Book Review:

*Counting Stories, Moving Ethnicities: Studies from Aotearoa New Zealand*

Editors: Rosalind McLean, Brad Patterson, David Swain.
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The study of population is principally a practice of enumeration, classification and generating meaning. The notion of population that forms the foundation of the field itself has only emerged in a modern era when technologies of calculation have become much more widely employed as a practice of the state. One of the most widespread, if also controversial, practices of population study is the enumeration of race and ethnicity, which emerges equally in political contexts underpinned by logics ranging from colonialism, apartheid and eugenics through to a multicultural emphasis on diversity. The enumeration of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ is then also an area where there remains much scope to explore the implications of the measurement and governance of population. In this regard, the edited volume *Counting Stories, Moving Ethnicities: studies from Aotearoa New Zealand* promises to offer an important contribution to the study of population both in this country and more broadly.

The volume emerged as a result of a one-day workshop on “ethnic counting” organised by Brad Patterson. Patterson, along with Rosalind McClean and David Swain, has edited this collection which includes contributors from the workshop and two invited chapters, one by Tahu Kukutai and the other by Michael Goldsmith. The workshop and the volume sought to focus on the practices of counting ethnicities and their

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implications for our knowledge of the worlds we inhabit. In doing so, the editors recognise that “quantification is as much or more about classification, words and meanings as it is about counting” (p. 3). With the notable exception of Kukutai’s chapter, they also focus explicitly on the construction of Pākehā or New Zealand European ethnicities, an area that they accurately note remains relatively understudied in the New Zealand context.

Across the seven substantive chapters, introduction and afterword that make up the volume, the authors in this collection cover a significant territory in terms of topics, approaches and styles of presentation. This includes chapters that explore specific research findings in relation to ethnicity, such as Gerard Horn’s examination of the role of ethnicity in Wellington’s Irish protestant community and Angela McCarthy’s fascinating discussion of the role of ethnic identities in lunatic asylums. By contrast, the three chapters authored by Rebecca Lenihan, Ian Pool, and Jo Barnes and David Swain provide more methodological accounts that place emphasis on the tools that demographers and others can use in the exploration of ethnicity, including different data sets for assessing migration patterns (Lenihan), fertility rates (Pool), and the value of genealogical data for analysis of ethnicity (Barnes and Swain).

Kukutai and Goldsmith, two authors who somewhat curiously were not involved in the original workshop, provide without a doubt the standout chapters in this volume. Kukutai’s incisive account of the changing conception of “Māori” is particularly important for framing a volume which often seems to get stuck in the minutiae of data sets. The focus here is threefold: on the collective awareness of ethnicity, the institutional power involved in counting and classification and the complexity of state practices associated with ethnicity. Through this lens, Kukutai nimbly delineates the manner in which the idea of Māori as a category has shifted from predictions of racial demise through pressures to amalgamate and ideas of caste and quantum, to economic integration and the much more variegated assemblage of ancestry, ethnicity and iwi affiliation that has emerged since 1986. Similarly, Goldsmith offers an insightful account of the use of the European category in Aotearoa New Zealand, tying ethnic categorisation to the emergence of modern thinking on population and its important connection to the changing socio-political orientation of the state. Collectively these two chapters illustrate what is
possible when demographic techniques are put under the spotlight of critical scholarly attention – questions of ideology, power, the state, people and populations, race and ethnicity as constructed yet concrete ideas, and the implications of institutional practices for everyday life emerge and offer the potential for new insights into our histories of counting.

Unfortunately, despite these important contributions, this volume is characterised by inconsistency. As the summary of chapters here suggests, the volume lacks coherence in terms of its focus, and once the reader moves beyond Kukutai and Goldsmith, theory largely falls off the radar. In part this relates to differences in approach, but this raises the question as to whether these authors are all pursuing similar goals – it seems difficult to reconcile the vast chasm between ideas of ethnicity as governmental practice (as in Kukutai and Goldsmith), social construct (for the editors and McCarthy), mere category of the world, or even as a “genetic” factor that is influential in migration decisions (in Barnes and Swain’s chapter, p. 135). There is also variation in presentation, with some chapters lacking in content or clear arguments. Finally, while the editors are right that minimal emphasis has been placed on this country’s presumptive “normal” ethnicity – that is, Pākehā or European – the volume feels somewhat partial without some account of the counting of other ethnicities, bar of course Kukutai’s account of Māori. While much has been written on Asian and Pacific ethnicities in recent years, very few authors have engaged in critical reflection on practices of classification which are at the heart of this volume.

As Patterson notes in his afterword, “the connecting thread in this volume is counting” (p. 209). Readers will find some useful material here on histories of counting in Aotearoa New Zealand, and some directions for future research on demographic questions that may shed light on the historical constitution of this country’s population. The chapters can be read independently and the editorial introduction does offer a useful framing for this area of study. Notwithstanding a notable inconsistency, then, this volume offers value to a range of students and scholars concerned with our histories of counting ethnicity and what they might mean for the future of our population.