

and sometimes insistent population concerns from the early 1820s, well before depopulation shifted onto the local European cognitive horizon.

These first Māori concerns are typically recorded with little additional missionary comment. It was only after missionaries became established in New Zealand and had observed Māori populations over significant periods of time that they began to record *their own* concerns about depopulation.¹⁸

Population concerns seem to have been a significant factor behind missionary developments in counting Māori by the early 1840s. Estimates of the sort that Williams, Hamlin and Clarke had produced were insufficiently precise to address the question. The Bishop of Australia, William Broughton, visited New Zealand in 1839, in the midst of a major and widespread influenza epidemic, and afterwards, expressed major concerns about Māori depopulation and the uncertain reasons for it.

Broughton's specific concerns echoed a more general British humanitarian worry about indigenous population decline around the Empire and its fringes. These were expressed in reports of the House of Commons Committee on Aborigines and the formation and publications of the Aboriginal Protection Society. Taking up the depopulation cudgels in a New Zealand context was the British humanitarian Reverend Montagu Hawtrey. In a book, written as a letter to intending New Zealand colonists, Hawtrey opposed British colonisation of New Zealand, based on experiences of past harm to natives. As one palliative to perhaps inevitable colonisation, he recommended collecting periodic Māori census information and vital statistics. This would provide information to understand and address depopulation, and to avoid colonisation causing harm to Māori.¹⁹

The 1840s missionary attempt at a nationwide census

In September 1844 the CMS held a synod at Waimate, Northland. Here they resolved to take an annual census of the Māori population.²⁰ The newly arrived Bishop George Augustus Selwyn was probably a major driver behind this ambitious project. In a speech to a London audience in 1854, Selwyn asserted that he had heard it stated as a fact before his 1841 arrival in New Zealand that 'the native races melted away before the advance of civilisation'.²¹ Assessing the truth of this proposition may have been a major reason for the decision to collect a census.

Selwyn had prior experience in census collection to address public policy issues. Around 1835, as curate in the British town of Windsor, he had organised a census of children, to settle a dispute about the number of children not provided with an education.²²