

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND DEMOGRAPHY: THE COMPLEX RELATION BETWEEN IDENTITY AND STATISTICS, edited by Per Axelsson and Peter Skold. New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2011.

How can there be a worldwide scholarly comparison of statistical enumeration of undefined groups of people? This is the question I asked myself when reading the book: *Indigenous People and Demography: The Complex Relation between Identity and Statistics*. Being aware of the immense challenge presented by the attempt to enumerate ethnic groups (Statistics Canada and U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993), it seems the enumeration of 'indigenous people', whose definition is all the more controversial and rife with periodical and geographical variations, presents an even greater challenge. Much to my surprise, Per Axelsson, historian, Senior Researcher of the Center for Sami Research at Umea University in Sweden, and Peter Skold, Professor of History at Umea University and Director of the Center for Sami Research, jumped into stormy waters, with their eyes wide open, and crossed them with impressive results.

Axelsson and Skold's outcome is an edited book that offers an attempt to introduce a new field of research: Indigenous Demography. The book includes a collection of sixteen articles written by historians, anthropologists, demographers and sociologists, which emerged from a workshop in Umea in September 2006. These articles are accompanied by a thoughtful introduction and epilogue. The articles examine the indigenous demographic numeration in various countries.

Indeed, the biggest challenge, pertaining to the global effort for comparative indigenous numeration, is how to do so when the relevant group is undefined. Apparently, the book overcomes this challenge while looking at the census practices in particular countries. The book does not offer a definition of 'indigenous people', although this topic is thoroughly discussed in most of the articles.

The editors chose to organize the book in a geographical order. This helps the readers to trace the regional events. However, it misses the potential benefits of looking, in a comprehensive way, at similar regimes or historical periods.

The first article, by Len Smith et al., deals with Australia. It presents the great decline in Victorian Aboriginal official numeration between: 1970 – 2001. It argues that "they [indigenous] had never disappeared; they had been rendered invisible only by legislative fiat." (p. 29). This highly substantiated argument emphasizes the crucial role of legislation in the numeration process. State laws, under which the censuses were conducted, were usually based on blood quantum. These laws were changed periodically and affected the statistics. Self-identification is another major component attributed to significant changes in numeration. In historical assimilation, voluntary or not, ethnic or religious ambitions prevailed and the indigenous identification was neglected by individuals or groups.

The second article deals with the numeration of the New Zealand Maori and presents their case as more flexible and inclusive, while combining blood quantum with self-identification. However, even there, the indigenous discourse continues

to be very much contested. Each of the three chapters dealing with the Americas: Colombia, Canada and USA, presents the first surviving censuses that took place in the 18th and 19th centuries onwards. These censuses suffered from problematic sources and confusing terminology (like the un-uniform use of the terms *indio* and *indidena* in Latin America).

The book continues with six consecutive articles about the numeration of the Scandinavian indigenous, mainly referring to Norway. The importance of indigenous data for promoting their wellbeing in fields such as: health, education, culture and economic development, is well described in these articles. In the chapter by the historian Gunnar Thorvaldsen, on the 1930 to 1845 Sami numeration, three interesting contradictory parameters were introduced when considering ethnicity: individual v. group; ancestral v. cultural – linguistic; objective v. subjective.

Three of the articles represent the indigenous people in different parts of the Russian Federation. The anthropologist Sergey V. Sokolovsky brings an additional dimension to the numerical discourse when introducing Russian historical legislation in which an ethnic group cannot exceed 50,000 persons. Obviously this legal restriction overshadows any quantitative calculation of indigenous people there.

The final article of this volume, contributed by the sociologist John MacInnes, is titled "Who are the British?". He takes the issue of indigenous numeration to a more general question of nationality and identity. It appears that several groups in the UK claim to be indigenous. He found that sometimes the attempts to put various groups into categories is highly problematic. In MacInnes' conclusion, he chose to call upon his fellows: "we have the responsibility of avoiding the unconscious reproduction of identity categories whose roots lie elsewhere." (p. 292)

I could not agree more with MacInnes' concluding statement. Recently, I was involved in a similar discussion of who is indigenous to Israel (Yahel et al., 2012). The indigenous argument was initiated by academic scholars in order to promote a Negev Bedouin's claim for private ownership over several plots of land north of Be'er-Sheva in southern Israel. In 2015, the Supreme Court dismissed the claim, while finding the argument irrelevant to the case (CA 4220/12 el Uqbi v. State of Israel).

Overall the significance of this book lies mainly in the particular cases taken from different geographical zones, the variety of legislative policies, and the impressive collection of demographic databases, including the combination of quantitative and qualitative, historic and contemporary. It also exposes the great importance of a collaborative interdisciplinary work. That said, it is worth mentioning some of the book's defaults. The text could benefit from an additional explanatory maps, to accompany the isolated one. A legal scholar could also add to the general theme which deals a lot with legislation. Also missing from this important volume is the presence of Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries. Many of these countries are currently facing the challenges of defining ethnic and indigenous groups.

To conclude, I highly recommend this book for all those who are interested in indigenous issues as well as those interested in the study of ethnic groups.

REFERENCES

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