

Book Review

Sociologies of New Zealand

Charles Crothers

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018

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This book offers a concise introduction to anyone interested in the formation of sociology in different national settings across the globe. Charles Crothers' *Sociologies of New Zealand* is one of a series of national accounts, now nearly two dozen, under the editorship of John Holmwood and Stephen Turner titled 'Sociology Transformed', chronicling sociology's development country-by-country. It corresponds to Harley's and Wickham's (2014) *Australian Sociology: Fragility, Survival, Rivalry*, in the series. Crothers' own career covers much of this period matching sociology as a recognisable university discipline with a professional association turned 50 in 2013. The Sociological Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand had in this period split from the Australian association, started its own journal and added 'Aoterora' to its name repositioning Māori-white relations in New Zealand.

In this period the shift from the conceptual apparatus of United States and British textbooks has broadened somewhat though still reflective of dominant Anglo-European framing of society as nation in the era of western modernity. Both United States quantitative methods and mid-century geo-political self-assuredness, and British-European attention to class have diversified to class, gender, ethnicity, sexualities, and methodological re-framing in New Zealand sociology from quantitative to emphasise qualitative research and cultural studies.

The book follows a series of 24 articles by local academics in special issues of *New Zealand Sociology* in 2014 and 2016 providing historical accounts, including Crothers' two editorials. Seven of the articles were histories of academic departments; the rest focus on the origins of sociology in New Zealand, subspecialties, or sociological work in related disciplines. Crothers has since served as editor of *Kotuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences*. The 128 pages of the book are divided into six chapters:

Chapter 1 suggests a 'knowledge project' approach to reviewing *New Zealand Sociology*. Crothers explains to readers that he is drawing on the existing body of work, including his own and other academics, about university departments and other aspects of the New Zealand sociology discipline. Outside readers are provided a useful sketch of the main historical periods of New Zealand society and some key cultural themes.

Chapter 2 sketches an historical account of New Zealand sociological work until it was institutionalised in universities after the mid-20th century. A scattering of sociological analysis and research projects is evident across many decades prior to formally established university sociology courses.

Chapter 3 focuses on institutional accounts and reflections on sociology as an academic discipline in New Zealand's eight universities. Sociology departments were established from about 1960 to the most recent at Dunedin in 2011. The main part of the chapter consist of department-by-department accounts of personnel and 'the rise-and-fall' phenomenon of regular restructuring. Australian and other western tertiary sector academics will recognise this pattern (Crook 2003). Crothers suggests 'the pattern of rise-and-fall has been driven largely by student numbers' (p. 63). There has been a modest degree of

coordination between departments and the Sociological Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Chapter 4 speaks to the continuing interest outside mainstream sociology departments: 'Sociology' versus more diffuse 'sociology' in other faculties and schools. Other writers offer similar distinctions using terms like 'core' and 'frontier'. Crothers does not theorise this spreading of sociology outside recognised sociology departments. Instead, the first part of the chapter offers an overview of areas of speciality within sociology; and the second part of the chapter offers a description of social science disciplines adjacent to sociology. He argues that 'Only a few sociological specialties have been strong in New Zealand... education, health/medicine, cultural studies, and sport,' noting however that 'these specialties have seldom been linked with mainstream sociology' (p. 66).

Chapter 5 shifts to describing the production of New Zealand sociology. Even in a small national setting the detail that Crothers provides and summarises in a series of tables inevitably points towards discussing networks, research funding and writing sociology. The chapters' three sections: inputs, connections and outputs, expresses a consciousness of New Zealand in relation to sociology outside the country. Section one, describes the formation of the sociology association: it includes reference to the split between Australia and New Zealand and the development of other networks within the country, including overlaps with government departmental research in a variety of projects. Section two describes connections within sociology, emphasising the social capital derived from personnel flows of migrant sociologists into and out of New Zealand. These might be recognised as international networks and the cultural traffic of academic mobility. Section three centres on theoretical and empirical traditions, finishing with brief mentions of the 'New Zealand-ization' of sociology textbooks, along with observations about publishing practices.

Chapter 6 provides summary points about New Zealand sociology. Beyond its Anglo history and emulation of American and European sociology, several features of the book emerge.

First, the lack of developing an indigenous framework is noted, notwithstanding the proliferation in many disciplines, sociology included, of bicultural and ethnic perspectives. Second is recognition (p. 132) that 'much sociology work has been driven by feminist interest', but this is not elaborated, despite cultural regendering becoming a permanent shift in society. Third, Crothers observes a lack of development of local sociological frameworks and perspectives. Fourth, the Australasian Agri-Food network's important work over several decades about environmental and climate change in New Zealand and globally, is noted.

Crothers places these things together as still needing work to make 'relevant our original context' (p. 131). This is both an important critique and points to the opportunity and necessity for sociological work into the future. In the end, whether the book describes a plurality of 'sociologies' as the title indicates, or is able to document 'the extent to which there is a New Zealand national sociology' (p. 4) remains an open question.

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References

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