

# Seeking an ethnic identity: Is “New Zealander” a valid ethnic group?

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## Introduction

A small, but increasing, number of respondents to official surveys, including the Census of Population and Dwellings, are writing down “New Zealander” as their response to questions about ethnicity. However, in reportage from the last three censuses, these people have been subsequently reclassified by Statistics New Zealand as “New Zealand Europeans” and, ultimately, in official reports as just “Europeans”.<sup>1</sup> While there has been a long and ongoing debate as to who is Maori (e.g. Kukutai, 2003; O’Regan, 2001; Pool, 1991; Waymouth, 2003), there is now a parallel discussion as to whether “New Zealander” is a valid ethnic group. Some of this discussion centres on the emerging ethnic identity of those “New Zealanders” with primarily European ancestry. But the discussion is also influenced by intermarriage between non-Maori and Maori as well as recent migration from non-traditional sources. While it is not possible to address these issues in isolation from discussions about the term “Pakeha”, in this paper I focus primarily on recent debates over whether the category “New Zealander” should be rejected as a valid ethnic group.

## “New Zealander” as an ethnic group

In New Zealand it is generally accepted that ethnicity is a culturally constructed concept (Allan, 2001). For example, in a paper setting out a Maori perspective for Statistics New Zealand’s 2001 review of ethnicity statistics, Robson and Reid (2001:24) note “[i]t is our right to name our own identity and to have our ethnicity recorded as we wish.” There are various factors that influence the way in which individuals classify their ethnicity, one of which can be nationality (Allan, 2001). However, in New Zealand there has been an ongoing debate as to whether people should be able to construct their ethnicity on the basis of New Zealand nationality.<sup>2</sup> For example, in a book chapter on racism, Spoonley (1993: 16) argues that nationality does not replace a specific ethnicity. He sees an appeal to the idea “we are all New Zealanders” as a way of denying ethnicity, adding that “this particular form of nationalism is often contradicted by the racism of its adherents”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In 2001, 78,111 recorded “New Zealander”, 8,886 “Kiwi”, and 2,230 “Kiwi and New Zealander”. In addition, 8,128 recorded “Pakeha”, 203 “Native” and 806 “White”. All these responses have been reclassified as “New Zealand Europeans”.

<sup>2</sup> Place makes a difference to whether someone is accepted as a “New Zealander”. For example, if living in the US a person can record “New Zealander” as an ethnic group and this will be identified in detailed census output. However, when high-level output is presented, they will be placed in the group “white” (Bhopal, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> This is a view shared by Ansley (2003) when discussing reactions to debates about ownership of the seabed and foreshore. He argues that the notion “we are all New Zealanders” stands for intolerance” (p. 19). By contrast, the campaign asserting that we are “all New Zealanders”, supported by the Human Right Commission, aims not to deny ethnicity, but instead is designed to challenge “racial stereotypes” and

Negating the ability to determine one's own ethnic group, Robson and Reid (2001: 13) also question whether "New Zealander" can be an ethnic group:

...currently a small proportion of the New Zealand population disagrees with the ethnicity question and writes 'New Zealander' in the space labeled 'other'. However, strictly speaking, New Zealander is a nationality not an ethnicity.

An examination of the questions in recent New Zealand censuses shows that there has been some confusion as to whether nationality comprises a valid ethnic group. In the 2001 census, respondents could tick eight possible ethnic groups and/or record in their own.<sup>4 5</sup> The choices (in order) were:

- New Zealand European<sup>6</sup>
- Maori
- Samoan
- Cook Island Maori
- Tongan
- Niuean
- Chinese
- Indian

A final tick box was "other" and the respondent was asked to "please state". Three examples, Dutch, Japanese and Tokelauan were provided. While the census "help notes" informed respondents that ethnicity is not about nationality, some of the examples given in the form comprise both ethnic groups and countries. In published three-digit level data from the 2001 census, ethnic groups include Australians, Germans, Poles and Dutch.<sup>7 8</sup>

The 1996 census question exhibited some similarities to the 1991 and 2001 censuses, but also some important differences. The New Zealand Maori ethnic group was at the top of the list of categories. The second choice, "New Zealand European", also had the

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encourage "a greater understanding of the many different groups that make up New Zealand society" (Human Rights Commission, 2003: 1).

<sup>4</sup> The 1991 and 2001 census questions were very similar. The one difference was that, in 2001, the words "New Zealand" were removed from the category "New Zealand Maori" (Lang, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> In their submission to the 2001 Review of Ethnicity Statistics the Human Rights Commission questions why some groups have the term "New Zealand" attached and others do not, e.g. "New Zealand" European but not "New Zealand" Samoan or "New Zealand" Tongan. The HRC expressed concern that people other than Pakeha were unable to indicate a "New Zealand" aspect to their ethnicity (Barnard, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> The 1991 census was the first one to add "New Zealand" in front of the word European in the set of ethnic choices.

<sup>7</sup> Australians are then classified at the one-digit level as "Europeans". However, there is also a separate category for Australian aboriginals (Allan, 2001: 11).

<sup>8</sup> Collins (2001) notes that country-based ethnicities such as Italian are themselves recent constructs often based on a regrouping following migration. In the US, Italians are comprised of people whose original homeland identities would have included Sicilians, Calabrians, Neapolitans, and Genoans. Collins also notes that even these regional subgroups are the result of assimilation of previously fragmented villages or clans.

alternative label “*or* Pakeha”.<sup>9</sup> After this choice there was also an extra category “Other European”.

If the respondent ticked this “Other European” box, then they were directed to another set of tick boxes that included English, Dutch, and Australian. This separation of “New Zealand European” and “Other European” provided some sense that “New Zealand European”s were “native” New Zealanders. The term “Pakeha” reinforced this idea. Finally, amongst the main ethnic choices there was also a tick box entitled “Other”. Examples given were Fijian or Korean. Again, respondents to this “Other” tick box were directed to print their own ethnic group(s). Like the 1991 and 2001 censuses, the 1996 census had examples of groups that could be considered as countries and/or as ethnic groups.

Thus, in all three censuses, instead of, or in combination with, ticking a box for a predetermined ethnic group, respondents could write in their own ethnic group. Responses included: “New Zealander”, “Kiwi” or “Pakeha”. The number of respondents claiming to be one of these groups is not insignificant. According to Allan (2001), in 1986 20,313 people recorded “New Zealander” in response to the ethnic origin question in the census. Overall, the group recording a “New Zealander” type response rose from just under 45,000 in 1996 to over 89,000 in 2001 (Potter *et al*, 2003). In 2001, this group represented just over 2 percent of the total population that indicated an ethnic group.

Researchers, policy makers and statistical agencies recognise a need to reduce the complexity of large-scale data collections so they commonly regroup the many possible responses to a much smaller number of categories. Five ethnic groupings are commonly used in New Zealand social science and policy making. These are “European”, “Maori”, “Pacific Peoples”, “Asian”, and “Other”.<sup>10 11</sup> In order to fit everyone into one of these categories, Statistics New Zealand previously made the decision to firstly reallocate all “New Zealander”, “Kiwi” and “Pakeha” responses to the “New Zealand European” subgroup. This group then became part of the wider “European” group. Therefore, while

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<sup>9</sup> “Pakeha” is a term that has not been universally accepted in New Zealand (for discussions of this issue see Bedggood, 1997; Pearson and Sissons, 1997; Spoonley, 1993). For instance, in a submission to the 2001 Review of Ethnicity Statistics, the Human Rights Commission records that one of the most common complaints to the former Race Relations Office was from people objecting to being labelled “Pakeha” (Barnard, 2001). The uncertainty about the status of the term Pakeha can be observed in the book *Tauīwi*. The publishers decided that the term “Pakeha” should not be capitalized (Spoonley *et al*, 1984). Spoonley (1993: 61) argues “there is considerable confusion about what being Pākehā means for many Pākehā”.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics New Zealand notes that, technically, aside from Maori, all the one-digit ethnic groups are not individual ethnic groups but collections of groups (Allan, 2001). However, the general public would not be generally aware of this important distinction. While New Zealand European is a box that can be “ticked”, the higher-level groups of “European”, “Pacific Peoples”, and “Asian” are not groups that can be “ticked” in census responses. These latter groups are “ethnic categories” not “ethnic groups” or “ethnic communities” (Pearson, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> However, there is a sixth group that is important. This is the combined “no response” or “not defined” group. Respondents may be categorised as being in this group for a number of reasons. One is that an individual simply fails to fully complete the census form. Another is that, for whatever reason, a respondent does not want to record their ethnic groups(s). In 2001, just under 4 percent of respondents did not state their ethnic group.

a respondent made an active choice not to tick the box “New Zealand European”, they were nevertheless allocated to this category and ultimately were counted as “Europeans”. While other ethnic groups are recoded to higher level groupings (for example Samoan to “Pacific Peoples”, or Chinese to “Asian”) it would be very rare for someone other than a “New Zealander” to be recoded to an ethnic group that they had actively chosen to avoid.

This coding decision by Statistics New Zealand appears to have been based on the presumption that people noting “New Zealander” are from majority groups known variously as “New Zealand Europeans” or “Pakeha”. While in the early days of colonisation Maori were often classified as “New Zealanders”, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is now often assumed it is only non-Maori who are choosing this label.<sup>12</sup>

This assumption was lent some support by research undertaken by Dupuis *et al* (1999). In their Smithfield project, a large-scale education study, the combined group of “Kiwi” and “New Zealander” made up a fifth of responses to a question on ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> In order to further investigate the backgrounds of those claiming to be “Kiwis” or “New Zealanders”, the researchers followed up on a geographically-based, sub-sample of the original group. They report that 96 percent of those contacted gave responses that indicated that they were “Pakeha” (p. 45).<sup>14</sup> A further 2 percent were “Maori/Pakeha”, while a further 2 percent identified as “Pacific People/Pakeha”. However, even based on this research by Dupuis *et al* the decision by Statistics New Zealand to recode all “New Zealanders” as “New Zealand European” means that over 3,000 people were potentially miscoded in the 2001 census.

Other research undermines the assumption that almost all “Kiwis” or “New Zealanders” are from the “New Zealand European” ethnic group. Te Hoe Nuku Roa (1999: Appendix 5) reports that when individuals of the Maori-descended adults in the baseline survey had to chose *one* option that best described themselves, 11 percent said “Kiwi” and 15 percent “New Zealander”.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, one in every four Maori-descended people wanted to define their ethnicity primarily as “Kiwi” or “New Zealander”. This 26 percent figure does not additionally identify those people who wished to identify first as Maori but also as “New Zealander/Kiwi”.

Data from a national sample of just over 2,000 individuals also suggests some diversity amongst the “New Zealander” group (Webster, 2001: 95). Respondents were first asked

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<sup>12</sup> Maori in the geographic area that is now New Zealand were defined by early British explorers, colonists, and official data collectors as “Indians”, “Aborigines”, “Natives” or “New Zealanders”, as well as “Maori” (Allan, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> This was an open-ended question that asked “How would you describe your cultural background?” (p. 38). However, this question was preceded by a paragraph providing examples of single and mixed ethnic groups. These groups did not include “Kiwi” or “New Zealander”. The researchers note that with such an open-ended question the respondents often provided complex answers involving factors such as language, place of birth, church membership, type of family and family connections in constructing their ethnicity.

<sup>14</sup> While Dupuis *et al* (1999) describe “Kiwi” and “New Zealanders” as being mostly from the “Pakeha” group, later in the paper they go further and label this group as “white” (p. 47).

<sup>15</sup> Only just over half of Maori descended people in the Te Hoe Nuku Roa project chose Maori as the single identity that best described themselves.

to record a single ethnic affiliation. This produced a sample in which 14 percent were classified as “New Zealand Maori”; 72 percent “New Zealand European/Pakeha”; 14 percent “Other European”; 2 percent “Pacific Islander”; 1 percent “Chinese”; 1 percent “Indian”; and 1 percent “Other non-European”. These people were then asked to tick one box which best described their *ethnic national identity*. Included on the list was “Above all, I am a “New Zealander” first, and a member of some ethnic group second” (p. 95). Overall, 46 percent of respondents ticked this “New Zealander” box. This included half of those who identified themselves as from the Maori ethnic group based on the initial question. As a group, these “New Zealanders” tended to be younger than average and to have some advantage in occupation, income and social class (p. 98).

Allan (2001: 11) reports on the findings of an AC Nielsen report commissioned by Statistics New Zealand to evaluate changes to the 1991 and 1996 census ethnicity questions. She notes “that 21 percent of non-Maori and 5 percent of Maori in their study preferred the term “New Zealander’ ” as a response to the ethnicity question.

As part of its review of ethnicity statistics, Statistics New Zealand prepared a report on the characteristics of people recording a “New Zealander” type response in the 2001 census (Potter *et al*, 2003).<sup>16</sup> The study found that the majority of “New Zealander” responses were single ethnicity responses made by people who were born in New Zealand. The small number born overseas tended to have lived in New Zealand for a long time.

The researchers investigated Maori descent responses for this group and found that the “New Zealand European” group, and “sole New Zealanders” were equally likely to be of Maori descent (12 percent of sole “New Zealander” reported Maori descent compared to 12 percent of “New Zealand Europeans”) However, as a group, “New Zealanders” had an unusually high rate of 'don't know' responses to the Maori descent question compared to other “New Zealand Europeans”.

Some “New Zealander” respondents also recorded this group in combination with other ethnic groups. In 2001, 4 percent of “New Zealanders” said they also had Maori ethnicity. These data again support the view that over 3,000 respondents in the 2001 were incorrectly renamed as Europeans when they were recoded by Statistics New Zealand.

The 2001 data show that “New Zealander” was generally a term reported by people in the 20 - 49 age bracket. However, the small group for whom this response was combined with “Maori”, “Asian”, “Pacific People” or “Other” ethnicity was predominantly made up of younger people. In terms of gender, fifty five percent of “New Zealander” responses came from men.

At the April 2003 *Connecting Policy, Research and Practice* conference Statistics New Zealand announced that it no longer proposed to recode the “New Zealander” and “Kiwi” census ethnic responses (Ministry of Social Development, 2003). It also announced its intention to report these responses under a new category “New Zealander” at a 1-digit

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<sup>16</sup> This excluded those who recorded “Pakeha”, “native” or “white”.

level. This would mean there would be six main ethnic groups in New Zealand – “Maori”, “European”, “Asian”, “Pacific Peoples”, “Other” and “New Zealander”. Subsequently, in mid 2003, Statistics New Zealand called for submissions on the questions to be included in the 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings. While several suggested changes to the ethnicity topic were raised during consultation, the most common of these was that people should be able to identify themselves as “New Zealanders”. In its final report on content for 2006, Statistics New Zealand (2003: 12) noted that respondents are already able to write down a “New Zealander” response. However, they went on to suggest that if the draft recommendations of the Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity are adopted, these responses will be coded and reported as “New Zealander” for 2006 rather than be recoded as “New Zealand European”. However, Statistics New Zealand state that the ethnicity question will not be changed to include “New Zealander” as a mark-box option because of the strong desire of most users to maintain time series continuity for this topic. Subsequently, Statistics New Zealand faced opposition to the decision to recognise the “New Zealander” responses and in January 2004 it had yet to release its final report from the Review of Ethnicity Statistics.

### **Why the rejection of the European ethnic group?**

Even assuming that many people wishing to be recorded as “New Zealanders” do, in fact, have European ancestry there are a number of reasons why they might not want to be classified as Europeans.

Based on Canadian research into possible census questions, Pryor *et al* (1992) suggest that as colonial societies mature and evolve there is an increasing tendency for settler-descended populations to see themselves as “indigenous” to the societies which they inhabit. This includes Canadians starting to view the response “Canadian” as an evolving indigenous ethnic category. For example, some descendants of immigrants can trace their history in Canada back 300 years.

In New Zealand, historian Michael King has put forward a similar idea (Butcher, 2003: 44).

Maori came to New Zealand from Eastern Polynesia. We don't know how long it took to actually turn their backs on their culture of origin and decide they were Maori, but it was probably only three or four generations. The point at which it happened was when they stopped looking over their shoulder to the home culture and just got on with being the people they were in a new country. My view is that Pakeha have been here long enough now to have done the same thing and are 'a second indigenous culture'. And I don't think that's a particularly provocative thing to say. Like most Pakeha, I've been to Europe and felt that sense of affinity – but I am not European.

With an increasing national and international emphasis on indigenous rights this is a provocative point of view, despite King's assertion to the contrary.<sup>17</sup> However, the idea

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<sup>17</sup> However, King is not the only person to be questioned who is part of the indigenous group. For example, Royal has suggested “the concept of ‘tangata whenua’ should no longer be exclusive to Maori but be part of a new language to include all those who share and are committed to a spiritual relationship with the natural environment” (Gurunathan, 2003: 1).

that “New Zealanders of European descent are no longer part of a “European” ethnic group is less provocative. For many people, the term “European” is not an ethnic group but simply a collection of countries. It is also a collection that, for many people, often excludes the United Kingdom and Ireland.<sup>18</sup> The United Kingdom and Ireland are the stepping off point for one or more ancestors of most New Zealanders, both for Maori via inter-marriage over the last 200 years and for non-Maori via both migration and inter-marriage.

In New Zealand, a person may be a fourth-generation descendant of European settlers or, perhaps, a third generation descendant of Chinese immigrants, but no longer feel a strong affiliation with Europe or China respectively. Examples of this can be found in New Zealand literature. Wells (2001), in his memoir book *Long loop home*, describes how, as a fifth generation descendant of European settlers, he feels no connection with Europe.

The term “European” can also be problematic for a range of more recent immigrants. For example, a “coloured” South African immigrant is likely to be classified as “European” in reports based on census data unless they specifically listed themselves as black.<sup>19</sup>

Intermarriage between Maori and non-Maori, as well as between various settler groups, is likely to be weakening ethnic boundaries for some New Zealanders. For some census respondents, the choice of the term “New Zealander” may simply represent a way to create a new ethnic group that amalgamates a complex range of ancestral backgrounds. As the census data already show, this includes some people with Maori ancestry (Potter *et al*, 2003). Finally, others may choose terms such as “New Zealander” simply because they do not feel influenced by ancestry and do not relate to the various response options.

### **Is a possible ethnic group “New Zealander” problematic?**

While some submissions to Statistics New Zealand’s Review of Ethnicity Statistics supported the idea of creating a new, high-level, ethnic group called “New Zealander”, there has also been some opposition to this move. This resistance revolves around four key issues:

- It potentially creates problems for Maori/non-Maori comparisons.
- It does not sit easily with concepts of Treaty partnership between two distinct peoples.

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<sup>18</sup> A dictionary definition of “Europe” and “European” provides further confusion. One definition of Europe is “a continent in the Western part of the land mass lying between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans separated from Asia by the Ural Mountains on the East and the Caucasus Mountains the Black and Caspian seas on the South East”. The dictionary goes on to note that in British usage the term Europe is sometimes used to contrast with England. A European can be seen as either a “native or inhabitant of Europe, or a person of European descent” or “a white person in a country with largely a non-white population” (Anon, 1997). This assumes the concept of Europe itself as a collectivity, which is a relatively recent conception.

<sup>19</sup> In South Africa there are four main ethnic groups. These are white, Asian, coloured and black. Therefore a coloured South African is unlikely to describe themselves as black.



- It is seen as a first step in the creation of a second indigenous group and this undermines Maori as the indigenous group within New Zealand.
- It is seen as a way of denying the existence of ethnicity.

In their 1999 research, Dupuis *et al* argue that the use of the term “New Zealander” “while not recognised as an act of political positioning by the claimants themselves, must nevertheless be seen as a position that denies recognition of other ethnic groups” (p. 56). Yet, those people who have a very strong, non-national, ethnic identity would naturally retain the right to choose only a non-New Zealand national ethnic group or to note this in combination with the “New Zealander” category. An individual, or groups of individuals, choosing “New Zealander” as their ethnic group is quite different from the claim that “we are all New Zealanders”. The creation of a “New Zealander” ethnic group does not deny choices for others.

The idea that identifying as a “New Zealander” is particularly problematic in regards to the position of Maori in New Zealand society is also somewhat challenged by “values” research undertaken by Webster (2001: 113). When comparing attitudes of “Pakeha” and “New Zealanders” to Maori rights, Webster notes that the views of those classifying themselves as “Pakeha” were more negative than those of people defining themselves as “New Zealanders”.<sup>20</sup>

The view that allowing settlers to identify with their country of residence will automatically undermine indigenous rights is also potentially challenged by an article based on the Australian experience. Moran (2002) explores the idea that “indigenizing settler nationalism” has potential for supporting rather than resisting the extension of indigenous rights and claims.<sup>21</sup>

In those data collections with an ancestry as well as an ethnicity question, even if many respondents did affiliate with the “New Zealander” ethnic group, Maori and non-Maori populations could still be created for comparative purposes. There are three ways of doing this. First, the ethnicity data could be ignored and the analysis could be simply based on ancestry data. Second, all people who recorded only “New Zealander” ethnicity could be allocated to the non-Maori group. These respondents are clearly choosing not to be in the Maori ethnic group, even if some have Maori ancestry. However, if they ticked the Maori ethnic response as well as writing in “New Zealander”, then they could be allocated to the Maori group.

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<sup>20</sup> In parallel, Pearson and Sissons (1997) have explored whether New Zealanders of primarily European ancestry who choose to call themselves “Pakeha” are more supportive of biculturalism and Maori rights than those who do not use this term. They found only a very weak link between being “Pakeha” and being bicultural. The authors found that the majority of both those who identified as “Pakeha” and those who never did were unsupportive of biculturalism and tino rangatiratanga (p. 79).

<sup>21</sup> A possible example of alignment of settler descendent interests with those of indigenous peoples is Federated Farmers (2003) announcement that it had serious concerns about the government's foreshore and seabed framework, which itself was announced in late 2003, suggesting that it “appears to be confiscation by stealth”.

Third, if researchers want to add more complexity to coding choices, they could reallocate those “New Zealanders” who stated Maori descent to those who declared Maori ethnicity. Those “New Zealanders” who did not have any Maori ancestry would be part of the non-Maori group. However, this option would not be possible in many data collections. A question on ancestry could be relatively easily incorporated into some research, although it would be more difficult in some standard areas - in particular administrative data collections in the health and education sectors.

In terms of undermining concepts of Treaty partnership between two distinct peoples, the idea of the existence of two completely separate groups is already undermined by historical and current intermarriage (Callister, forthcoming). Of all those people who recorded Maori as one of their ethnic groups in the 2001 census, only 56 percent recorded only Maori. For Maori intermarriage has also resulted in a complex interaction between ethnicity and ancestry data. Table 1 shows a significant number of respondents record Maori ancestry but not ethnicity, while a small number say they have no ancestry but claim ethnicity. The “New Zealander” category would simply add another layer to an already complex and fluid construction of ethnic groups in New Zealand.

**Table 1: Response of Maori descent question compared with responses to the ethnic group question, 2001 Census**

		Maori descent				Total
		Yes	No	Don't know	Not elsewhere included*	
Maori ethnic group	Yes	487,317	5,322	6,846	26,796	526,281
	No	112,665	2,655,516	58,974	233,295	3,060,450
	Not elsewhere included*	4,125	16,671	1,791	127,956	150,546
	Total	604,110	2,677,506	67,608	388,050	3,737,277

\* Includes response unidentifiable, response outside scope and not stated.

Source: Statistics New Zealand

Table 1 also shows a relatively high non-response to both the descent and ethnicity questions. If people’s ethnic responses are not acknowledged, then there is the potential for some of these individuals not to record any ethnic response in future surveys. A high non-response rate also undermines Maori / non-Maori comparisons.

Finally, it is possible some of the opposition to allowing respondents to record New Zealander in their answer to the census ethnicity question might diminish if there was also a wider ancestry question, not just one that asked about Maori ancestry. It is possible that many individuals claiming to be “New Zealanders” would be happy to acknowledge their ancestry, whether it is “European”, “Chinese”, “Tongan”, some other group, or a combination of ancestral links. This would allow researchers to make comparisons based on ancestry in combination, at times, with the ethnicity data.

## Conclusion

Strauss (1959: 15) stresses the importance of language on identity, noting “[a]ny name is a container; poured into it are the conscious or unwitting evaluations of the namer”. Furthermore, altering names is “a rite of passage”, enabling the evolution of a “new self image” (Strauss, 1959: 16, 17). If ethnicity is seen to be both culturally constructed and reflective of individual choice, as generally agreed in New Zealand, the historical practice of recoding “New Zealander” type responses as “New Zealand European” and, ultimately, “European”, has been conceptually incorrect. Denying individuals their choice of ethnic classification has put Statistics New Zealand in a position of making a political decision rather than an ethnically neutral based statistical decision. While in early 2003 Statistics New Zealand announced that it no longer proposed to recode the “New Zealander” and “Kiwi” census ethnic responses, it has subsequently faced opposition to this decision and in early 2004 it had yet to release its final report from the Review of Ethnicity Statistics.

Despite the general acceptance that individuals should be able to choose their own ethnic group, there is concern amongst some individuals and organisations that allowing a group of people to label themselves as New Zealanders will undermine the identity and rights of Maori. I have argued that these concerns are overstated. For example, accepting “New Zealander” as a high level ethnic group does not prevent Maori/non-Maori comparisons.

There is clearly a group of New Zealanders, many who have no connection or feel no connection to Europe, who do not wish to be recorded as “Europeans” in official surveys yet have been counted as “Europeans” in recent years. A lack of connection to Europe may have been created through having: complex mixed ancestry perhaps including Maori ancestry; Asian or another non-European background; or European ancestry but having lived in New Zealand for a number of generations. As has occurred in Canada, there is likely to be an increasing tendency for long-term New Zealand settler populations, other than the original Maori settlers, to see themselves as “indigenous”. It is almost certain, therefore, that there will be growth in the number of “New Zealander” type responses in official surveys. Along with this, there will be continuing calls for the need for a high-level “New Zealand” ethnic group to be reported in official statistics. In parallel, it is likely there will be continuing debate as to the name of such a group, specifically whether it will eventually be labelled as “Pakeha”, “New Zealander” or some other name. In the longer term, it is also likely that the use of the name “European” for the main New Zealand ethnic group will be questioned. Further research and debate is needed on these issues. Such research and debate is an important aspect of the ongoing construction of national identity.

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