



A land of milk & honey?

Making sense of Aotearoa
New Zealand.

Edited by **Avril Bell, Vivienne Elizabeth,
Tracey McIntosh** and **Matt Wynyard**

Since colonisation, New Zealand has been mythologised as a ‘land of milk and honey’ – a promised land of natural abundance and endless opportunity. In the twenty-first century, the country has become literally a land of milk and honey as agricultural exports from such commodities dominate the national economy. But does New Zealand live up to its promise?

In this introductory textbook for first year sociology students, some of this country’s leading social scientists help us to make sense of contemporary New Zealand. In 21 chapters, the authors examine New Zealand’s political identity and constitution; our Māori, Pākehā, Pacific and Asian peoples; problems of class, poverty and inequality; gender and sexualities; and contemporary debates around ageing, incarceration and the environment. The authors find a complex society where thirty years of neoliberal economics and globalising politics have exacerbated inequalities that are differentially experienced by class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and age. These social divides and problems are at the heart of this text.

For sociology students and for a wider audience of New Zealanders, *A Land of Milk and Honey?* is a lively introduction to where we have come from, where we are now and where New Zealand society might be headed.

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Introduction

Avril Bell

The phrase ‘land of milk and honey’ originally appeared in the Old Testament, describing the longed-for homeland to Jewish people in exile. It was a utopian image of a homeland of agricultural abundance, promising a good life for all. From this biblical origin, the term has spread widely and been used more broadly to refer to the promise of a good life in a new land. Unsurprisingly then, it has often been used to refer to the promise of New World societies, such as Aotearoa New Zealand, to which settler migrants flocked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Arguably, it encapsulates the hopes of all migrants, who leave their homes to escape various undesirable realities and in the hope of better lives and futures elsewhere.

The vision of a land of milk and honey played a powerful part in the mythologies generated by those involved in the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand and continued to shape ideas about what it would mean to live in this country throughout much of the twentieth century. In the original usage, the image pointed directly to agricultural abundance, making it particularly appropriate in thinking about Aotearoa New Zealand, where the export economy has always been agriculturally based. In the

twenty-first century, milk and honey quite literally play significant roles in the national economy – milk, since dairying became an export leader around the turn of the century, and honey, a much more minor player, but increasingly a valuable export commodity since the identification of its anti-bacterial properties by the Honey Research Unit of the University of Waikato in 1981. If the internet is anything to go by, this phrase is still widely in use in relation to Aotearoa New Zealand. An internet search for ‘land of milk and honey’ and ‘New Zealand’ resulted in 41,200 hits (19 April 2016), with migration and agricultural industry websites being prominent, and uncritical, users of this image to describe Aotearoa New Zealand.

But this internet search also uncovered sources that critique the idea that Aotearoa New Zealand lives up to the promise of a land of milk and honey. This collection of essays likewise takes such a critical stance. We invoke this image of the migrants’ promised land as a signifier of the failed promises of Aotearoa New Zealand. Our view is that in the twenty-first century it is clear that, for many, the promise is not being fulfilled. Despite how agricultural exporters seek to promote their products and immigration consultants seek to represent this country, there are many signs of the limits of, and problems created by, our agricultural abundance. Environmental issues are very much on the table. Our ‘clean, green’ image is under the microscope, brought into question especially as the link between the ongoing expansion of dairying and declining water quality is made clear.

There are also significant social problems created by the unequal sharing of economic rewards in our society. Aotearoa New Zealand never offered equal opportunity for all, despite the national mythology of egalitarianism. In recent decades, however, some historical inequalities have been deepened, while others have been lessened, but not overcome. The landscape of inequalities and social divides in our society is a complex one. In particular, thirty years of neoliberal economics and globalising politics have exacerbated already existing inequalities that are differentially experienced by class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and age, and are also reflected in a number of social problems that are widely recognised to be

confronting our society. These social divides and problems are at the heart of this collection.

The editors of this collection have all taught introductory Sociology courses on New Zealand society at the University of Auckland. The idea for the book came about from our desire for an up-to-date collection to act as a reader for our students. We hope also that this book has something to offer to a wider audience of New Zealanders interested in broad overviews of where we have come from, where we are and where we could be headed as a society.

For the collection we approached a number of sociological experts to respond to the image of the land of milk and honey and its inverse – scarcity and inequality – in relation to their various areas of expertise. Given our sociological focus, most of the chapters address the social, economic and cultural inequalities that divide New Zealanders. Some chapters are historical in focus, and many involve an historical dimension, providing a view on how we have come to be where we are today as a society. Each chapter stands alone as the viewpoint of its author(s), based on their research expertise and knowledge base, and no attempt has been made to provide any overall coherence and agreement between them.

Overall, this collection offers various ways of ‘making sense’ of Aotearoa New Zealand through a sociological lens. The facts of social life don’t speak for themselves, but require interpretation. Sociology is particularly concerned with the patterning of social life – with how society’s resources and rewards are distributed unevenly to different social groups. Where such uneven patterns are discernible, sociologists argue that the resulting problems are ‘public issues’ and not just ‘personal troubles’, in the influential words of American sociologist C. Wright Mills. In other words, what we experience as our personal difficulties – or privileges – are often, in fact, the outcome of large-scale social and historical processes. Rather than being our ‘fault’ – or evidence of our merit – much of what accounts for our individual social position is the product of forces at work at the societal, or even global, level. Throughout this collection the authors demonstrate how this kind of sociological way of thinking can help us make sense of important features of the society we live in.

Chapter Overview

The book is divided into sections organised around particular features of New Zealand society. In Part I: Foundations: State and Nation, contributors explore various foundational features of the political and ideological structure that organise social life in Aotearoa New Zealand. We begin the collection with a focus on the historical foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand's agricultural economy in the settler colonial project. Matt Wynyard reminds us that the basis of our capitalist and agricultural economy lies in the alienation of Māori land. Wynyard draws on Marx's theory of primitive accumulation to argue that the systematic dispossession of Māori land in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries established the preconditions necessary for capitalism in Aotearoa New Zealand and created lasting patterns of inequality between Māori and Pākehā that continue to the present day. This chapter is paired with the next, in which the late Ranginui Walker tracks the evolution of rangatiratanga, as a political response to the arrival of Pākehā, and kāwanatanga, focusing in particular on the history of Te Whakaminenga, the United Tribes of New Zealand, and of the Kingitanga. Both of these were attempts to unite Māori and to express rangatiratanga that remain relevant today and continue to lay challenges to the nation's developing constitution.

The following two chapters in this part address the themes of democracy and national identity respectively. In his chapter, Richard Shaw explores the state of our democracy, beginning with an overview of the history of political representation and participation of women and Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand as a reminder of how hard-won these democratic rights and freedoms have been, before turning to the current declines in political participation and controversies over political interference in the democratic process in this era of 'dirty politics'. Overall, Shaw argues for the continuing importance of democratic engagement and exhorts us not to take our rights and freedoms for granted. I then focus on some of the key themes involved in the construction of New Zealand national identity, primarily the *politics* of national identity. I consider in particular the ways in which stories of national identity can be exclusionary for some sectors of the population and the ways in which our identification with

the nation can be manipulated and exploited by powerful economic and political interests.

Part II: New Zealand Peoples explores some of the issues faced by the diverse ethnic groups that make up our society, and issues we face as a highly culturally diverse society. Tahu Kukutai and Melinda Webber explore continuities and changes in the present patterns and practices of Māori ethnic identification. Kukutai and Webber reflect on the influence that changing socio-cultural contexts have for Māori identifications, particularly in relation to two key institutions – the New Zealand Census of Population and schools. Although whakapapa continues to be an important basis of collectivity and hence identification for Māori, the authors note that what it means to be Māori in the twenty-first century is open to a number of interpretations. Steve Matthewman then takes a critical look at Pākehā through the lens of ethnicity, understood as a system of stratification that bestows advantages and disadvantages, and is linked to a raft of inequalities. Pākehā advantages stem from colonisation, which as I argue elsewhere is better understood as a social structure that continues to have effects rather than an historical event no longer relevant to our present (Bell 2014).

Two of the key ‘new settler’ groups, Pasifika peoples and Asian New Zealanders, are the focus of the next two chapters. Karlo Mila takes an historical approach to interrogate the socio-economic and discursive positioning of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. Mila documents the way the economic crises of the 1970s and subsequent structural transformation of the country’s economy from the mid-1980s onwards resulted in Pasifika peoples becoming both an economically disadvantaged and racialised minority who are largely blocked from reaping milk and honey. In his chapter, Paul Spoonley provides an overview of the historical changes to Aotearoa New Zealand’s ethnic make-up and identifies a number of issues and challenges these changes raise for our society, especially in ‘super-diverse’ Auckland. Spoonley argues that this rapid cultural diversification creates challenges for the cohesion of New Zealand society, and for our national identity. How biculturalism and multiculturalism are to be coordinated, and what it means to be a ‘New Zealander’ in this new cultural landscape, are both issues that we face as a society.

In Part III: Social Class and Economic Inequalities, contributors address the present state of significant fractures in the economic fabric of Aotearoa New Zealand in this era of neoliberal economics. This part begins with Louise Humpage's consideration of the impact of neoliberalism on our contemporary society. Humpage begins by defining neoliberalism's predecessor, Keynesianism, and detailing the role it played in post-war Aotearoa New Zealand, before outlining the ideological and political shift towards neoliberalism that took place in Aotearoa New Zealand in the mid-1980s. Humpage also examines the emergence of various alterations and extensions of the neoliberal project embodied in, for example, neoconservative and Third Way strategies of government. Bruce Curtis and Marko Galic then use a Marxist approach to class to identify the class divides of New Zealand society in the neoliberal era. They argue that the divide between the capitalist and working classes remains primary, with the idea of 'middle classness' being an ideological smokescreen that encourages aspiration and entices workers to buy into the capitalist system. However, the logic of neoliberal globalisation has made even middle-class jobs precarious for many, pointing up the essential two-class divide of capitalist economics.

The following two chapters in various ways address the empirical fallout of the neoliberal economy. Kellie McNeill examines poverty in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. McNeill considers the structural and historical underpinnings of contemporary poverty and draws attention to the ways in which the experience of poverty is patterned in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand in terms of social divisions such as age and ethnicity. The issue of social mobility, so crucial to the migrant dream of making good in a new country, is the focus of Gerry Cotterell's chapter. Cotterell defines social mobility before examining the possibilities for social mobility in the post-war Keynesian economy. He then considers the impact of neoliberalism on social mobility, arguing that mobility has become much more difficult for many people in Aotearoa New Zealand since the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s.

In Part IV: Genders and Sexualities, attention turns to the impacts of patriarchy and heteronormativity on gender and sexual difference in Aotearoa New Zealand's history, and on continuing challenges we still face as a society. Julia Schuster charts the history of feminist activism in

Aotearoa New Zealand through an examination of two key issues: women's political participation and male violence against women. While the First, Second and Third Waves of feminist activism have been responsible for some very significant strides towards the achievement of gender justice, Schuster points out that women in Aotearoa New Zealand are still under-represented in formal politics and they still suffer from one of the highest rates of physical and sexual violence in the Western world. Such findings indicate, contrary to the claims of post-feminism, that feminist activism remains necessary if gender justice is to be attained. Johanna Schmidt also brings an historical dimension to her examination of the social and legal regulation of homosexuality. She traces the history of its definition as heterosexuality's deviant other and its legal marginalisation through the 1800s and into the mid-1900s. Paradoxically, the view of homosexuals as deviant individuals created the basis for the rise of the gay liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, first in the United States and then in other Western countries like Aotearoa New Zealand. Gay activism in Aotearoa New Zealand has achieved a number of important legal victories, yet Schmidt raises questions about whether its most recent victories – the Civil Union Act in 2004 and the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act in 2013 – are merely indicative of the operation of hegemonic power.

Richard Pringle then explores how power has worked to privilege a particular kind of masculinity that, following Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell, can be described as hegemonic masculinity. Pringle shows that historically this form of masculinity has been aligned with Pākehā men, as reflected in widely shared ideas about who are Aotearoa New Zealand's national heroes. He also shows that Māori masculinity has operated as the marginalised 'other' for Pākehā masculinity, with damaging historical and contemporary consequences for Māori men. Gender inequalities are again the focus of Vivienne Elizabeth's chapter, in which she takes issue with post-feminist contentions that the power of gender has dissipated to such an extent that young women's lives are no longer shaped by it. Through an examination of the contemporary labour market Elizabeth shows that the labour market in Aotearoa New Zealand continues to display marked gender differences and gendered inequalities. In making sense

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