

studies of the development and differentiation of biomedical citizenship in the early twentieth century—now we just need to connect some of the dots.

Warwick Anderson  
University of Wisconsin–Madison

*While You're Away: New Zealand Nurses at War 1899–1948.* By Anna Rogers (Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2003, \$42.95, ISBN 1-869-40301-0) 352 pp.

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ON THE EXPERIENCES OF NEW ZEALAND MEN who fought in the major wars of the twentieth century, but little on the women who served their country as nurses. Yet, as Anna Rogers notes, their stories were ‘every bit as remarkable, memorable and moving as those of the soldiers’ (p. 2). In this book she sets out to correct that imbalance and to tell the stories of the nurses—gauged through letters, diaries, accounts published in the *New Zealand Nursing Journal*, interviews, and memoirs such as those of the Matron-in-Chief of the New Zealand Army Nursing Services 1913–23, Hester Maclean (though her published memoirs are missing from the bibliography). In the introduction, Rogers states that ‘[m]ale attitudes are central to this story’ (p. 7), and yet the nature of the sources ensures that the story is seen through the eyes of the nurses themselves. The narrative revolves around the thirty or so nurses who served in the South African Boer War 1899–1902, about 550 nurses in World War I, six in the Spanish Civil War, and the more than 600 nurses and 250 voluntary aids in World War II, and in the Pacific and Japan immediately after the war.

Much of the literature on soldiers’ experiences of war has explored the rise of a national identity, as large groups of New Zealand men were thrust together on foreign soil for the first time. This gave them the opportunity to compare themselves with others, a comparison from which they emerged rather well. In particular, they seemed to be bigger, stronger, more manly, more egalitarian and more practical than their British counterparts. Rogers argues that the nurses also played their part in forging a new sense of nationhood. Concrete evidence of the nurses’ bravery and skill was found in the awards bestowed upon them, although she notes: ‘Sometimes the reaction to an award would be typically Kiwi in its abrupt modesty’ (p. 6). These nurses went overseas for the first time and, according to Rogers, discovered they were often more competent and flexible than their British counterparts. In World War I, ‘colonial superiority was soon assured’, with Maclean

commenting on a tug-o'-war between English and New Zealand nurses which the 'fine well-built New Zealand sisters won amid cheers from the onlookers' (p. 62).

One thing the New Zealand soldiers appeared to have in common was a dislike of British hierarchy and rigidity. Rogers notes this was the same for the women, who were 'bemused and discomforted' by British 'rigid insistence on rules' and 'adherence to routine' (pp. 6, 200). She claims that for the nurses, 'the sharp contrast between a relaxed antipodean attitude and hide-bound British military tradition was ubiquitous' (p. 151). One wonders from this account whether New Zealand civilian hospitals imposed no routines, which seems highly unlikely.

Rogers makes no attempt to look critically at her sources. She takes the nurses' accounts at face value. For example, in the Boer War, New Zealand nurse Jane Peter kept a diary. We are told, 'When three or sometimes five patients were dying each night, only Peter's determination altered this appalling statistic' (p. 23). Peter was nursing a particular soldier but was then sent to another hospital, and she noted in her diary that two days later 'her boy' died. Peter commented, 'Left to ignorant orderlies by the Sister who took my place, he was simply murdered for he was doing well though still very ill when I was forced to leave him', an assessment which Rogers appears to accept. Rogers writes that by the time Peter made her last diary entry before returning to New Zealand, 'her disillusionment with the British military medical establishment was complete, though her Kiwi spirit was undimmed' (p. 62).

Stereotypes abound in this history. For example: 'In true Kiwi fashion, the hospital at Wisques was a triumph of adaptation and determination' (p. 128). Rogers concludes: 'Like the men they cared for, the nurses were practical, adaptable, impatient of unnecessary bureaucracy and highly skilled.' The implication, although not proved, is that the New Zealand women stood out among military nurses. At one point she admits that the British nurses 'did a splendid job', but that the New Zealand soldiers were delighted and comforted by New Zealand women, with their familiar accents and their appreciation of the same jokes. In fact, this was probably the basis of the growing sense of national identity.

Rogers does indeed correct the former imbalance between soldiers' and nurses' accounts. The latter's stories are told with no detail spared; every nurse is named. She has adopted a narrative style with copious information on weather, style of accommodation, food and other conditions. This works well in her graphic account of the sinking of the *Marquette*, in which ten nurses drowned. Elsewhere, however, we are swamped by detail—yet no themes are explored in depth. For example, in her chapter on World War I she mentions the subject of shell-shock in passing and then goes on to discuss night raids and mustard

gas in subsequent paragraphs. She does not attempt to explore medical advances and techniques, for instance, the impact on nursing of the introduction of blood transfusion and penicillin. Nevertheless, she does show that nursing served New Zealand women well. It was, as one of Rogers' informants stated, 'a terrific adventure'.

Linda Bryder  
University of Auckland

*The People's Health: Public Health in Australia, 1788–1950 (volume 1) and 1950 to the Present (volume 2)*. By Milton J. Lewis (Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 2003, \$US69.95, ISBN 0-313-31090-4) 311 pp. & 347 pp.

THIS IS A MASSIVE WORK OF WIDE SCOPE, LONG COVERAGE AND MANY PAGES. Two-volume histories are a rarity these days. But telling the story of more than 200 years of public health in Australia demands the large-scale treatment it receives in *The People's Health*. The first volume charts the rise of public health initiatives from the arrival of the First Fleet to the post-World War II period. The second carries the story on until the later 1990s, and concludes by addressing some of the issues facing health care providers in the new millennium. The result is an important book—comprehensive, reliable and well researched. As a reference work and critical history, it will be a must for the bookshelves of historians of Australian medicine, public health practitioners and students of public policy.

Lewis starts by briefly charting the rise of public health measures in the Greco–Roman world, China, and mediaeval and Renaissance Europe. But his analysis really begins with the emergence of mercantilist thought in Europe during the seventeenth century. A new vision of the people as a national resource was enshrined in the works of John Graunt, Christian Huygens and Edmund Halley. This view was elaborated on during the Enlightenment by, among others, the French *philosophes*, for whom political, social *and* health reform were of a piece in accelerating mankind's advance towards perfection. States, too, were now increasingly concerned about the state of the public's health. The concentration of power that characterised the nation state made intervention feasible. And the exigencies of war and trade fuelled anxieties about the ability of each nation to compete at an international level. Lewis traces the social, intellectual and the cultural imperatives that set governments in Europe, America and Australia on the slow, clumsy, and fiercely contested path to public health policies.