

This book closes with its weakest chapter, Gilbert Wong on the Poll-Tax apology of 2002. Points made earlier in the book are unnecessarily repeated, but more importantly there is no serious attempt to explain why the long-mooted suggestion of an apology suddenly moved rapidly ahead between September 2001 and early 2002. Once the acceleration began, the objections from Maori arenas of the government are able to be documented, as are the criticisms from the opposition through the sole Chinese member of Parliament, Pansy Wong, but the political or community motivations for the move to an apology at that time are not adequately revealed.

In sum, a book of value on an important topic serving various potential audiences. On the more negative side, treat some of its figures with care, have a magnifying glass on hand to read the notes and do not expect to find everything in the index.

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Keeping a Low Profile: An Oral History of German Immigration to New Zealand. By Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2002. 351 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-439-5.

THIS WELCOME ADDITION to research on German–New Zealand connections is based on 102 interviews conducted with German immigrants in New Zealand between 1996 and 1997. It was published first in a German version, which was translated into English by Nelson Wattie and subsequently revised. Apart from a brief introduction and historical sketch of Germans in New Zealand, the book is divided into two parts: ‘Arrivals’ and ‘Themes’. ‘Arrivals’ contains six chapters, concerned with German immigrants who arrived from 1936–1940, 1948–1952, 1956–1966, the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s respectively. ‘Themes’ covers such topics as what it means to be a foreigner, comparing Germany and New Zealand, what Germans miss in New Zealand, and gender issues.

The book’s strength lies in its analysis of recent German immigrants’ attitudes toward New Zealand. We learn for example that New Zealand’s nuclear-free status combined with the Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident brought a number of environmentally conscious Germans to New Zealand in the 1980s. German ‘alternative centres’ had been set up around the country in the 1970s in which Germans could live ‘an ecological existence’ (p.124f.). The German environmentalists tended to be critical of New Zealand, ‘which is not really so green at all’ (p.142). Those Germans who arrived before the major market reforms found that New Zealand reminded them more of Communist East Germany than West Germany (pp.123, 134). Ironically, many of those who came to New Zealand from East Germany once they were free to travel after reunification in the 1990s tended to become disillusioned with New Zealand’s dismantling of the social welfare state and did not stay (p.138). Other Germans returned for different reasons: they simply found themselves getting ‘bored’ once they had finally acquired their dream house at the seaside; they did not know ‘what to do with the life they once dreamed of’ (p.143). Bönisch-Brednich’s interviewees had one thing in common: all ‘underestimated how difficult it would be to switch languages’ (p.162). Linguistic gaffes made by Germans were many, such as requesting the butcher not to give them ‘so much of your bloody meat’ (p.164), and asking a shopkeeper for ‘a tit with a ring’ (p.166). The phrases ‘How are you?’, ‘See you later’ and ‘Bring a plate’ created particular difficulties for Germans who took them literally (p.178f.). In addition, New Zealanders seemed to speak ‘incredibly

fast' or 'mumble' (p.169), and their tactful and polite way of putting things was often interpreted by Germans as being dishonest (p.172). German immigrants are often taken aback by the common association here of Germans with the World Wars and need to work out strategies as to how to deal with this problem. Bönisch-Brednich devotes a section of her book to this, which she calls 'The shadow of war'. Strangely, apart from a brief seven-line characterization of New Zealand's 'historical memories' as 'a mixture of victory and loss' (p.185), she does not present the New Zealand point of view. I would have thought that the fact that 'more than three quarters of New Zealand's 28,000 dead in all foreign wars have fallen in combat with Germans'¹ might have helped German immigrants understand this New Zealand preoccupation.

Although Bönisch-Brednich emphasizes that the quotations given in italics are translations which 'try to be as faithful to the German transcripts as possible' and are not meant to be 'colloquial English' (p.14), some comments will have readers scratching their heads, such as: 'They would stop you even if you had done nothing, and those little policemen, they had machine guns and were shitting in their pants for fear of them themselves' (p.122), or 'for me there was a kind of feeling, like here, that is especially here' (p.135), or 'when I took a boy friend home, a young fellow, 14 years old, and he was at the ordinary school — pooh! My parents weren't happy at all! At least an intermediate school is what you had to have!' (p.212). It would have been preferable to have translated the comments accurately and to have given the original German in footnotes, as Helen Baumer has done in her study of the Swiss in New Zealand.² Some of the author's own comments also sound more German than English, such as: 'New arrivals were often told that in winter the storms are so raw and dangerous that the police put up thick ropes along Lambton Quay (the main shopping street in Wellington) so that people can hold onto them to stop being blown away with their shopping by the winds' (p.341); and 'they would ask if the much-loved equivalent Christmas tree at home, the pohutukawa, had already sprung its red flowers' (p.348). There are some irritants, though they are generally minor. The Wellington focus of the book is in itself defensible, but statements become misleading when applied to New Zealand as a whole, for example: 'The standard sentence uttered by immigrants and heard again and again is: "I thought it would be warmer here." This expectation is due partly to the fact that the Germans in Wellington kept telling me that the city is on the same latitude as Casablanca in the northern hemisphere, whereas it actually is on the latitude of Madrid' (p.341). The 'editorial decision to omit an index' (p.10) can only be described as a great pity, as an index would have added a great deal to the book's value. The dangers of drawing general conclusions from the comments of a small number of interviewees are obvious from some debatable statements by the author, like this one: 'For the last twenty years it has been customary, at least for alternative, academic and feminist circles, to ask men to sit down on the toilet and to raise boys accordingly' (p.345).

Such matters, however, should not detract from Bönisch-Brednich's achievement in bringing together the experiences of a diverse group of immigrants which will be of great interest to historians, geographers and sociologists alike.

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1 Ian McGibbon, in: Bade, *Out of the Shadow of War*, OUP, 1998, p.5.

2 Helen Baumer, *One-way Ticket to New Zealand: Swiss Immigration After the Second World War*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 2003.