so-called “race alien” (i.e. non- Māori, non-European) were exceptions to this general rule and automatically lost their British status (Census and Statistics Office 1925:111, Didham 2009).

legacy of colonialism and seems to appropriate Māori claims to indigeneity (see, for example, Bell 2004). The notion of majority group indigeneity continues to have considerable popular and political appeal but is more likely to be expressed in the nomenclature of New Zealander than Pākehā, for reasons noted below.

### The Default Ethnic Option

A third perspective is that New Zealander ethnic identification represents the default ethnic option. Research and public opinion have shown a lack of consensus among members of the majority group about the most appropriate label for their group (see, for example, Liu 2005, Statistics New Zealand 1993, 2004). This is not a new phenomenon: the problem of defining the ethnicity of the majority group was flagged as an issue for ethnic classification and statistics as part of a review undertaken in 1993 (Statistics New Zealand 1993). Given discontent with the terms Pākehā, European and New Zealand European, New Zealander might simply be seen as the most appropriate and comfortable option. But why did labels that were once seen as acceptable in colloquial usage become unacceptable or inappropriate statistical categories? The historical and statistical record is replete with examples of Pākehā and European used as descriptors of self and other.<sup>11</sup> However, from the late 1980s the meaning of Pākehā seems to have changed, in part due to its usage in political discourses setting out Māori grievances. Interestingly, Pākehā as a social category is still popular among Māori, with Liu's research showing Māori-identified New Zealanders prefer the label Pākehā for New Zealanders of European descent much more than those so labelled.

Like Pākehā, the New Zealand European identifier has also been subject to criticism, not because of negative connotations but because it lacks a meaningful point of reference (King 1999, Statistics New Zealand 2004). As a statistical term, New Zealand European first appeared in the 1991 census, then as NZ European *or* Pākehā in the 1996 census, reverting to NZ European in 2001. Despite European being the only ethnic group in official statistics to be preceded by the New Zealand identifier, critics have argued that it is too generic to serve as a meaningful ethnic label, and/or is irrelevant for those with only distant ties to the European continent. For now, many more people continue to check the New Zealand European tick-box than write in a New Zealander response, which suggests the former label resonates on some level. However, the Canadian and Australian experiences suggest this may change if a New Zealander tick-box is introduced in future.

### CONCLUSION

In the settler states of North America and Australasia, census-based enquiries into ethnicity are an integral tool of policy makers. As the flagship of official statistics in many countries, the census is also a site of inclusion and exclusion, where ethnicity and ethnic groups are constructed, reconfigured or rendered invisible (Kertzer and Arel 2002). As such, the emergence of national naming in the censuses of Australia, Canada and New Zealand offers intriguing insights into the socially constructed bases of ethnicity and ethnic groups, and the ways in which shifting group relations at the macro-level are implicated in shifting identification patterns at the individual level. How individuals choose to identify themselves on a census form may seem a deeply personal or perhaps a relatively inconsequential matter,

<sup>11</sup> The term European was widely used as a racial descriptor for individuals who were neither Māori nor "race alien" in the Census from 1874 through to the 1980s. Pākehā was largely absent from official statistics but was often used and understood in workaday and public life as a neutral descriptor for White New Zealanders. See, for example, its usage in the National Party's election campaign (McIntyre and Gardner 1971:412).

depending on how the form filler sees the exercise. However, Bell (1996) reminds us that naming is never “innocent”. Rather, she argues, “what is at stake here is more than personal preferences for this term or that, but significant discursive struggles that both represent and constitute part of wider political struggles being waged in our society on the basis of claims of cultural identity.”

By combining the theoretical literature with qualitative insights from Canada and New Zealand we have sought to bring sociological perspectives to bear on the questions: For whom does the New Zealander ethnic designation resonate, and why? In so doing we have emphasised the importance of the political context within which identification decisions are made. As in Canada, the trend towards national naming in New Zealand appears to be linked to processes that have drawn sharper distinctions between indigenes, immigrants and settlers. To that end, national naming seems to resonate most among people with multi-generational ties to New Zealand but who are not of Māori descent, and who live in areas where Europeans predominate. We note, however, that for the majority of self-identified New Zealanders, it is unlikely at this time that processes of attribution would lead them to be designated New Zealander by others. More likely, European or Pākehā would be the signifier that springs to mind because the term New Zealander is not yet (and might never be) bedded into the vernacular as an ethnic descriptor of white New Zealanders. We have suggested that national naming by majority group members may signal a rejection of ethnicity, its configuration in the form of dominant group indigeneity, a default ethnic option, a combination of these elements, or some other trend. The answer cannot be discerned from census data, but hopefully future research using more qualitative methods will provide illumination.

One of the key substantive concerns to emerge from our analysis is the selectivity of New Zealander ethnic identification. In Canada there have been ongoing debates about whether or not ethnic data should be collected and the potential for national naming in the census to be a force for social division or cohesion (Howard-Hassman 1999, Jedwab 2003). In theory, if not in practice, national identity (as distinct from legal citizenship) is an affiliation that everyone within the nation can lay claim to, irrespective of symbolic or concrete ties to communities of difference. Moreover, an ethnic group derives its meaning vis-à-vis other groups, which necessitates boundary making, even if those boundaries are porous and changeable. If the meaning of New Zealander evolves to become an ethnic dimension of difference, particularly one that is predominantly claimed by New Zealanders of European descent, where does that leave those who do not lay claim to New Zealander ethnicity? Do they become the outsiders? Should we be concerned about that prospect? If the New Zealand census follows the path of Australia and Canada, the prospect of a New Zealander tick-box in future is not improbable. The statistical and substantive implications of such a move are manifold, but are unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

Finally, although we have emphasised the selective nature of national naming, it may be that some, or even many, of the people who identify as New Zealander conceive of their affiliation in inclusive terms. Because processes of ethnic labelling and classification are inherently political, the meanings associated with such categories are unlikely to remain stable or uncontested. The New Zealander signifier, once used by colonists as a synonym for Māori, but now apparently in transition to denote homegrown New Zealanders of European/British origins, exemplifies this process. However, patterns of New Zealander identification, and their meanings, may yet expand to include more diverse ancestries. Only

the passage of time and generational distance will tell if a more inclusive rendering will emerge.

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