

CHILDBEARING ‘OUT THERE’ IN ‘BETTER BRITAIN’: ‘HOW’ & ‘WHY’ THE FERTILITY OF NEW ZEALAND PAKEHA (= BRITISH-ORIGIN) COLONISTS DIFFERED FROM THAT OF THEIR BRITISH VICTORIAN PEERS

Long Abstract¹

New Zealand became a colony in 1840 when the indigenous population outnumbered foreigners, essentially Europeans of British-origin, termed Pakeha, 40:1. By 1860 there were 60,000 settlers, equalling Maori numbers, but over the 1860s and 1870s there were massive immigrant inflows, at rates surpassed since only, and then but briefly, in the early 2000s. The flows came because of gold-fever (1860s), and in the 1870s because of assisted passage migration driven by population policy aimed at creating a ‘Better Britain’ in the South Seas, the *Immigration and Public Works Act, 1870*. This established a British-origin Pakeha demographic hegemony that was eroded only with Pacific Island and Asian migration, and the resurgence of the Maori population from 1970 on. This paper addresses the issue that colonial Pakeha fertility patterns seem to have deviated from those of their British contemporaries.

The analysis of British data from around 1870, and directly comparable New Zealand data for the same period produces a sort of “ex-post-facto experimental design” allowing two sets of questions to be addressed for the early period: “how” Pakeha reproductive patterns differed from their British peers, and, more importantly, “why”. Moreover, similar questions in the 1911 censuses in both countries allow some cross-comparisons to be made.

Essentially British Isles in origin, the settlers had early in early years, and certainly by the 1870s, developed fertility and family building patterns that seem to have differed markedly from those of their British peers, who would often have been their cousins. Total Fertility Rates were around 7.0 births per woman (as against <5.0 in Britain), and marital fertility rates were at bio-social limits. The only factor limiting overall TFRs was the fact that the proportions of women ever-married at ages 20-24 years, high by British standards, were not as high as those reported in the Pakeha Baby Boom in New Zealand around 1960.

Between the 1870s and 1900 Pakeha fertility declined very rapidly as they adopted British nuptial patterns, later marriage and a significant minority of women remaining celibate. The fertility transition 1875-1900 varied regionally, starting in metropolitan

¹ This paper is drawn from research undertaken by the author while on a James Cook Fellowship of the Royal Society of New Zealand, 2004-06. A forthcoming book and supporting papers covering the “Demographic History of NZ, 1840-2005” is the central output of this incumbency, while another major product (in press, with A Dharmalingam and J Sceats as junior authors) is “The New Zealand Family 1840-2005: A Demographic History”. The comparative analysis of British demography was made possible by being a visitor at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, 2004, to whom grateful acknowledgement is made, especially to Simon Szreter and James Oeppen. A special thanks is due to Robert Woods at Liverpool University whose historical analyses inspired the work here.

areas and regions that had been developed earlier, and was most delayed in the isolated rural pioneering areas of the North Island.

In looking at these questions it is essential to recognise that the broad difference between Britain and New Zealand relates to national level data and not the many constituent “fertilities” among sub-populations as Szreter has argued: the composition of the parenting populations is the key factor (Szreter 2002; Garrett et al 2001). Thus a first issue to be examined is whether or not levels were indeed different once compositional factors are taken into account or whether they were due to behavioural adaptations made after arrival in New Zealand.

The most important compositional factor would be that migration flows seem to have been selective in terms of place of origin and the occupations of settlers. For example, Presbyterian Scots, colonists from the Home Counties and from the southwest of England seem to have been overrepresented. Similarly, agricultural workers were over-represented (McKinnon et al 1997). This information must be put alongside the far more detailed analyses available in particular for England and Wales that outline the compositionally driven variations there (Szreter 2002; Garrett et al 2001; Woods 2000).

Given early and near universal marriage a simple explanation of the difference between the British and Pakeha is to argue that, with male-dominated migration, high masculinity ratios in the population assured marriage. The problem with this argument is that the ratios were still relatively high at the 1901 census when delayed marriage and spinsterhood were common.

Per capita incomes were high in the 1870s and this also held true at the dawn of the 20th century. Thus it has been argued that “frontier effects” or greater opportunities in New Zealand induced Pakeha to go forth and multiply. But the fertility decline by 1901, occurred first through a very long depression (1880s) and then over a period of rapid development, especially based around primary sector technologies. Moreover, economic development was accompanied in the 1890s by the implementation of an early welfare state that, most importantly, reformed land tenure and thus increased opportunities. Together these points seem to give the lie to the “opportunities” hypothesis, although the delaying of fertility declines until the early 1900s in the pioneer regions might give it some support.

The settlers of the 1860s and 1870s adopted reproductive strategies that, in many respects, resembled more those extant in Britain in the first few years (1801-25) of the 19th century rather than what the British were doing in the early- and mid-Victorian decades. This can be seen when, following the strategy of Robert Woods (2000), one graphs bivariate timepaths between Coale indices *Ig* (marital fertility) and *Im* (nuptiality). Looking at the patterns these indicate there is a perceptible lag between England and Wales in the period 1800-25 and New Zealand in the 1870s.

Equally well the same sort of lag is seen for the bivariate timepath for *Im* (nuptiality) and *Ih* (ex-nuptial fertility). But in this case there is a major difference between Pakeha

and British: while the pattern is similar the levels are very different. Indeed, because the Pakeha *Ih* in the 1870s is lower than that for Britain in the 1800-25 period, the levels for the intersect of *Im* and *Ih* are also far below those for Britain in the period 1800-25, when their *Ih* levels were elevated. Pakeha in the 1870s (when the first data become available) are also very different from British in 1851-75. In contrast Pakeha rates for *Ih*, but not *Im*, are close to late Victorian British levels. By c1901 the two populations' intersects are very close, being low for both *Ih* and *Im*.

The latter timepath is very interesting not only in the way it describes reproductive patterns, but for the light it possibly sheds on normative systems relating to ex-nuptiality. Woods argues that hypothetically when *Im* is high then *Ih* should be low; that is, under these circumstance most women marry young and therefore exposure to ex-nuptial child bearing is limited. Conversely, a low *Im* should, in theory, be accompanied by high levels of ex-nuptial childbearing. But historically Britain has sometimes deviated from this logical pattern, with *Ih*'s higher than expected given their *Im*'s, and around 1901, in contrast, significantly lower than might be expected.

Pakeha society seems to suffer the same contradictions as have been seen in Britain. We know from the analysis of later experiences, say from the 1920s on, that Pakeha can follow the laxer British model, and, in the words of Woods, tolerate "disregard for virginity", but equally well earlier on Pakeha had not "[confused this] with acceptance of bastardy". Indeed *Ih* levels remained more or less the same, and at low levels, through the late Victorian era, both following the logical path of being low when *Im*'s were high, but also the illogical when both were low.

Thus Victorian Pakeha had been selective about what they imported from the early 19th century. The lag effects suggest that they carried forward earlier British traditions, but not all: they favoured marital fertility but not ex-nuptial. In passing, the first welfare regime they adopted, reformed in the 1890s, was a more extreme version of the *New Poor Laws*, as implemented punitively in some British parishes. It must be recalled that this was a period in which fertility control was largely achieved through access to marriage; the fragmentary information does not hint that induced abortion levels were high when fertility levels had dropped.

To sum, this paper will examine the hypothesis that patterns and trends in reproduction in early Pakeha society were at least in part a function of selectivity in migration streams. But it will qualify this by asking whether the observed low levels of "bastardy" is something adopted in New Zealand or a function of attitudes common among the migrants (selected by region and occupation) dominating the major inflows.

References

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McKinnon M et al 1997 *New Zealand Historical Atlas*
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