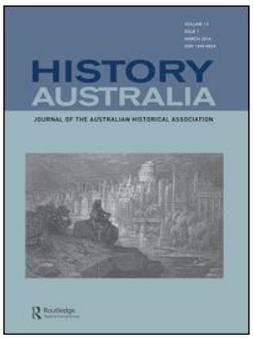

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The travelling social survey: social research and its subjects in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, 1930s–1970s

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the connected history of the social survey in Britain, Australia and New Zealand in the twentieth century. I describe the movements and international influence of social scientists, ideas and research subjects, which fit with James Vernon's call for a global history of modern Britain and other nations. I argue that the participation of local populations in social surveys helped to shape twentieth-century conceptions of citizenship, social knowledge, and the significance of everyday life around the globe. Further comparison of raw social scientific data will enable a discussion of cultural divergence in the British world due to the local politics of social class and race.

This article has been peer reviewed.

KEYWORDS

Australian history; British history; New Zealand history; social science; survey

In May 1942 the occupants of 31 Bridge Street in Hampton refused an invitation to participate in a wartime survey of Melbourne. Wilfred Prest, an economist at the University of Melbourne, had selected this house in a sample that would assess lodgings, occupations and incomes across the city. Prest made a careful and flattering plea for admittance to Bridge Street. He asserted that facts about its inhabitants would be kept secret but that these facts would, in the form of statistics, contribute to the planning of the postwar 'new social order'.[1] The project, he noted reassuringly, 'has the interest and support of government departments, municipal authorities, Trade Union leaders and many well-known citizens, but it depends for its success on the information you are willing to give us'. With that rhetorical flourish, ordinary inhabitants of the city – and their knowledge – were made king. Yet the residents at number 31 remained unconvinced. As recent arrivals to the city, they explained, 'we know nothing of the matters' the survey hoped to elucidate. These residents of Melbourne did not yet see themselves as part of Prest's social scientific equation. They were not alone. As Prest moved from street to street, his survey required endless argument and negotiation. Locals worried that their cooperation would expose them to higher taxes, reveal their illicit home businesses, or put their homes in danger of being condemned. Their

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[1]Letter to the participants, 1973.0002, Wilfred Prest Collection, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne (UMA). Note: Wilfred Prest was father of the Adelaide-based historian Wilfrid Prest.

reservations highlight the novelty of social scientific requests for information about ordinary lives, especially against the backdrop of ongoing intrusions for the purposes of collecting taxes and means testing.

The family at Bridge Street were not the only travellers involved in this encounter. The social survey was a portable tool, carried door to door and across oceans in order to understand households, streets, neighbourhoods, cities, nations and their social problems. A 'reconnaissance of the social landscape', social surveys were meeting points for different forms of social knowledge, including the established techniques of mapping, statistics and classification and newer qualitative practices such as the interview.[2] Surveys aimed to generate precise knowledge about populations – whether defined by a city boundary or an age range – and to investigate and make recommendations about the social problems they faced. Mike Savage has described how these methods extracted the characteristics of Britons from their local environment, calling into being the 'average' qualities of a nation.[3] Between the 1930s and the 1970s, social surveys were carried out by a combination of philanthropic, academic and government actors that varied by nation. There was a more prominent culture of philanthropy in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, and marked state support for social science research in New Zealand.[4] The avenues of government-funded research increased after the Second World War in all three nations, not least through the expansion of staff and student numbers at universities. A greater number of social surveys were carried out in Britain but, as this article will show, Australia and New Zealand researchers were up-to-date in their methodology and made their subjects part of a social scientific encounter that had different effects across the British world.

Although it is usually told as a national story, the social survey carried its social scientific methods and findings around the globe. Poverty surveys, popularised by Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to measure want in London and York, enjoyed particular prestige throughout the British world. Subsequent developments in the form of surveys travelled equally well. The tactics pioneered in Britain by Mass Observation in the late 1930s were employed in New South Wales in the early 1940s.[5] And the explosion in the number of social surveys – as well as the introduction of new topics including old age, youth, education and migration – occurred during the 1950s in Britain, Australia and New Zealand alike. Viewed from the Antipodes, social research was a transnational profession, equipped with a highly mobile methodology that was usually turned to the task of addressing local concerns about urbanisation, social class and race. By implementing surveys in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, researchers contributed to a global process that, in turn, remade the self-image of twentieth-century nations.[6]

[2]Graeme Davison, 'The Social Survey and the Puzzle of Australian Sociology,' *Australian Historical Studies* 34, no. 121 (2003): 172.
[3]Michael Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[4]Neil T. Lunt, 'Contested Inheritance: The Emergence of Social Science Research in New Zealand' (PhD Thesis, Massey University, 2004), 199–203.
[5]A. P. Elkin, *Our Opinions and the National Effort* (Sydney: Australasian Medical Publishing Co., 1941).
[6]James Vernon in this issue, 19–34.

The international development and influence of the social survey has not received sustained attention from historians of social science, who typically organise their studies according to national borders.[7] Many in the field drill down, to discuss the significance of a particular researcher or social research organisation.[8] The discussion of experiences on the front line of particular research projects has begun the work of mapping out the changes that social survey research wrought on the ground, among its subjects. Building on the 'active citizenship' that had been encouraged by wartime politics and perceptions of civic virtues in the 1930s and 1940s, the interactions of experts and individuals involved the reimagining of twentieth-century citizenship, aspects of social hierarchy and expectations about standards of living.[9] These studies do less, though, to explain the influence of social scientific methods, theories and language across national borders.

The differences between the British, Australian and New Zealand historiographic literature point to the role of national politics and the ways that social surveys have been put to local use, both at the time of their production and in subsequent historical debate. British historians have most often used social survey findings and research notes to answer questions about national community and social class during the Second World War and the postwar period of apparent affluence among workers.[10] Analytical strengths of this literature, expressed in the work of James Hinton and Jon Lawrence, include the insights that mid-century Britons identified with expertise and citizenship in new ways through their participation in social research, while the power dynamics of their interactions with researchers remained unequal. Australian and New Zealand historians have paid less attention to the influence of changing social research methods on social class, despite the fact that a number of mid-century studies investigated this aspect of life in the Antipodes. Instead, a marked strength of the literature in Australia and New Zealand has been its careful attention to the racial politics of medical science and anthropology.[11] Warwick Anderson, for example, traces the messy interactions of medical scientists and their subjects on the ground, and the consequences of their insights and misunderstandings for biomedical knowledge and race relations in Australia and around the globe. Taken together, recent work in these fields suggests how much was at stake for local populations when they encountered the social

[7]Sarah Elizabeth Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[8]Stuart Macintyre, *The Poor Relation: A History of Social Sciences in Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2010); James Hinton, *The Mass Observers: A History, 1937–1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Peter Mandler, *Return from the Natives: How Margaret Mead Won the Second World War and Lost the Cold War* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2013).
[9]James Hinton, 'The "Class" Complex: Mass-Observation and Cultural Distinction in Pre-War Britain,' *Past and Present* 199, no. 1 (2008): 207–36.
[10]James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Selina Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class,' *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 4 (2008): 501–18; Jon Lawrence, 'Class, "Affluence" and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain,' *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 2 (2013): 273–99.
[11]Warwick Anderson, *The Collectors of Lost Souls: Turning Kuru Scientists into Whitemen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne and Lancaster: Melbourne University Press and Gazelle, 2002); Geoffrey Gray, *A Cautious Silence: The Politics of Australian Anthropology* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007); Daniel Morrow and Barbara Brookes, 'The Politics of Knowledge: Anthropology and Māori Modernity in Mid-Twentieth-Century New Zealand,' *History and Anthropology* 24, no. 4 (2013): 453–71.

survey. Social scientists determined whether they were repeat subjects, like the British poor or, as was the case for indigenous populations in Australia and its territories, whether they were deemed unsurveyable and made the subjects of medical and anthropological knowledge instead.

Before they arrived in local communities, social surveys travelled along routes of university hiring and admission practices that most often led from Britain to Australia and New Zealand, rather than in the opposite direction. Tamson Pietsch has explained the workings of the 'British academic world' between the 1870s and 1939, focusing on the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.[12] Similar to the patterns that Pietsch has identified for the earlier period, virtually all of the individuals who directed social surveys of mid-century Australia had studied or worked in Britain, including theologian Alan Walker, agricultural scientist Samuel Wadham, economist Ronald Henderson, and psychologists A. P. Elkin and Oscar Oeser. Military service during the Second World War offered opportunities for young men to travel and to conduct research overseas.[13] Australians and New Zealanders abroad were connected by their attendance at the London School of Economics (LSE). They were also brought together by the patronage of Cambridge, Oxford and LSE scholars who had written about Aboriginal Australians and Māori, including A. C. Haddon, Bronislaw Malinowki, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Raymond Firth.[14] The careers of these influential scholars point to some of the ways that knowledge of Australia and New Zealand, especially of their indigenous populations, fed back into British intellectual culture.

North American scholarship was also influential in Australia and New Zealand, especially through Carnegie Foundation funding and the Fulbright, Harkness and Nuffield fellowships. Research from the United States was most significant for rural sociologists, such as Wadham, and for the development of community studies. The American community study *Middletown* that was published in 1937, for example, inspired a New Zealand version that appeared a year later.[15] Organisations and personnel from the United States also shaped the field of political and opinion polls.[16] Despite the regular appearance of funding from its philanthropic organisations, Australia and New Zealand had few ties to the American academic job market. Closer in proximity, Canadian academics were more often employed in the United States, and employed its graduates, so that Canada functioned as a 'hinge' between the British and American academic worlds.[17]

Social surveys most often travelled south from Britain to the Antipodes, although they followed academic networks that did not lead direct from London. Wilfred Prest,

[12]Tamson Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).
[13]Geoffrey Gray, Doug Munro and Christine Winter, 'Introduction,' in *Scholars at War: Australasian Social Scientists, 1939–1945*, ed. Geoffrey Gray, Doug Munro and Christine Winter (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2012), 6.
[14]Ibid., 14–16.
[15]H.C.D. Somerset, *Littledene: A New Zealand Rural Community* (Auckland: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1938).
[16]Murray Goot, '"A Worse Importation Than Chewing Gum": American Influences on the Australian Press and Their Limits the Australian Gallup Poll, 1941–1973,' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* 30, no. 3 (2010): 269–302; 'Studying the Australian Voter: Questions, Methods, Answers,' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 3 (2013): 366–78.
[17]Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars*, 7.

for example, was 'steeped' in the British tradition.[18] Prest had been educated in Leeds and Manchester, where he researched coal mining in Britain. After graduation, he taught at the University of St Andrews in Fife and for the Workers' Educational Association. Social surveys were part of Prest's 'undergraduate culture', and new and influential surveys were published during his years of graduate study and teaching in the 1930s.[19] Arriving at the University of Melbourne in 1938, Prest was surprised that there were no local equivalents to famous British surveys.[20] The wartime survey of Melbourne, designed in conversation with colleagues at the University and led by Prest, was meant to fill a perceived gap in knowledge that was modelled on British intellectual life. As the example of Bridge Street showed, Prest's social scientific vision was disseminated far beyond the university quadrangle by letters and interviewers that reached more than 6000 households in the city between 1941 and 1943.

The social survey had a mobile life in the mid-twentieth century, in which methods and questions that were developed in Britain interacted with local populations and national politics elsewhere. The rest of this article will explore that intersection by tracing several waves of survey methodology ranging from the poverty surveys that were pioneered in Britain in the 1890s, to lengthy interviews with elderly people and immigrants in the 1950s, via studies of group psychology and wartime morale in the 1930s and 1940s. In each of these examples, the social survey brought with it new ideas about the role of participants that were embedded in the design and delivery of questionnaires. Although social surveys always met enthusiasm mixed with a degree of scepticism, the nature of social scientific interactions changed over time in ways that heightened their participatory components and fit with social democratic developments and active citizenship in the mid-twentieth century. While a number of these innovations were developed first in Britain, they were usually implemented in all three nations soon afterward. From the perspective of people on the ground, successive developments in social survey methods were local events that gave increasing importance to the voices of research subjects.

The circulation of ideas: from poverty surveys to community studies

Celebrated examples of British social research had an afterlife in sites around the British world. Questions and methods that were first employed in Britain also shaped academic research, public opinion and the experiences of research subjects in Australia and New Zealand. In many cases the circulation of ideas was facilitated by the migration of academics trained in Britain, who were employed in universities in the Antipodes where they put the social survey to local use. Examples include famous surveys of poverty in British cities that subsequently determined the expectations of researchers about what should be known about the housing, income and living standards of Australians, and how that knowledge could be determined. The emphasis placed by British poverty surveys on scale and the comprehensive knowledge of the

[18]Graeme Davison and John Lack, 'Planning the New Social Order: The University of Melbourne Social Survey, 1941–1943,' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 17, no. 1 (1981): 36.
[19]Ibid.
[20]Ibid.

material conditions of the population (a notion that was informed by new sampling techniques) interacted with heightened interest in public opinion from the 1930s. Investigating local patterns of psychology, researchers in Sydney and Melbourne were inspired by the novel methods of British social research organisation Mass Observation. Path-breaking British social survey research had transnational influence when researchers and ideas travelled across the world to initiate the pursuit of apparently transparent and inclusive social knowledge.

British poverty surveys set the agenda for large-scale surveys of the material conditions and income of the residents of cities in sites across the British world. Charles Booth's famous survey of poverty responded to nineteenth-century debates about poverty among statisticians, journalists, politicians and philanthropists.[21] Booth calculated that around 30 per cent of London's working poor lived below a stringently defined level of subsistence, thus quantifying the level of poverty in London and showing that it was a greater problem than others had been able to discern. Social researchers would apply his methods to towns and cities around Britain for another half-century. Most immediately Seebohm Rowntree employed the concept of a poverty line in a social survey of York, where he identified similar levels of hardship and therefore undermined the popular criticism that Booth's surveys had identified a problem that was particular to the capital.[22] Rowntree developed the theory that the social problem of poverty was structured by the working-class life cycle.[23] Young people could save a little money in their initial working years but their wages failed to accommodate the needs of a family beyond the support of a few children. Once adult children began to contribute wages to the household economy this desperate need eased, only to return when the ageing parents were themselves unable to secure steady employment. The statistical analysis presented in these studies and subsequent social surveys unsettled earlier portrayals of poor individuals as 'masters of their fate' and suggested that poverty was the outcome of a series of problems that governments could conceivably compensate for, including the death or illness of a wage earner, old age, unemployment and low wages.[24]

Contributing to important shifts in British politics that would culminate in the social democratic developments of the mid-twentieth century, British poverty surveys also set the terms for social research in Australia. Designing the wartime survey of Melbourne that eventually reached the residents of Bridge Street, Prest studied British surveys for their definitions of overcrowding, nutritional requirements, poverty and social class.[25] He used British sampling methods that were not yet employed in the Australian census by sampling one in every 30 houses in most areas, using addresses from the *Melbourne Directory*.[26] Prest's survey shared British interest in material conditions of life that could be established by describing in detail the interior and exterior of houses and creating a record of the income and expenditure of their inhabitants.

[21]Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. 1st Series: Poverty* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1902).
[22]B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London: Macmillan, 1901), 298.
[23]Ibid., 136–37.
[24]A.L. Bowley and Alexander Robert Burnett-Hurst, *Livelihood and Poverty: A Study in the Economic Conditions of Working-Class Households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1915), 47.
[25]Davison and Lack, 'Planning the New Social Order: The University of Melbourne Social Survey, 1941–1943,' 37.
[26]Ibid.

The long-standing influence of British poverty surveys meant that the 1966 Melbourne Poverty Survey was initiated by virtually the same question. Economist Ronald Henderson, recently arrived from the University of Cambridge to direct the University of Melbourne's new Institute of Applied Economic Research, asked 'What is the equivalent of Rowntree on Poverty in Australia?'[27] With this question Henderson identified what seemed to him an obvious gap in Antipodean social knowledge, especially because Prest had never published a synthesised version of his findings.[28] To fill the space Henderson adapted the poverty line, the analytical tool first developed by Rowntree, for Australia, creating a focus for national debate over the measurement of poverty in that country.[29] The Melbourne Poverty Survey demonstrated that social surveys had as much to say about the 'rediscovery' of poverty in the 1960s, as they had contributed to the changing treatment of pauperism at the beginning of the century. To gather its data, researchers surveyed about 4000 households in the city. Henderson's conclusion that around one in 16 people in Melbourne lived in poverty drew even greater numbers of Australians into the conversation. Widespread publicity and ensuing political debate led to a nation-wide Commission of Inquiry into Poverty in 1972–1975, led by Henderson.[30] One part of the Inquiry was an Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of household income that collected information on 22,000 households around the nation.[31] The social survey had become national in scale.

While key questions for research were set out in British poverty surveys of the early twentieth century, the methods of survey work in the Antipodes were equally shaped by qualitative surveys that aimed to establish the truth of public opinion. Established in 1937, Mass Observation's interest in the collective unconscious of modern Britain emerged out of interwar anxieties about the spread of fascism and political instability, and the concern of its founders, Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, over the potential manipulation of individuals by government, media and mass culture. Mass Observation exploited overlaps in social scientific and humanities research in the first half of the twentieth century, using techniques from anthropology, social psychology, surrealism, literary criticism and sociology to pursue its aims. In Harrisson's 'Worktown' study of Bolton, researchers who were called observers lavished attention on everyday social life and popular politics and recorded, verbatim, the conversations of their subjects.[32] At the same time Madge established a national panel of volunteers – 900 of them by the end of 1938 – who wrote diaries, observed neighbours and friends, and answered questionnaires for the organisation.[33] The scientific value of reflective writing and diaries completed by members of the panel, Mass Observation

[27]Davison, 'The Social Survey and the Puzzle of Australian Sociology,' 192.
[28]The only published synthesis of research findings was focused on the western industrial suburbs. Wilfred Prest, *Housing, Income and Savings in War-Time: A Local Survey* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, Department of Economics, 1952).
[29]Peter Saunders, 'Setting the Poverty Agenda: The Origins and Impact of the Henderson Report,' in *Australian Poverty: Then and Now*, ed. Ruth Fincher and J. P. Nieuwenhuysen (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 57–60.
[30]Ibid., 53–54.
[31]Australia Commission of Inquiry into Poverty and Ronald F. Henderson, *Poverty in Australia: First Main Report, April 1975*, 2 vols. (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975).
[32]Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 17–60.
[33]Ibid., 61–88.

argued, was in the recording of individual thought.[34] Harrisson and Madge publicised the idea that mainstream media, politicians and social scientists failed to understand popular feeling or to predict mass behaviour when they ignored subjectivity.

The path-breaking methods of Mass Observation provided inspiration for psychologists investigating civilian morale and group psychology in Australia during the 1940s and 1950s. At the University of Sydney, A. P. Elkin employed 20 'observers' who were trained in social anthropology in order to complete a survey of wartime morale that was commissioned by the Commonwealth government.[35] The observers conducted what Elkin called 'guided conversations' to establish the attitudes of Australians.[36] The survey ultimately drew on the opinions of 400 individuals from Sydney, Newcastle, eight country towns, and a handful of rural districts.[37] In so doing Elkin, like the founders of Mass Observation, wanted to reflect 'the point of view of the people as distinct from that of the administration'.[38] The method of the study drew attention to the underlying attitudes and beliefs that directed the behaviour of Australians, especially to the mix of emotions that produced behaviour that had been incorrectly labelled wartime apathy. Ultimately, Elkin claimed, it was attention to individual psychology that provided a 'mirror' for Australian society.[39] Suggesting the racial politics of this image of the nation, Elkin warned his readers not to behave like an Aboriginal Australian, who had no glass to see the effects of decorating his face with 'pipe-clay, red ochre and charcoal' on ceremonial occasions.[40] Instead the Australian nation should pursue the social scientific project of 'self-examination' as a marker of white modernity.

Working in the expanding research networks of the 1950s, University of Melbourne psychologist Oscar Oeser employed survey methods that were influenced by his visit to the Worktown project in 1937, and by Mass Observation's notion of applying 'anthropology at home'.[41] Like the founders of that British organisation, Oeser argued that researchers should become part of the communities that they studied in order to discover the private opinions of their subjects. New forms of support were available for this work in the 1950s. Oeser directed a pair of urban and rural community studies that were sponsored by the Australian Social Sciences Research Council and UNESCO as part of an international investigation of social tensions that might lead to war.[42] In this international and comparative context, research findings and methods travelled the globe in new directions. Oeser reported that fieldworkers working on comparative

[34]Ibid., 376.
[35]Davison, 'The Social Survey and the Puzzle of Australian Sociology,' 179.
[36]Elkin, *Our Opinions and the National Effort*, 5.
[37]Ibid., 6.
[38]Ibid., 9–10.
[39]Ibid., 5.
[40]Ibid.
[41]Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, 81–82.
[42]The communities were in Melbourne and rural Victoria. O.A. Oeser and S.B. Hammond, *Social Structure and Personality in a City*, ed. University of Melbourne Deptment of Psychology, et al., 2 vols., vol. 1, Studies of Social Behavior (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954); O.A. Oeser and F.E. Emery, *Social Structure and Personality in a Rural Community*, ibid., vol. 2.

studies in India, France and Sweden adopted the methods of the Australian researchers.[43] Read in Britain, though, the published studies were not greeted with the same enthusiasm. Writing in the *Sociological Review*, Charles Madge criticised Oeser's 'dependence on the questionnaire and the absence of direct observation'.[44] Apparently Oeser had not travelled enough along the anthropological path marked out by British researchers.

An increased number of social surveys were completed in Australia and New Zealand from the 1950s onwards, and in these studies social researchers turned their attention to social integration among different groups in a manner that was modelled by sociologists working at the Institute of Community Studies. The London-based Institute, established by Michael Young and Peter Wilmott in 1954, paid social scientific attention to everyday life in the context of postwar developments in Britain such as slum clearances, the building of council estates, suburbanisation and the expansion of the white-collar workforce.[45] Sometimes work undertaken in the Antipodes closely matched British topics. The Rotary Club of Melbourne raised money for a study of old people in Australia and engaged Bertram Hutchinson, a researcher in the British Social Survey Department, to complete it.[46] Peter Townsend was conducting interviews in East London on the family life of old people at virtually the same time.[47] National research on community diverged when it considered social class and race. In New Zealand, for example, studies of social class were set in the school system rather than the homes of workers, and the social integration of Māori was the subject of survey and psychological research at a time when Indigenous Australians were considered the subjects of anthropology.[48]

The social survey and its subjects

While social scientific ideas mostly travelled from Britain to the Antipodes, the social survey was applied in distinctive ways on the ground. Exchanges between researchers and their subjects took place in the crosscurrents of paternalistic and democratic principles that were each embedded in the social surveys of the period. The poverty surveys of the early-twentieth century privileged the conclusions of informed observers, a tradition that was partly continued through respect for the expertise of social scientists in

[43]Letter from Oscar Oeser to Theodore Newcomb, 9 September 1949, Oscar Oeser papers, Correspondence 1946–1969, 2014/ 4219, UMA.
[44]Charles Madge, Reviews, *Sociological Review* 3, 1 (1955): 117–18.
[45]Michael Dunlop Young, et al., *Family and Kinship in East London*, Reports of the Institute of Community Studies (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957); Peter Marris and Institute of Community Studies, *Widows and Their Families*, ibid. (1958); Peter Willmott and Michael Dunlop Young, *Family and Class in a London* Suburb, ibid. (1960).
[46]Bertram A. Hutchinson, *Old People in a Modern Australian Community: A Social Survey* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1954).
[47]Peter Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, Reports of the Institute of Community Studies (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957). Interviews for the study were conducted between October 1954 and November 1955.
[48]Athol Congalton, *Social Class Consciousness in Adolescents* (Wellington: Victoria University College Department of Psychology, 1952); Jane Beaglehole Ritchie, *Childhood in Rakau: The First Five Years of Life*, Publications in Psychology (Wellington: Department of Psychology Victoria University College, 1957); Cora Vellekoop, 'Social Strata in New Zealand,' in *Social Process in New Zealand: Readings in Sociology*, ed. John Forster (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1969), 233–71; David P. Ausebel, *Maori Youth* (Wellington: Price Milburn, 1961); M.A. Lovegrove, 'The Scholastic Achievements of European and Maori Children,' *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1966): 15–39.

the postwar years. From the 1950s onwards surveys tended to grant their subjects more freedom to speak their mind and recorded their views in greater detail. This development was adjacent to the increasing importance afforded to the individual and the enlarged role to be played by citizens in the expanding welfare states of the mid-twentieth century. A key tension in social surveys of the time, however, was caused by the oppositional effects created by the high status of both first-person evidence (and therefore personal stories) and statistics, which converted the experiences of individuals into abstraction.

Tensions concerning the involvement of subjects in social survey research date from the nineteenth century. Booth's survey of poverty in London worked by categorising the level of poverty in each street in London, which was then presented in a colour-coded map of the city. To gain this knowledge of neighbourhoods, Booth gathered the reports of London School Board visitors, recently tasked with ensuring that the children of London attended school, who described conditions in the streets in which they worked. While historians have emphasised Booth's parallel interest in the testimony of working people, it was not the case that large numbers of London householders encountered his project on their doorsteps.[49] Officials provided the answers instead. The subjects of research, Booth believed, were accurately observed and labelled by expert observers.

Booth's subsequent research on old age, a category of poverty that he believed could be eliminated by the introduction of government pensions, harnessed the life stories of individuals to make his political point. Life stories of the aged poor were presented on page after page of the pamphlets that he published on the topic.[50] Yet Booth collected these accounts from the casebooks of workhouses that primarily reported official judgments about the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. In Booth's presentation, individuals were sorted according to their place in this hierarchy. Assigning letters to the different causes of poverty – so that 'D' stood for 'drink' – Booth posited that there were 'few stories that cannot be forcibly expressed by marital condition, age, and three letters'.[51] In the same publication that spent hundreds of pages detailing the experiences of families and individuals, Booth relied on the words of officials to reach his conclusions.

Decades later, the poverty surveys that were undertaken in Australia employed a mix of expert observation and interviews now experienced by thousands of research subjects in their own homes. The survey that was coordinated by Prest in the early 1940s directly asked its Melburnian subjects about their incomes. The question caused resentment and was frequently met with the reply that women did not know the amounts earned by men living in the house. On some occasions these underlying tensions erupted in open conflict, including between subjects.

> Wife interviewed. She was willing and cooperative until asked about incomes. She then called her husband who was very hostile and abused wife for having given any

[49]David Englander and Rosemary O'Day, *Retrieved Riches: Social Investigation in Britain 1840–1914* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1995), 8, 18.
[50]Charles Booth, *Pauperism; a Picture: And Endowment of Old Age; an Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1892).
[51]Ibid., 87.

> information. He paid his taxes and that was all anyone needed to know about him. Probably earns £6.7 week.[52]

As this example shows, researchers easily overrode the claims to privacy that were made by their subjects since many occupations had fixed wages, set by a central tribunal. The properties of Melburnians were made the objects of similar expert appraisal. Researchers measured the size of sections and estimated the productivity of gardens. Once inside, they asked questions about bedrooms, living rooms, sleep outs, baths, W.C.s, washhouses, and eight different questions about the kitchen. The frequent observation of cracks in walls or damp suggests that researchers were permitted to engage in lengthy, frequently critical, observation that had much in common with the practices of Booth and Rowntree.

Throughout the 1950s earlier practices of 'informed observation' were challenged by the greater legitimacy of 'direct' accounts from subjects, gathered through questionnaires and interviews.[53] Writing during a period of celebrated social democracy, and when psychoanalysis was pervasive, researchers emphasised the significance and complexity of everyday life and social relations – of employment, marriage and neighbourhoods – and the importance of understanding identity. Researchers began to record more of their interactions with participants by keeping notes during interviews and typing them up afterwards. This research relied on first-person evidence. It was necessary to have 'direct and continuous acquaintance with the people who are being studied' insisted British sociologist Peter Townsend.[54] Anything less produced meaningless 'lists and tables of statistics'. The new significance attached to research subjects was evident in survey work done by medical doctors, economists, anthropologists and sociologists from the late 1940s onwards.

The 1950s and 1960s have been called a halcyon period for the social sciences in New Zealand.[55] Sociology was first taught in New Zealand to social work students at Victoria University College's School of Social Sciences in 1950. Fewer in number than in Britain, academics and students in Australia and New Zealand nevertheless contributed to several large-scale social surveys, especially of urban populations and of women in New Zealand.

In these decades social research in Britain was nourished by the Clapham Report's recommendation of greater funding for social science research, the Home Office's financing of social work training, the Robbins Report's expansion of university-based social science faculties, and the creation of the Social Science Research Council in 1965 to carry out, support and publicise research in the field.[56] While the LSE had established a sociology department in 1907, the discipline established itself more firmly in the new 'plate-glass' universities that championed the social sciences as the most appropriate form of knowledge for modern life.[57]

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[52]Interview questionnaire, 14 January 1942, Interview 71, Prahran, Wilfred Prest Collection, 1973.0002, box 15, UMA.
[53]Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain*, 94.
[54]Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People*, 9–10.
[55]Lunt, 'Contested Inheritance,' 227.
[56]A.H. Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13.
[57]Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain*, 128.

The survey now addressed its subjects through the sociological interview, which enhanced the democratic and participatory dimensions of social research. In the late 1950s, for example, sociologist Jerzy Zubrzycki interviewed migrant workers and their families in the Latrobe Valley, east of Melbourne. The State Electricity Commission of Victoria had established infrastructure and towns in the valley to support the mining and burning of brown coal in order to produce electricity for the state of Victoria. Zubrzycki, who was born in Poland and attended university in London, was interested in the postwar 'influx' of new ethnic groups who came to work in the coal industry.[58] The area was home to an unusually high number of immigrants. The Valley town of Newborough, for example, had the lowest percentage of Australian-born residents in the nation (43 per cent) in the 1954 census.[59] A total of 541 workers from Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Malta, Italy, Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were interviewed for the project. Nine refused. The consenting subjects shared details of their early family life, schooling, religion, migration, marriage, work, income, leisure activities and more.

Social survey participants in 1950s Victoria took a range of positions on the interest and value of survey research. The interviewers who worked on Zubrzycki's project – eight students from the University of Melbourne's Department of Social Studies – judged that migrants from England, Scotland and Ireland were interested and cooperative, even grateful to be interviewed.[60] Reflecting publicity attempts by the researchers and the increased visibility of social science in Britain and Australia, several participants had heard about the survey before the interviewer arrived on their doorstep.[61] A Scottish man who had arrived in Australia in 1950, for example, had been hoping that he would be interviewed and wanted to know more about the sampling process.[62] Zubrzycki had sponsored a multi-pronged publicity campaign to convince the community of the value of his work. The effort included articles in local papers the *Advocate Live*, *Live Wire* and *Advertiser*, and in the State Electricity Commission's Christmas magazine. The latter publication did its best to allay the fears of participants about privacy and free choice, giving assurance that

> All the interviewers will sign a pledge of secrecy, and the completed questionnaires, which do not name the men interviewed, will be kept under lock and key by the University authorities. The report on the survey will not quote individuals.
>
> This is a golden opportunity for newcomers to help themselves in the long run by providing the data necessary for a balanced judgement on the vital problems of migrant settlement. There are no 'strings' to the queries, and no compulsion to answer them, but the willing co-operation of the chosen five hundred will assure a Happy Future in the Valley as well as a Merry Christmas.[63]

[58]Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley: A Sociological Study of Immigrants in the Brown Coal Industry in Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1964), 16.
[59]Ibid., 24.
[60]Interview, 9 February 1959, Settlers of the La Trobe Valley, 1959–64 (SLTV), MS6690, series 11, box 18, folder 1, Papers of Jerzy Zubrzycki, National Library of Australia, Canberra (NLA); Ibid., 37, 39–40.
[61]Interview, 27 January 1959, SLTV, box 18, folder 1; 3 February 1959, folder 4; 24 January 1959, box 19, folder 7, NLA.
[62]Interview, 24 January 1959, SLTV, box 19, folder 7, NLA.
[63]Zubrzycki, *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley*, 36–37.

Following this appeal to the moral duty of participants in a season that was symbolic of good will, there was a public meeting and the announcement of the beginning of the survey in the papers and on local radio stations. Zubrzycki enlisted local authorities – the press, councillors, members of the clergy, employers and 'prominent citizens' – in each of his efforts to convince the public that social surveys were safe to participate in and important to modern, multicultural society.

The promotion of social science was necessary because many people questioned the aims, methods and worth of surveys. A number in the Latrobe Valley were 'amazed' or 'amused' to be counted as migrants after living in Australia for decades.[64] Others worried that the information would be made public, on the radio or in the papers.[65] One man wanted to hurry because he believed the survey to be a 'waste of time'.[66] Another shouted his answers from the bedroom, where he was busy reading a detective novel.[67] By the middle of the twentieth century the reverse was also becoming true, as Australians increasingly employed social-scientific notions to explain national and community life. Accordingly, many participants were happy to share their ideas about immigration and the mixed attitudes of Australians towards immigrants.[68] Interviewers reported that participants became more 'friendly and cooperative' as they learned more about the survey.[69] In one household, 'drinks flowed' and the interviewees 'spoke freely'.[70] Another couple provided the interviewer with supper as a gesture of welcome and respect.[71]

Age made a difference to these responses, as did nationality. When they turned their attention to family life and networks of support, for example, researchers in Britain were interested in information that had been used under the poor law to refuse older people financial aid and to locate relatives who could be forced to pay their costs.[72] These were dire outcomes for older Britons. Accordingly, some participants closed down discussion after they had volunteered what they considered the most relevant information: the state of their health, their employment history and their weekly expenditure.[73] Among the migrant groups that were subject to Zubrzycki's survey, eastern Europeans were particularly suspicious of 'any stranger with a form to fill in'.[74] As Jean Martin observed of Polish, Russian and Ukrainian subjects in her study of refugees in 1952, people were afraid they would be forcibly repatriated.[75] Some had witnessed officials rounding up 'Soviet citizens' in Europe after the war, others knew of organisations that had been set up to exert pressure on expatriates. In this context

[64]Interview, 2 February 1959 and 3 February 1959, SLTV, box 18, folder 2; 4 February 1959, box 19, folder 8, NLA.
[65]Interview, 26 January 1959, SLTV, box 18, folder 3, NLA.
[66]Interview, 28 January 1958, SLTV, box 19, folder 9, NLA.
[67]Interviews, 30 January 1959, SLTV, box 18, folder 1; 3 February 1959, folder 4, NLA.
[68]Interviews, 27 January 1958, SLTV, box 18, folder 6; 4 February 1959, box 19, folder 8, NLA.
[69]Interview, 22 February 1959, SLTV, box 19, folder 7, NLA.
[70]Interview, 31 January 1959, SLTV, box 19, folder 9, NLA.
[71]Interview, 29 January 1958, SLTV, box 19, folder 9, NLA.
[72]Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 173.
[73]Interview transcripts, SN 4723 Family Life of Old People, 1865–1955, The Peter Townsend Collection, National Social Policy and Social Change Archive, available digitally through UK Data Archives (UKDA), http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-4723-1.
[74]Zubrzycki, *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley*, 35.
[75]Jean Martin, *Refugee Settlers: A Study of Displaced Persons in Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1965), 5–6.

what appeared to Australian researchers to be routine questions about past employment, or the number of people in a family, seemed dangerous.[76] Martin relied on each contact to vouch for her and introduce her to others; Zubrzycki abandoned his intention to 'probe deeply' into the lives of his subjects before migration.[77]

A proportion of research subjects remained suspicious, even as surveys became an expected part of modern life. People became familiar with the activities of social researchers as distinct from surveillance by the state and no longer worried so much about being reported for unpaid tax or undeclared income from lodgers. This shift intersected with new approaches among researchers, which removed some intrusive aspects of their questioning. In the surveys of poverty that Henderson carried out in the 1970s, for example, the opinions of subjects were a focus of inquiry equal to the facts of their material lives. A 1975 example pursued questions of poverty and income by asking how subjects were 'getting along financially these days'.[78] Subsequent questions inquired about people's views on contemporary economic conditions in Australia, and their state of mind given their financial situation. Later in the survey, when the researcher and subject had built rapport, the survey asked its subjects to place their annual income within a $1000 range, which most participants did without question. New concerns about privacy emerged when researchers asked these subjects to provide their full name (earlier surveys had identified subjects by address). A large number refused. In these cases, familiarity with the survey culture of modern life did not help. Instead, subjects complained of the follow-up mail they had received after providing such detail, as well as the 'stupid questions' they had been required to answer for Gallup polls.[79]

While the responses of research subjects were always mixed, the formation of grassroots social research organisations affirms a degree of faith in the transformative effects of social surveys during the second half of the twentieth century. In 1966, for example, a group of volunteers formalised their commitment to social research by establishing the Society for Research on Women in New Zealand (SROW). Convinced that knowledge of the statistical facts of women's lives would improve government policy, these amateur social scientists trained themselves in survey method and carried out large-scale studies that resulted in 70 publications.[80] At its peak, in 1968, SROW had just over 1000 voluntary members who conducted research in local study groups around the country.[81] The Society's first published text, *Urban Women* (1972), showcased their interest in quantitative method, technical skills such as coding, and studies that were vast in scale and subject matter. The study was based on 5400 interviews.[82]

[76]Ibid., 5.
[77]Zubrzycki, *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley*, 35–36.
[78]Survey questionnaires, 1979.0172, Survey of Living Conditions in Melbourne: Stage II, Institute of Applied Economic Research, box 7, UMA.
[79]Survey questionnaires, 112205, 13 September 1975 and 103201, 19 September 1975, 1979.0172, Survey of Living Conditions in Melbourne: Stage I, Institute of Applied Economic Research, box 7, UMA.
[80]SROW Handbook, 1976, Society for Research on Women, Auckland Branch, MS 98/22, Auckland War Memorial Museum, Auckland (AWMM).
[81]Elizabeth Jane Gawith, et al., *Women Centre Stage: A Study of SROW and Its Research* (Wellington: Society for Research in New Zealand, 1993), 9.
[82]Society for Research on Women in New Zealand, *Urban Women* (Dunedin: Society for Research on Women in New Zealand, 1972); Gawith, et al., *Women Centre Stage*, 6.

The interview schedule consisted of 124 questions over 26 pages.[83] This was exacting work, especially for previously untrained volunteers, but many were convinced that the most effective intervention in women's lives was the expansion of this brand of social research.[84] Unfortunately for the hardworking members of SROW, by the 1970s social scientists in universities were questioning the value of such large-scale, comprehensive research and advocating the close analysis of individual choices instead.[85]

The connected history of the social survey in Britain, Australia and New Zealand underlines the value of James Vernon's global history of the modern nation. The profiles of social-scientific employment and the development of research projects in the period demonstrate a high degree of intellectual and cultural exchange in the British world. At first glance this may seem like a familiar story describing Antipodean efforts to become a 'better Britain', yet Australian and New Zealand projects did not aim to replicate British studies exactly. Social researchers investigated local issues and helped to shape national conversations, even as they used transnational methods. The increasing opportunities for participation by research subjects in all three nations reveal how this intellectual exchange shaped aspects of everyday life. Transported through networks of employment, education and migration, the travelling social survey contributed to local and lived experiences around the globe.

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[83]History of SRO, 3, Society for Research on Women, National Records, box 2, folder 9, AWMM.
[84]Society for Research on Women in New Zealand, *Urban Women*, 4.
[85]Allan Levett, Graeme Sargent and Margaret Shields, 'Academic Social Science and Political Action in Social Research': 2, 12, Society for Research on Women, National Records, box 1, folder 25, AWMM.