

*Flying Kiwis: A History of the OE*. By Jude Wilson. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2014. 296pp. NZ price: \$45. ISBN: 9781877578267.

*Flying Kiwis* is based on author Jude Wilson's PhD thesis research and details the development of the New Zealand OE (Overseas Experience). Wilson's rationale for writing the book is that the OE is poorly documented and underresearched despite the fact that it has long been a pivotal New Zealand experience and central to our sense of national identity. While more descriptive than analytical, the book argues that the OE illuminates New Zealanders' colonial connection with England, and its changes over time reveal New Zealanders' growing confidence in their national identity.

This book gives little detailed description of methodologies used, but the sources are varied. Many of the stories and photographs were elicited from volunteers interviewed by Wilson. A select bibliography (pp.284–6) reveals Wilson has trawled widely through travel memoirs, histories, novels, plays, films and tourism guides for material. One of the highlights of this book is the reproduction of many OE-related photos, cartoons, advertising and ephemera, which are colourful, cheerful and informative. Wilson has done her research in both New Zealand and the United Kingdom, unearthing gems such as copies of London-based expatriate newspapers and travel mementoes. She has also created a number of pictorial diagrams illustrating key time frames and patterns, such as 'The OE Travel Map' (p.126). The book is divided into three sections. Part I, 'Foundations', deals with early New Zealand OE experiences; Part II, 'The Big OE', outlines the key OE experiences; and Part III, 'A Cultural Icon', considers the return home and legacy of the OE in New Zealand culture.

Of the three sections, Part I is the weakest. The three chapters are too varied in content to hang together successfully. The section tries to merge accounts of early OE stories with a more general account of travellers' experiences of leaving home and initial arrival. Part II is the largest section of the book and more coherent. It details the changes over time, common trends and key experiences of the Kiwi OE. It describes New Zealanders' travel adventures, bus tours, favoured destinations, work experiences, support systems and lives in London. Part III is fairly brief but has some interesting reflections on returning home and on how the OE is viewed by New Zealand politicians, in popular culture and in the media.

There is no doubt that this book is a useful resource for any researcher interested in New Zealanders' fascination with overseas travel or the tourism industry. Many of the book's findings and themes resonate with recent research on the experience of New Zealand migration. But all these positives ultimately failed to draw me in. I found many of the chapters which described all the permutation of Kiwi OEs somewhat dull. Perhaps this is a reflection of my own prejudices against OE stories. In oral history interviews I often find that interviewees dwell on the travels of their youth in interminable detail. Wilson references this when she writes 'what identifies as OE is its emphasis on curiosity and pleasure' (p.32). Usually travel stories are formulaic, fond and self-indulgent, containing little more than lists of places visited and experiences enjoyed, with the occasional 'hilarious' mishap thrown in for entertainment. Most

OE stories are too recent and ubiquitous to seem remarkable, and often have little relevance to New Zealand's social and political history.

While this book is useful as a compendium of Kiwis' OE experience, much of its content seemed to have similar flaws to OE narratives: plentiful description, but little analysis and reflection. I would have liked to see a more creative approach to the source material. For example, a more in-depth enquiry into how the OE challenged and redefined New Zealander's sexual mores, gender roles and attitudes to drugs, would have been fascinating. It might have been possible to draw links between the OE and the growth of the counterculture back home in New Zealand.

As an oral historian, my major gripe is that book does not use the source interviews to their full potential. Firstly, individual narratives are often summarized in third-person sidebars, or used only in brief quotes. Greater use of narrators' individual voices would have created more compelling reading. Secondly, Wilson has not investigated fully the close ties between storytelling and the OE. In Chapter Nine she looks at the way the OE has been depicted through cartoons, plays, news media and advertising, but she does not consider in any depth how individual narrators construct, rehearse and tell their own OE stories. For most Kiwis, much of the value of travel lies in its ability to generate memory, meaning and an interesting life story. This book missed an opportunity to delve into narrators' motives for OE reminiscence, challenge their narratives, and provoke them to critically reflect on their OE experience.

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