

ON SHIFTING GROUND:
Self-narrative, feminist theory and writing practice

By
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To
Susan Moller Okin
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Abstract

This thesis centres on a problem that stands at the heart of feminist theory: how women may come to understand themselves as speaking subjects located within historically specific, discursive social structures, to question those structures aloud, and to seek to change them. It combines self-narrative, feminist theory and writing practice to make sense of a body of published work which I produced between 1984 and 1999, with a consistent focus on some form of gendered discourse, by setting it in its personal, historical, and theoretical contexts. Although the thesis is built around published work, it is not primarily about results or outcomes, but rather about a set of active historical processes. Taking the form of a spirally structured critical autobiography spanning five and a half decades, it traces how one voice of what I have termed feminist oppositional imagining has emerged and taken its own worded shape. First, it constructs a double story of coming to writing and coming to feminism, in order to explore the formation of a writing subject and show the critical importance of the connections between subjectivity and oppositional imagining, and to highlight the need to find ways of producing knowledge which do not rely on the notion of the detached observer. Secondly, in a deliberate shift of form and focus, it steps back to canvass the historical context for the work I produced in response to the discursive shift that has become known as the New Right. It argues that by usefully enforcing a focus on the necessity of a commitment to social justice and human interdependence, this shift spurred the development of a feminist discourse, centred on unpaid work, which is capable of understanding and countering New Right perspectives on what it means to be a human being and to live in human society.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Chapter 1: Introducing this thesis.....	1
Undertaking a PhD by published and unpublished work.....	1
What this thesis aims to do	1
Key questions	2
Key concepts	3
How the thesis is structured	15
Chronology: Anne Else	20
Section One.....	21
Chapter 2: Coming to writing, 1950-1967	22
Introduction	22
Part One: Coming to reading	22
Part Two: A good school	26
Part Three: Doing English.....	32
Part Four: Losing interest.....	37
Chapter 3: Coming to feminism, 1965-1980.....	45
Introduction	45
Part One: A married mother	45
Part Two: Sexual politics	54
Part Three: The facts of life	57
Part Four: Moving away	61

Chapter 4: Writing women, 1978-1984	68
Introduction	68
Part One: The shock of recognition	68
Part Two: The withering effect	72
Part Three: A larger understanding	77
 Chapter 5: How to write, 1984-1987.....	 89
Introduction	89
Part One: Four notebooks	90
Part Two: Finding the subject	92
Part Three: Oppositional imagining	96
Part Four: Claiming the right to write	100
Part Five: Reconciling philosophy and poetry	108
 Chapter 6: Writing adoption, 1945-1995	 120
Introduction	120
Part One: Birth and death	120
Part Two: A question of adoption	122
Part Three: Knowledge and power	126
 Section Two.....	 137
Chapter 7: Gender politics: Before 1984	138
Introduction	138
Part One: The politics of housework	139
Part Two: "Participation and belonging"	147
Part Three: The unravelling consensus	153
Part Four: Rethinking the state	156
 Chapter 8: Women under Labour, 1984-1987	 161
Introduction	161
Part One: Seeing the enemy?	161

Part Two: Questioning the state	168
Part Three: Shifting right	176

Chapter 9: To market and home again, 1987-1992..... 184

Introduction	184
Part One: Rolling back the state.....	184
Part Two: A different discourse	190
Part Three: Women and social policy	194
Part Four: Gender and the New Right.....	201

Chapter 10: False economy, 1990-1999 209

Introduction	209
Part One: Pressing on with the programme.....	210
Part Two: Celebrating women's suffrage	216
Part Three: Developing a view from elsewhere	220
Part Four: Countering the discourse of dependency	229
Part Five: The price of growing older	234

Chapter 11: In conclusion..... 240

Bibliography 249

Appendices

Appendix I: Anne Else - Chronological list of major publications discussed	249
Appendix II: Extract from <i>False Economy</i>	271

Figure

Fig.1: On shifting ground: Chronological structure.....	19
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Chapter 1: Introducing this thesis

Undertaking a PhD by published and unpublished work

In 1968, I graduated Master of Arts with first class honours in English from the University of Auckland. Thirty-four years later, in June 2002, I enrolled part-time for a PhD by published and unpublished work at Victoria University of Wellington. This thesis can be read as an explanation of why it took me so long to undertake doctoral study.

This type of doctorate recognises the liminal position on the threshold of academia and formal knowledge that I and many other New Zealand expository writers, including other feminists, have held. Like them, I have produced a substantial body of work which has broken new ground, and has achieved credibility within academic and other communities; and I have done so either wholly outside academic institutions, or in tenuous, marginal, intermittent connection with them. The PhD by published and unpublished work acknowledges the ways in which scholarly endeavours can take paths other than the traditional ones, and allows those who have taken such a path to lay claim to formal recognition as producers of valid knowledge.

What this thesis aims to do

This thesis centres on a problem that stands at the heart of feminist theory: how women may come to understand themselves as speaking subjects located within historically specific, discursive social structures, to question those structures aloud, and to seek to change them. In writing it, I aim to create an account of how I have become a writing subject, and what I as that writing subject have “learned how to see”¹ in my work. I use the term “work” because, unlike “text”, it evokes both the agency and the labour which writing necessarily involves.²

¹ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): p.583.

² See Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988).

My thesis is built around three groups of published work, spanning the period from 1984 to 1999. Their common feature is a focus on some form of gendered discourse. They consist of essays on writing, literature, and creativity; a book and essays on motherhood, identity, and the state; and a book, essays, articles and speeches on paid and unpaid work, the New Right, and the state.³

Writing this thesis gives me the opportunity to make sense of this body of feminist writing in its personal, historical and theoretical contexts, which span three decades. What I aim to produce here is what Nancy K. Miller has called “the story of the ‘coming to writing’”,⁴ and to show how this cannot be separated from the development of subjectivity, nor from the story of the “coming to feminism”. I intend the story I tell to illuminate “the shaping force of gender within the social field of writing”.⁵ As always, I write to find out what I think I know, about myself, about others, and about gender, writing, and knowledge.

Key questions

The key questions I address in relation to my own work are:

- How have I come to see myself as a writer and producer of feminist knowledge, and how have I put that perception into practice?
- What historical contexts contributed to the formation of my own subjectivity and my perception of myself as a writer and feminist?
- From what contexts did my writing emerge, and in what ways are these contexts reflected in my writing?
- What problems of theory and practice have I encountered in my writing, and how are they related to issues of knowledge and power?

³ These publications are listed in Appendix I, pp.259-260.

⁴ Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Biographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p.127.

⁵ Ibid., p.126.

- What does this study of my own work contribute to feminist theories of subjectivity, discourse and knowledge?

Key concepts

In answering these questions, I have worked with ten key concepts, which are outlined below. These concepts come from a range of disciplinary perspectives, although feminist philosophical inquiry predominates in the work I have chosen to quote from in outlining them. The order in which they appear is not hierarchical; they all work together, in what Sue Middleton has described as the kind of theoretical “promiscuity” or “pluralism” which feminist theory and criticism often adopt, refusing to fit into the neat conventional boundaries or taxonomies of knowledge which were not designed to include them.⁶

Although these concepts do not figure explicitly throughout the thesis, surfacing only in particular contexts (as in the examples mentioned), they provide the theoretical framework for this account, and often for the published work itself.

Critical autobiography

Introducing their anthology of essays on women’s autobiography, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson state that to read women’s autobiographical texts is “to attend to the historically and culturally specific discourses of identity through which women become speaking subjects”.⁷ This also applies to writing the kind of autobiography which this thesis represents. The terms used by feminist critics to describe it include “critical autobiography”, “feminist autobiography”, and “auto/biography” or “feminist auto/biography”.⁸

⁶ Sue Middleton, *Educating Feminists: Life Histories and Pedagogy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), p.42.

⁷ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1998), p.22.

⁸ These terms come respectively from Morwenna Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1995), Jeanne Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), Pauline Polkey, ed., *Women's Lives into Print: The Theory, Practice and Writing of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), Liz Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

I prefer “critical autobiography”, the term used by Morwenna Griffiths. Like Middleton, Miller and Stanley, Griffiths approaches critical autobiography not as a safely distanced research subject, dealing with “texts” produced by others who are not themselves feminist theorists and critics, but as a feminist practice. She defines it as a form of epistemological critique, undertaken “not to be confessional or to share a personal account more widely”, but as a means of:

reflecting on experience in order to develop an account of self-identity which...serve[s] the double purpose of both adding to feminist theory and also providing a challenge to the mainstream.⁹

Nancy K. Miller sees this kind of autobiography as a “performative genre of criticism...the idea is to transmit not so much the truth of a self as the personal or autobiographical effects of a discourse”.¹⁰ Sue Middleton suggests that it centres on studying “the ways in which we...are [and were] positioned inside the social...phenomena that are the object of our enquiries”.¹¹ Griffiths helpfully foregrounds agency, describing critical autobiography as “an account of the self making itself, but not in conditions of its own choosing”.¹² That is the kind of account I aim to produce in this thesis.

Women’s autobiographical writing is now said to be positioned as “a privileged site for thinking about issues of writing at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial and postmodern critical theories” and “a previously unacknowledged mode of making visible formerly invisible subjects”.¹³ Yet this is a remarkably recent development.

For the most part, the feminist critics putting forward this approach to autobiography have positioned themselves outside the kind of writing they are considering. Relatively few feminist theorists have written at any length about their own expository writing in the context of their own life. Those who have done so¹⁴ have in most cases already

⁹ Morwenna Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.71-2.

¹⁰ Christie McDonald, "Personal Criticism: Dialogue of Differences," in *Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.246.

¹¹ Middleton, *Educating Feminists: Life Histories and Pedagogy*.

¹² Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity*, p.130.

¹³ Smith and Watson, eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, p.5.

¹⁴ The major examples I have drawn on in writing this thesis, including those written by women poets and novelists, are Sandra Coney, *Out of the Frying Pan: Inflammatory Writings 1972-89* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1990), Ann Curthoys, *For and against Feminism: A Personal Journey into Feminist*

established an academic career in which writing to produce knowledge has been both authorised and expected. Even for these women, critical autobiography is still viewed as a risky enterprise, because it involves joining the purportedly personal, subjective life with the purportedly impersonal, objective production of knowledge. Taking this risk, as I do in this thesis, is one way to show how closely intermeshed these are.

Self as relational

One important concept underpinning much feminist thought, and crucial to critical autobiography, is the shift of focus away from the familiar opposed duality of “self” and “other” to “interaction, interconnection, and interdependence”.¹⁵ This provides a theoretical foundation for connections not only among present selves, but also between the present and the past. The self becomes a consciously social and historical being, and the story of the self becomes fundamentally a constructed history of relationships with other people. My thesis, like other autobiographies, will show how this history involves relationships between present and past selves, the “I” of now and the “me” of then.¹⁶ It also involves relationships with others known only through their representations in culture, especially their own writing. These others may even be wholly fictional.

Theory and History (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988), Donna J. Haraway and Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf* (New York: Routledge, 2000), Nicole Ward Jouve, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1991), Sue Kedgley, *Our Own Country: Leading New Zealand Women Writers Talk About Their Writing and Their Lives* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1989), Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Mead, "Nga Aho O Te Kakahu Matauranga: The Multiple Layers of Struggle by Maori in Education" (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 1997), Middleton, *Educating Feminists: Life Histories and Pedagogy*; Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Biographical Acts*, Ann Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Dell, 1989), Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), Janet Sternburg, ed., *The Writer on Her Work* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980).

¹⁵ Anne Else, "History Lessons: The Public History You Get When You're Not Getting Any Public History," in *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, ed. Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001), p.127. In that essay, I discussed the most helpful exposition I have found of this concept: Caroline Whitbeck, "A Different Reality: Feminist Ontology," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989). For an overview of feminist philosophy of the self, see Diana Meyers, *Feminist Perspectives on the Self* (Spring 2004) (in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 2004 [cited 19 September 2004]); available from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2004/entries/feminism-self/>.

¹⁶ Liz Stanley notes that Virginia Woolf's memoirs are "constructed out of the relationship between present and past self, in which she assembles just enough of the present to act as a platform, just enough of the past to act as another, on which to locate that elusive being, her 'self'." Liz Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography*, p.37.

New Zealand theorist Kim Worthington puts this idea another way, arguing that all personhood involves the active construction of a “narrative of the self”. This narrative is embedded in community, and hence in language:

Selves are already always *in* community, and cannot simply choose or contract to enter the social context in which they have meaningful being...Personhood is always embedded in the social (and, significantly, linguistic) context in which one has meaningful being; selves are constituted in and by a society and that society’s history.¹⁷

In this thesis, I emphasise the connections between agency, self-narrative, and what can be called “internal” relationships, as an important part of the story of coming to writing and to feminism. In Chapter 5, I explore my own and others’ relationships with the figure of the New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield. In Chapter 6, I explain my childhood relationship with the fictional Anne of Green Gables, and how I took elements of her adoption story to shape my own. In Chapter 9, I discuss my changing relationship with the New Zealand-born philosopher Susan Moller Okin.¹⁸

Self as political

I agree with Griffiths when she argues that politics, including the politics of feminism, are “inseparable from the construction and maintenance of the self”.¹⁹ This is because the “early encountered information” that “serves as the raw material for inferences about what the subject (in this case, oneself) is like” comes from “a lifetime’s patterns of exclusion and inclusion”.²⁰ These patterns are inextricably connected with structures of power:

The experience of acceptance and rejection, and the reaction to them, cannot be understood without reference to the structures of power in the society in which the self finds itself.²¹

¹⁷ Kim L. Worthington, *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Continuity in Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.56.

¹⁸ Short story writer Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) remains New Zealand’s best-known and most widely read literary figure. Anne of Green Gables is the adopted heroine who first appeared in one of the most popular children’s books of the twentieth century, L.M. [Lucy Maud] Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (London, Ontario: Sir Isaac Pitman, 1908). New Zealand-born Susan Moller Okin (1946-2004) was a distinguished feminist philosopher who became Martha Sutton Weeks Professor of Ethics in Society at Stanford University.

¹⁹ Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity*, p.93.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.96, 120.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.93.

Selves come to understand who and what they “are” (and are not), and where they “belong” (or not), through such experience. But these understandings are neither seamless nor fixed. The very experience which gives rise to them is itself historically contingent. They conflict with and contradict each other, and they change and are revised over time.

This process of self-formation ensures that “political structures are part of all aspects of our emotions”, because:

The human relationships in which the emotions are worked out are relationships in which gender, race and class are embedded...Justice is not separate from self-creation because it is part of human relationships which are inextricably entangled in that creation.²²

This concept appears most clearly in Chapters 2 and 3, where I consider how and why I came to see myself as having and not having particular abilities and capabilities which I believed to be related to reading, thinking and writing, as well as to membership of relevant “invisible colleges”;²³ and how these understandings of myself conflicted, as they did for other feminists, with those associated with “being a girl”, and later a wife and mother. It also appears in Chapter 5, “Writing women”.

The political operations of discourse

The concept of the political self implies that all experience, including the experience of self-formation, is known through discursive relations. Joan Scott describes experience as “at once already an interpretation *and* ... in need of interpretation”.²⁴ Discourses produce schemes of classification, distinguishing one kind of thing from another (women from men, private from public, emotion from reason) by specifying the differences between them. Joan Cocks has neatly summed up how discourse operates, and why its operations are political:

the world receives its order, and objects in the world their identity, from schemes of classification rooted in [historically] transient modes of social

²² Ibid., pp.131-2.

²³ Ibid., p.110.

²⁴ Joan W. Scott, “Experience,” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p.69.

life...these classification schemes reflect and support specific ensembles of social interests, intentions, and desires.²⁵

Discourse theory therefore opposes “the notion that the world as it is physically given, and apart from any sense or thing humans make of it, is the sole or primary or even secondary-but-still-crucial repository of truth.”²⁶

The “most crucial” of discourse's operations, and the one of most concern to me here, is to do with truth and knowledge. It produces the understanding that “the object as it is represented [for example, “literature”, “the family”, “the economy”, even “the self”] has its existence independent of the discourse”, and is merely “discovered” through seeking knowledge of it:

The discourse adorns the object with a wealth of descriptive phrases that purport to disclose the object's “true”, “real”, and “secret” self, which the discourse, seeking the truth of the object, has [disinterestedly] labored to discover and know.²⁷

Cocks goes on to stress that, as Michel Foucault said, the body itself, as power's “fine target”, is incited by discourse “to speak about itself”; and as Foucault strangely did not say at all, “‘masculine/feminine’ is the most fundamental truth that the sexed body is forced to tell”.²⁸

I discuss specific instances of these operations of discourse throughout the thesis, for example in Chapter 2 (“great literature”), Chapter 6 (the discourse of adoption, so strongly founded in “masculine/feminine”), Chapter 9 (“work”), and Chapter 10 (“dependency”).

Natureculture

Two premises related to experience, knowledge and discourse are now well understood in feminist theory: that “there is no place to be in the world outside of stories”, and that

²⁵ Joan Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 1989).

²⁶ Ibid., p.27.

²⁷ Ibid., p.37.

²⁸ Ibid., pp.56-7. This is not meant to imply that “the sexed body” exists independently of discourse.

knowledge “is built into...‘natural’ material at every stage of the game”.²⁹ The force of these valuable ideas has sometimes risked obscuring the equal importance of, as Cocks puts it, “insisting on the concrete materiality of things to do with cultural life”, as well as vice versa.³⁰

Donna Haraway takes this a step further by stressing that “natureculture is one word”.³¹ Recognising that nothing exists beyond human knowledge (“culture”) does not mean that materiality (“nature”) can be dismissed altogether, so that the flesh is dissolved completely into the word: “meaningfulness is both fleshy and linguistic but never *only* linguistic”, any more than it is ever *only* fleshy [my italics].³² This is particularly important in discussing what Cocks calls “the regime of Masculine/feminine”.³³ Dorothy Smith, focusing specifically on writing and reading, stresses that “Insisting on the materiality of the text and on the actual socially organised activities, including writing and reading, articulating texts to social relations” is fundamental to investigating knowledge and “culture”.³⁴

As Chapter 6 shows, I used this “both/and” concept of natureculture in my work on adoption, a field in which it immediately makes sense, and which cannot be effectively discussed without it. It also grounded my work on the discourse of the New Right (discussed in Chapters 8, 9 and 10). The difficulty of expressing this concept emerges in the discussion of my attempts to understand my own situation (Chapters 2 and 3), and put my understandings into words (Chapters 4 and 5).

The sudden discovery

One enduring problem for all critical theory, including feminism, is to explain how any such theory is able to emerge and take shape, given the “entrenched order of things”,³⁵ which is everywhere produced by discourse. Cocks concludes that such theory originates not in thought itself, but in “the given, concrete situation of the particular

²⁹ Haraway and Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf*, pp.106, 44.

³⁰ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.26.

³¹ Haraway and Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf*, p.106.

³² Ibid.

³³ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.12.

³⁴ Dorothy E. Smith, *Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.223.

³⁵ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.68.

thinker ...stretching out into a more and more reflective intelligence about it”.³⁶ Aspects of this concrete situation “offer potential openings of resistance”³⁷ where this process may begin. For example:

[N]o particular mode of life can subsume within itself every abstract possibility of thought and action...By the same token that a mode of life rules out these possibilities...it also points silently to them...the very limits of any given arrangement provide the boundary beyond which thought and action can venture out...New needs, interests, and practices may arise out of the present mode of life that it cannot accommodate through incorporation, suppression, or control.³⁸

In Chapter 3, I describe how such openings first appeared in my own life, leading to what Rae Langton calls, “a sudden discovery that things are not what they seem”.³⁹ This discovery comes about, says Langton, not because the woman is “a philosopher, retreating to a room of her own, but because she is a woman in the wide world”.⁴⁰ In other words, it happens as a result of the woman feeling and thinking about her own contradictory experience of her “given, concrete situation”.

This sudden discovery shows her that she has the ability to judge for herself – that is, it reveals “women as rational knowers”.⁴¹ It is this revelation which lays the ground for reflective, critical feminist thought to “stretch out”, as I discuss in relation to women and writing in Chapters 4 and 5, and to political philosophy in Chapter 9.

Limited location, partial perspective, situated knowledges

By writing a thesis which sets my own previously published work in the context of my “recollected” experience of how it was generated and produced, I am calling into question those understandings of valid knowledge that rely on the necessity of the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p.66.

³⁸ Ibid., pp.63-5.

³⁹ Rae Langton, "Feminism in Epistemology: Exclusion and Objectification," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.127.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

disembodied, disinterested, objective “view from nowhere”⁴² from which discourse derives its power. It is these definitions of knowledge and objectivity which have persistently invalidated women's attempts to problematise dominant discourses of sex and gender.

Rejecting what Donna Haraway has so memorably called the “god-trick”, that “illusion of infinite vision” which the “view from nowhere” represents, does not mean rejecting objectivity. Instead it means redefining it to reflect the embodied human condition:

[O]bjectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment...about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.⁴³

The kind of knowledge produced with this understanding “does not depend on the logic of ‘discovery’”, but rather on “a power-charged social relation of ‘conversation’”.⁴⁴ But this does not mean that all situated knowledge can and must give equal prominence to all perspectives, or even to all peripheral or marginal perspectives. Partial perspective is always necessarily partial, and the logic of intellectual activity reflects this, as Cocks notes: “To think seriously and systematically is to refuse to think seriously and systematically in almost every vein but one.”⁴⁵ Susan Bordo makes a similar point by arguing that the post-modern “dream of everywhere” is just as illusory, unattainable and undesirable as “the view from nowhere”.⁴⁶ Similarly, Susan Stanford Friedman suggests that:

Rather than seeking the definitive narrative of feminism, or of any given moment in feminism, we must acknowledge the potential for many localized narratives of feminism, none of which can claim to represent the totality of feminist history.⁴⁷

⁴² For the most cogent discussion of this concept in relation to feminist epistemology, see Susan Bordo, “Feminist Scepticism and the ‘Maleness’ of Philosophy,” in *Women and Reason*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Kathleen Okruhlik (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

⁴³ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” p.583.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.189.

⁴⁶ Bordo, “Feminist Scepticism and the ‘Maleness’ of Philosophy.”

⁴⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman, “Making History: Reflections on Feminism, Narrative, and Desire,” in *Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p.41.

Lesley Forrest and Judy Giles provide a useful outline of how this concept could function in terms of writing critical autobiography, highlighting what I call the “shifting ground” on which the knower stands, in relation to her readers as well as her own self-narrative:

Auto/biography is as much about making sense of experience as deconstructing and theorising from that experience. What we are able to do with our auto/biographies may vary according to our needs and desires at the specific moments when we choose to “tell our stories” and the community to which we wish to represent ourselves. Neither are we able to occupy some neutral or “pure” space from which we can “tell it as it was”: all telling is an act of making sense of...experience.⁴⁸

The concepts of limited location, partial perspective, and situated knowledge(s) underpin my whole approach. I use them, for example, in Chapter 4, on writing women, Chapter 5, on how to write, and Chapter 6, on writing adoption as an adopted person. In Chapter 10, I align situated knowledge with the Maori concept of *turangawaewae*, the place where one belongs and has the right to stand and speak. The whole process of writing a PhD thesis does not take place in or from a “pure” space either. The thesis itself is an example of situated knowledge, shaped according to a specific moment, context, and audience.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity has sometimes been taken to mean that feminist expository writers can and should explicitly locate themselves, by listing their “identities” at the outset. A number of feminist theorists have countered this, stressing that reflexivity is rather “a matter of intellectual accountability”. Liz Stanley suggests that in the interests of “providing readers with an open text”, what matters most are:

the reasoning procedures involved in my making sense of events and people and drawing conclusions about these...providing analytic details of the relationship between evidence, interpretation and conclusion within the knowledge production process...Analytical reflexivity...brings matters of

⁴⁸ Lesley Forrest and Judy Giles, “Feminist Ethics and Issues in the Production and Use of Life History Research,” in *Women's Lives into Print: The Theory, Practice and Writing of Feminist Auto/Biography*, ed. Pauline Polkey (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p.56.

epistemology and methodology to the heart of feminist texts as they are at the heart of actual research processes.⁴⁹

Stanley believes that it is this concept that draws together “the major feminist contributions to epistemological debates...into a powerful whole”.⁵⁰ Throughout this thesis, I reflect openly on my self-narrative as the context for my work. In Chapter 11, I reflect on the process of writing the thesis itself.

Self-authorisation

The concept of “self-authorisation”, as Nancy K. Miller calls it, relates to the problem dragged painfully into the light by Tillie Olsen in *Silences*:⁵¹ how women and other “others” are to attain the confidence to claim the right to write in the first place, and then to go on writing. Regenia Garnier, specifically discussing self-representation, notes that:

what is striking about the “mind” or personality is not its uniqueness or autonomy, but rather its profound dependence upon intersubjectively shared meanings and its profound vulnerability to the deprivations of the body.⁵²

Ruth McElroy sees “this discursive, political dilemma” as an example of natureculture, because it is “profoundly bound to the physical, if only because the experience of being speechless and [also] of having too much to say is often imaged throughout mouths and tongues”.⁵³ This struggle becomes particularly acute in trying to write autobiographically:

Finding the words to enunciate the self is a process of accommodation and conflict for the political and physical subject...autobiography...is less a net to support us – to give us confidence, to look down upon as a resource – but more a ropy bridge across a fearful and sometimes thrilling chasm, a chasm of legitimacy and discipline.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Liz Stanley, “How Do We Know About Past Lives? Methodological and Epistemological Matters Involving Prince Philip, the Russian Revolution, Emily Wilding Davison, My Mum and the Absent Sue,” in *Women's Lives into Print: The Theory, Practice and Writing of Feminist Auto/Biography*, ed. Pauline Polkey (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p.19.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Olsen, *Silences*.

⁵² Regenia Garnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.58.

⁵³ Ruth McElroy, “Bringing It Back Home: Autobiography and Contradiction,” in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods.*, ed. Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.256-7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.255-6.

This image strikes home for me; I am terrified of the swaying rope bridges over chasms which are commonly encountered on New Zealand bush walks. Miller, who has written extensively about crossing such intellectual bridges and learning from others who have crossed them, concludes:

[T]o the extent that the history of women's writing is also a history of a same reiterated struggle in the face of institutionalised exclusions...to appropriate language and to rework one's place in its turns, it seems to me that it is precisely at this place of common struggle that women's autobiography takes root.⁵⁵

This struggle to become a speaking subject does not take place once and for all; as my thesis shows, it is a continuing process, shaped by and responding to changing contexts, that has no definitive end. In writing this thesis, I found it was strongly raised again for me. I discuss it particularly in Chapters 4, 5, 9 and 11.

Oppositional imagining

Although knowledge can be made public or “published” in many different ways, this thesis is concerned primarily with writing for publication. The best name I have come up with for what I am doing when I engage in the process of reading, thinking and writing (including writing this thesis) is “oppositional imagining”. I have derived this term from the title Joan Cocks chose for her book, *The Oppositional Imagination*.⁵⁶ It captures the active and creative aspects of what I am doing, something which most discussions of feminist theoretical writing leave out altogether.

Oppositional imagining produces a form of situated knowledge. It is generated from a perspective or range of perspectives which are inherently relational and historical, and which cannot therefore be seen as the result of a completely free, positionless, individual choice. If they were, there might be no grounds for oppositional imagining to exist. Maori theorist Linda Mead suggests that while it is not “inherently

⁵⁵ Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Biographical Acts*, p.466.

⁵⁶ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*.

emancipatory”, oppositional imagining “creates a language of possibility through which people can search for, create, and claim back emancipatory spaces”.⁵⁷

How the thesis is structured

Overall, this thesis deals with the half-century from 1945, when I was born and adopted, to 1999. The structure is not straightforwardly chronological, but rather takes a spiral form. Although Chapter 2 begins in 1950, and Chapter 10 ends in 1999, the periods covered in each chapter range backwards and forwards in overlapping sequences. Figure 1 charts the range of years spanned by each chapter, and shows the period when each group of published writing discussed in that chapter appeared. It is followed by a brief Chronology to assist the reader.

I am deliberately using this spiralling structure to avoid a straightforward chronological sequence, so as to reflect the ways in which what, how and why I write emerges from, refers back to and takes shape in shifting contexts and interpretations of both past and present. Although this is necessarily a story of becoming a feminist and a writer, the spiral structure is also designed to subvert, at least to some extent, the straightforward “plot of becoming that characterizes canonical autobiography”.⁵⁸

Chapters 2-6 form the first section. In Chapter 2, “Coming to writing, 1950-1967”, I cover my formation as a reader and writer, from learning to read to graduating Master of Arts in English. I tell a story of how and why I came to understand my own identity in terms of having or not having particular abilities and qualities, and belonging or not belonging in various “invisible colleges” related to reading, knowing and writing, as well as to family and femininity. Throughout, I explore how these understandings were shaped by profoundly gendered discourses of education, writing, and creativity.

⁵⁷ Mead, “Nga Aho O Te Kakahu Matauranga: The Multiple Layers of Struggle by Maori in Education”, p.413.

⁵⁸ Nancy K. Miller, “Teaching Autobiography,” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p.466.

Chapter 3, “Coming to feminism, 1965-1980”, covers four interwoven trajectories over fifteen years. The first runs from marriage and motherhood to separation and the start of a new relationship. The second runs from graduating BA, then returning to complete my MA, to taking on assorted paid jobs. The third involves a series of literal moves: leaving home, flatting, buying a house, then moving to Albania, to London, and finally to Wellington. The fourth covers “coming to feminism” and to feminist writing, in the context of a society where “women” were consistently subordinated, excluded and belittled, and how becoming one of the founders of *Broadsheet* magazine⁵⁹ provided me with the basis for a more coherent subjectivity which included writing.

Chapter 4, “Writing women, 1978-1984”, leads up to my first major piece of writing beyond *Broadsheet*, a feminist critique of Antony Alpers’ *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*. I look at the resurgence of New Zealand women’s writing from the late 1970s, together with the advent of feminist literary criticism, seeing these as combining to give me “a rudimentary framework within which to start thinking about exactly what was wrong” with Alpers’ book. I also begin to consider the formal difficulties I was encountering as a feminist writer, including the use of “a kind of camouflage” to convey authority and conceal emotion. I conclude that, for the first time, “Writing for myself was coming to mean acting as myself, becoming my own subject”.

In Chapter 5, “How to write, 1984-1987”, I use the notebooks I kept over those years to trace my development as a writer and my attempts to write about the 1950s. I draw out three recurring strands related to writing, knowledge, and identity: finding the subject, working out how to write the “oppositional imagining” of feminism, and the recurring problem of claiming the right to write. I end with an account of writing “The Daffodil Doiley” (1987), “the first piece of work in which I felt that I consistently achieved the kind of writing I was seeking”.

Chapter 6, “Writing adoption, 1945-1995”, moves through my own experience of being adopted, finding my birth mother, deciding to write about adoption, and the death of my younger son, followed by writing the first history of closed stranger

⁵⁹ *Broadsheet* became one of the world’s longest-running feminist magazines, appearing ten times a year from 1972 to 1991, then four times a year from Autumn 1992 to Winter 1997, the last issue.

adoption in New Zealand from 1945 to 1974. I consider the central significance of knowledge as power, and the challenge to the concept of valid knowledge arising from “the view from nowhere” which my book and associated papers on the history of adoption represented.

In Section Two, Chapters 7-10 appear to be more conventionally conceived and constructed than Chapters 2-6, in that their focus and voice is ostensibly less “personal” and more “impersonal”. By writing them in this way, I am claiming the right to speak about some of the most significant issues of our times, as they play out in a small country at the edge of the world; but at the same time, I am retaining the connection with subjectivity. In these chapters, I turn back to focus directly on the historical context, including the emergence of second wave feminism and of the New Right, for my third major group of publications. These centre on the interdependence of the historically divided private/social and public/economic in general, and of paid and unpaid work in particular, in opposition to the implicitly gendered separation of “family” and “market” which necessarily underpins the “independent, rational individual” who ostensibly stands at the heart of New Right discourse.

In Chapter 7, “Gender politics: Before 1984”, I discuss the intellectual context of second wave feminism in the period prior to 1984, including new attention to women’s unpaid work. I argue that there were distinctive contextual factors which made it particularly difficult for New Zealand feminists, including me, to understand the development of the discursive New Right shift which became manifest after the 1984 election.

In Chapter 8, “Women under Labour, 1984-1987”, I consider why the Labour government, whose victory in 1984 received such a guarded welcome from feminists, came to seem like an ally against the resurgent far right. I outline how feminist and other critiques of the welfare state were co-opted to bolster New Right arguments against state social provision, and account for why my own writing at first focused on critiquing moralist and religious right discourse, particularly in relation to the 1950s. I discuss my understanding of how and why the New Right gained ascendancy in

intellectual terms, and why it was not until 1987 that the full implications of the New Right agenda began to be understood.

Chapter 9, “To market and home again, 1987-1992”, charts the development of my own thinking and writing on the New Right, against events in the period from 1987 through to Labour’s defeat in 1990. It focuses on two pieces of work: the section on women in the 1988 report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy,⁶⁰ and the essay “To Market and Home Again”,⁶¹ which was published in 1992, in the first collection of New Zealand feminist theory intended for use in university women’s studies courses. These pieces of work laid the ground for what I wrote on public policy and political economy generally in the 1990s.

Chapter 10, “False economy, 1990-1999”, covers the decade when, under National-led governments, social policy was reshaped along New Right lines. I outline those “reforms” and their impact, the political implications of the centenary of women’s suffrage in 1993, and the growth of widespread resistance to the New Right agenda, as its damaging results became evident. I chart how my own writing and speaking became part of this collective effort; and I discuss the development of my work and its deliberate focus on unpaid work, interdependence, and old age, in order to highlight the deficiencies of a “narrow philosophy of market values” and thus clarify a feminist alternative.

In Chapter 11, I look back over the account I have created in this thesis, and consider its significance, answering the question, “What does this study of my own work contribute to feminist theories of subjectivity, discourse and knowledge?”

⁶⁰ “Women and Social Policy” in Royal Commission on Social Policy, “The April Report Vols I-IV,” (Wellington: Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988), pp.153-274. Chapter 9 explains how this section was written and which parts I took the major responsibility for.

⁶¹ Anne Else, “To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right,” in *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary Du Plessis, et al. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Chronology: Anne Else

- 1945 Unnamed female Hawkins born in Auckland, New Zealand
Becomes Frances Anne Matthews by adoption
World War II ends
- 1950 Anne Matthews starts school at Mt Eden Primary
- 1958 Goes to Auckland Girls' Grammar School

- 1963 Begins studying for Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Auckland
- 1965 Marries Chris Else, graduates BA and gives birth to Jonathan Richard Else
- 1966 Reads *The Feminine Mystique*
- 1967 Completes study for Master of Arts
- 1968 Graduates MA with first class honours and becomes a junior lecturer
- 1969 Gives birth to Christopher Patrick Else

- 1970 Attends Auckland Teachers' College (secondary division)
- 1971 Reads *The Female Eunuch*
- 1972 Helps to found *Broadsheet* magazine
Reads *Sexual Politics*
Equal pay comes into force
- 1973 Goes overseas to teach English
- 1976 Returns to New Zealand
- 1977 Moves to Wellington as editor for Reed Education
- 1979 After departure of Chris Else, repartners with Harvey McQueen

- 1981 Begins to search for birth mother
- 1983 Finds Mary (Hawkins) Gilmer
Reads *Women in Western Political Thought*
- 1984 Writes on Katherine Mansfield and the 1950s
Labour government begins New Right reforms, focusing on economic policy
- 1985 Marries Harvey McQueen
Adult Adoption Information Act passed
- 1986 Meets Mary Gilmer
Awarded Literary Fund grant to write on 1950s
- 1987 Writes and presents "The Daffodil Doiley"
Begins work on women for the Royal Commission on Social Policy
Awarded Claude McCarthy Fellowship to write on adoption
Christopher Patrick Else dies in Sydney on 22 October
- 1988 Report of Royal Commission published

- 1990 National government continues New Right reforms, focusing on social policy
- 1991 *A Woman's Life* (anthology, co-edited with Heather Roberts)
A Question of Adoption
- 1992 "To Market and Home Again"
- 1993 Centenary of women's suffrage
Women Together
- 1996 *False Economy*
- 1997 "Doing the Dirty Washing"
"Having it Both Ways"
- 1998 *A Super Future?*
- 1999 "Through a Glass Darkly"

Section One

Chapter 2: Coming to writing, 1950-1967

Introduction

This chapter centres on the first part of “the story of the ‘coming to writing’”.⁶² It covers the years I spent at primary and secondary school, from 1950 to 1962, and at university, 1963-5 and 1967. The focus is on how and why I came to see myself as having and not having particular abilities and capabilities related to thinking, writing, and knowing – in other words, how “early encountered information serves as the raw material for inferences about what the subject (in this case, oneself) is like”.⁶³ From my experiences of exclusion and inclusion, I came to understand myself in terms of “belonging” and, more often, “not belonging”, in the groups marked out at school and university as “bright”, among my peers, and in my own family. These understandings played a crucial part in determining how I came to see myself in relation to writing and knowing.

Part One: Coming to reading

Coming to writing begins with coming to reading. As a well-dressed, well-behaved, blonde Pakeha⁶⁴ girl who was already familiar with reading and books, I had a head start in the primers. In an essay written in the late 1990s, which focused on the *Janet and John* reading series, I explored my recollections of how I came to reading:

...I learnt to read quickly and painlessly. This was partly due to my mother, who read Little Golden Books to me every night – *Counting Rhymes*, *The Shy Little Kitten*, *The Saggy Baggy Elephant*. So I was definitely “reading ready”. But there was another factor at work too. Apart from the fact that we lived in a flat over a shop, rather than a pretty suburban house surrounded by lawns, the central themes of *Janet and John* were entirely consistent with those of my own home life.⁶⁵

⁶² Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Biographical Acts*, p.127.

⁶³ Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity*, p.96.

⁶⁴ Pakeha is the Maori term for non-Maori, Caucasian New Zealand citizens, who first began arriving in considerable numbers in the early 1800s. This term is widely used in New Zealand by Maori and Pakeha alike, although some Pakeha object to it.

⁶⁵ Anne Else, “Up the Garden Path: *Janet and John* Revisited,” in *A Book in the Hand: Essays on the History of the Book in New Zealand*, ed. Penny Griffith, Peter Hughes, and Alan Loney (Auckland:

I think my parents wanted above all to give their children the kind of secure and, to the best of their limited means, indulged childhood they had both lacked. Reading was seen as part of such a childhood. They both had limited formal education, and were not members of that self-educating group which historian Bill Oliver, describing his own family, called “people of the book”,⁶⁶ but they both read a great deal for enjoyment. My father read the *Auckland Star* and the *Readers’ Digest*, and collected Readers’ Digest Condensed Books. He also took out Zane Greys and Dennis Wheatleys (the only books, apart from his books of Masonic ritual, that I was forbidden to read) from the local lending library.⁶⁷ My mother had her own standing order for a bundle of weekly and monthly women’s magazines, from the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* to the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and over the years she added a series of appropriate British comics and children’s magazines for me. I learnt to read as much from comics, magazines and advertisements as from books, but I was soon asking for and getting a book as my main birthday and Christmas present. I left it up to my parents to choose these for me, although I carefully stipulated that “books” did not include cheap, boring *Schoolgirl’s Annual* story collections.

None of us went near the forbidding grey stone Grafton Public Library, but as soon as I was old enough to go to the lending library by myself, I copied my father and read my way through entire series of books by Enid Blyton, Richmal Crompton, Baroness Orczy, Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs. There were also a few older books that had survived from my mother’s chaotic childhood: a full-text Brothers Grimm collection, richly bound volumes of Longfellow and Tennyson, a gorgeously illustrated book of Bible stories. With my own bedroom and only one sister, five years younger than me, I was allowed to spend hours alone reading, and I had almost entirely unmediated access to what seemed a huge range of print. I think now that the relative freedom of my early encounters with such a variety of reading was fortunate, in terms

Auckland University Press, 2000), p.129. This essay outlines the history and considers the discursive implications of the *Janet and John* reading series, which arrived in New Zealand schools in 1950.

⁶⁶ W.H. Oliver, *Looking for the Phoenix* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2002), p.33.

⁶⁷ Although it charged fees, we had completely free borrowing, because my commercial artist father had designed red lending book jackets for the owner.

of my own reading and writing. Nothing was ranked or categorised or even discussed; all that counted was discovery and pleasure.

At primary school, my own reading did not give rise to my own writing. The only writing I did was what was required for school. I enjoyed writing for projects, but I strongly disliked “creative writing”. I could just manage “The Story of a Penny”, but usually I felt so unable to “make up” a story to order on a set topic, in the classroom time allowed, that I chose the one non-fiction topic on offer, such as “How a Fountain Pen Works”. Once I made a big ink blot on purpose, much to the teacher’s irritation, just to fill up part of the endless blank page in front of me. I think now my head was perhaps so full of rich work by others, and I had such an exalted idea of what stories should be – but with no notion at all of how they were made – that I felt incapable of producing a new story of my own. Although our Standard Four teacher, a man in his fifties, read us a wealth of hugely enjoyable British poetry by Alfred Noyes, Rudyard Kipling and John Masefield, we were never asked to write poems. By the time I finished primary school, I had learnt to look to unique creative talents, situated somewhere else, unknown and unknowable at first hand, as the fount of all true knowledge and value, and much pleasure.

By 1950, the year I started school, the Beeby⁶⁸ era of profound educational change was starting to take full effect, particularly in reading. Dr Beeby’s own central statement of his education philosophy, based on what he later called the myth of equality of opportunity in education,⁶⁹ has been endlessly repeated:

The Government’s objective, broadly expressed, is that every person, whatever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right, as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted, and to the fullest extent of his powers.⁷⁰

As Dr Beeby later explained, he, like virtually all other educators at that time, thought that natural differences in intelligence were the primary cause of differences in

⁶⁸ Dr Clarence E. Beeby was New Zealand’s most influential Director of Education from 1939-1960. See William Renwick, *Beeby, Clarence Edward 1902 - 1998* (Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, 2000 [cited 12 September 2005]); available from <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>.

⁶⁹ Clarence E. Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education* (Wellington: NCZER, 1992).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xvi. Beeby wrote this statement for Peter Fraser, Minister of Education (see Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives, 1939, pp.2-3).

scholastic achievement.⁷¹ The “right to education” meant the right to fulfil the innate potential, whether high, average, or low, which was more or less fixed in every child by the time he or she came to school. If educators did their job effectively, then:

high intelligence, like truth, would out...the complex ways in which schooling reflected and perpetuated systematic discrimination and disadvantage along lines of gender, race and class were not even visible, let alone understood...⁷²

While being marked out as “bright” might seem to indicate that the system was working well for me, since it had ranked me in the top category, it also worked against a sense of belonging, both at school and, eventually, at home. The first time I fully understood that this category existed, and applied to me, was on the last day of primary school, when the teacher told me that I and the boy I had a secret crush on had jointly “come top” of Standard Four. Until then, I had understood only that to perform well enough to “stand out” was to be undesirably different from some undefined norm. This meant being rejected by other children, especially boys, and even the teachers seemed only partially to approve:

The boys in the Standards classes at Mount Eden Primary made sure that any signs of superiority in bright girls were quickly stamped out – though they cut uppity boys down to size, too. Boys and girls were frequently pitted against each other in spelling or mental arithmetic contests. As a successful female speller who wore glasses, I was dealt with at playtime by jeers of “brainbox!” and “four-eyes!” accompanied with surreptitious thumps. (Any boy caught hitting a girl would have got the strap.) Male teachers [in the Standards, three of my four teachers were men] did not seem overjoyed at my constantly raised hand either.⁷³

As well as wearing glasses and being too clever by half, I was culpably different in other ways: I was adopted (and foolishly revealed this, despite my mother telling me not to), I was hopeless at sport and “phys. ed.”, and I did not know how to make

⁷¹ Else, “Up the Garden Path: *Janet and John* Revisited.” Renwick has since pointed out that Charles Spearman of University College, London, who supervised Beeby’s doctoral research, was “a world authority on the nature of human intelligence, and his view of intelligence as a largely inherited human capacity strongly influenced Beeby’s views as an educational thinker.” Renwick, *Beeby, Clarence Edward 1902 - 1998* ([cited]).

⁷² Else, “Up the Garden Path: *Janet and John* Revisited,” p.233. In his own account of his thinking, Beeby explains the assumption that “Given the opportunity, encouragement and guidance that a good and varied school system offered, able students would succeed in spite of initial social and economic disadvantages – provided they were willing to try...[this] has always been an underlying theme to justify the morality of unfair selective systems of education...but we lacked the intellectual instruments to handle such problems.” Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, pp.188-91.

⁷³ Else, “Up the Garden Path: *Janet and John* Revisited,” p.233.

friends. At sixteen, I wrote about how those who are marked by difference become named targets:

There was a family at school called Tyler; the only thing I can remember about them was the girl's pale frizzy hair, and the boy's perpetual piece of sticking plaster. They were completely untouchable; if you were to be in with the others, you would never go into a lavatory after the Tyler girl had been there. And there was a Lithuanian boy called something like Vits Alif; he was fair and sulky, and the teachers would get impatient with his halting English – perhaps we caught it from them. We called him “little Stalin” and “Russian spy”, and shunned him. Children are terribly cruel, with their mocking laughter, and their taunting chant and pointing fingers. To be different is the unforgivable sin.⁷⁴

Although I did not then know how to say so, I knew myself to be both target and taunter. I knew, too, that I was quick to seize any opportunity to join my tormentors when they turned on others in a worse position, if I thought it would help me win acceptance by those who held the mysterious power of naming, and deciding what the names meant.

At Normal Intermediate,⁷⁵ I went on having crushes on boys, started having my periods, floundered at cooking and sewing, and slipped down the ranks in a whole class of “bright” pupils. I could not work out how to win the approval of my classmates, or the man who taught us for two years. My greatest pleasure was reading my way around the school's superb Stenberg library, discovering for the first time modern British writers for children, especially girls, such as Noel Streatfield and Elfrida Vipont. At home I was reading both the new Classic Comics and some of the books they were based on, as well as the slim, exciting paperbacks of the Schoolgirls' Own Library. It was at about this time, too, that I first read *Jane Eyre*.

Part Two: A good school

Knowing and belonging conflict for those who do not fit the predetermined mould of the knowers, because they are wrongly positioned in some way. When they try to join

⁷⁴ Anne Matthews, “The Twenty by Ten Foot World,” in *New Zealand through Young Eyes*, ed. Terry Power (Auckland: Paul's Book Arcade, 1963a), p.16. The name “Tyler” is a pseudonym.

⁷⁵ In New Zealand, intermediate schools consist of just two levels, which used to be called Forms 1 and 2 (corresponding to ages 11 and 12 for most pupils). They are found mainly in the larger urban centres. Elsewhere, primary schools include these two levels, which are followed by secondary school. “Normal” means that the school is close to and trains students from a tertiary institution for student teachers.

some “invisible college” of knowers, believing that they meet the criteria, they repeatedly run up against invisible barriers. But knowledge and belonging also conflict for those who are seen by others as being already among the knowers. At primary and intermediate school, knowing was in conflict with belonging among the other children. At secondary school, I learnt how knowing and belonging in one’s original home and family come into conflict for those who are the first in their families to “go on” in education.

In 1958 I went to Auckland Girls’ Grammar School (AGGS), a large urban school which had been the first secondary school for girls in the city, with mathematician Annie Whitelaw as its first headmistress.⁷⁶ Neither of my parents had any secondary schooling, but by the mid-1950s access was officially free and equal, though less so in practice, for both girls and boys.⁷⁷ In the 1950s and 1960s, girls’ secondary schools were one of the few enclaves where women both held and could be seen to hold public and decisive power. I did not notice this at the time, any more than I noticed that it was exceptionally rare for women to hold and exercise power in the public world.

By the 1950s, the education offered at AGGS was still “basically academic in character and geared primarily to the demands of university entrance”.⁷⁸ It was also still firmly

⁷⁶ The predecessor of AGGS, Auckland Girls’ High School, had opened in 1877, but during the depression of the 1880s its grant was withdrawn. Auckland Grammar School (which is solely for boys, though the qualifier is never used) was persuaded to let the 78 girls, their headmaster and four women teachers join the boys in September 1888. By 1905 it was clear that two separate schools were needed, and the search for a headmistress began. Although a number of University of New Zealand women graduate teachers were available, the Board wanted a woman with a British university education. The headmaster recommended Anne Whitelaw, who had grown up in Auckland and attended the original Girls’ High, before completing the equivalent of a Masters degree in mathematics at Girton College, Cambridge. For the first two years she ran the school in temporary premises in St Paul’s Church crypt, as the Howe Street site was not ready until 1909. She supervised the building and landscaping of the new school, modelling both its physical and its educational environment on Wycombe Abbey, the elite public (that is, private fee-paying) English girls’ boarding school where she had taught from 1898 (when she was still only 21) to 1906 (and to which she later returned as headmistress). She left AGGS in 1910 to become headmistress of Wycombe Abbey, and spent most of her adult life working and often living closely with women and girls in a variety of female educational institutions. See Kay Morris Matthews, “Boundary Crosser: Anne Whitelaw and Her Leadership Role in Girls’ Secondary Schooling in England, New Zealand and East Africa,” *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 37, no. 1 (2005): pp.39-54, Heather Northey, *Auckland Girls’ Grammar School: The First Hundred Years* (Auckland: Auckland Girls’ Grammar School Old Girls’ Association, 1988).

⁷⁷ Among my own cohort of women born 1943-1951, 98 percent had at least some secondary education. See Society for Research on Women in New Zealand, *Urban Women* (Auckland: SROW, 1972).

⁷⁸ Beeby, *Biography of an Idea*, p.178.

oriented towards Britain. I benefited there from having the right kind of British-based intellectual capital, and no longer being the wrong sex. I was placed in what was obviously the right class in the school's terms, the top academic stream.

As top stream girls, we were implicitly expected to engage in intellectual pursuits because they mattered for their own sake, to us as well as to our teachers, beyond any practical use they might have in our own future lives. My secondary schooling therefore provided a relatively unambiguous, unconflicted context for the beginnings of my own consciously intellectual life. But this was so only because I experienced this life as distinct from, and continuing almost regardless of, both my life as a daughter at home, and my developing desires and concerns about "being a girl", which meant primarily being attractive to boys. Having a reading, thinking, writing mind was quite separate from being a girl. It was a capability I wanted to have and use both for its own sake, because I valued and enjoyed it, and for the sake of getting good marks, because I wanted to go on coming top. It was also becoming a form of identity.

Being a girl and having, or rather being, this kind of mind were both part of who I was, but they had nothing to do with each other. It was like being two different people, and one felt much safer than the other. As a mind, I felt increasingly secure, confident, and powerful. I believed I knew the rules of the game, could play very well within them, and could even sometimes bend them to suit my own purposes. But as a girl, no matter how hard I worked at being one, I felt nervous, insecure, and frequently humiliated and miserable.

Being a daughter was much less of a problem. I was fond of but generally ignored my father, and I was not in the least concerned about what my mother thought of me. She could sometimes be useful, even knowledgeable, in helping me as a girl, and she always did her best to bolster my fragile self-esteem. But though she was always proud of me, she appeared to me to be clearly incapable of understanding me as a mind, and in this respect I placed her in a completely separate category from myself. I never once tried to talk to her about any of my work. When she was in her eighties, I learnt that she used to read my schoolbooks secretly, because she wanted to be able to keep up with me and understand what I was doing.

Neither my schooling nor my family life offered any basis for joining my two most prominent selves together, so that I could be an intellectual girl, instead of alternately one or the other. Other feminist writers have remarked on this strangely schizophrenic quality in their developing subjectivity; for example, Adrienne Rich writes of “the split I even then experienced between the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationship with men”.⁷⁹ Ellen Cantarow lays the blame for this split on the kind of schooling commonly offered in girls’ schools in the post-war period: “Education ...didn’t just belie our life experience as girls...it nullified that experience, rendered it invisible...we lived in a state of schizophrenia that we took to be normal.”⁸⁰

Yet the expanding discourse of post-war femininity in turn belied the life experience of Anne Whitelaw’s heirs, our most highly educated teachers. From the 1950s on, what would later come to be called “the feminine mystique” increasingly labelled them only in terms of deficit and deviance, because they were unmarried (living devotedly with each other did not count); childless (nieces and nephews and hundreds of pupils did not count either); and had to earn their own living (though equal pay did not arrive until 1960, teaching was much the best-paid profession for women, and the girls’ schools offered the only realistic prospects of advancement).

As Mary Evans points out, the “good school” for girls did, however, publicly endorse the institutions of heterosexism.⁸¹ I was aware of a constant counter-emphasis, especially on official occasions, on the importance and value of education not for its own sake, or our sake, but for the sake of future generations, and for generally exerting a proper womanly influence in society, as a teacher or – even possibly and – a wife and mother.

⁷⁹ Adrienne Rich, *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations* (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 2001), p.17. The essay this quotation comes from, “When We Dead Awaken”, was written in 1971.

⁸⁰ Ellen Cantarow, “Why Teach Literature?,” in *The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English*, ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter (New York: Random House, 1973), pp.57-61. Quoted in Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p.114.

⁸¹ See Mary Evans, “A Good School Revisited,” in *Women's Lives into Print: The Theory, Practice and Writing of Feminist Auto/Biography*, ed. Pauline Polkey (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

What the good school for girls did not endorse, in fact did everything in its power to discourage and deny, was teenage heterosexual femininity. In 1959 the headmistress, Miss Rua Gardner, wrote in her Annual Report:

I make no plea for keeping at school the socially mature girl who is wasting her time. She needs the cold douche of the adult world to wake her to realities, and the sooner she gets it the better.⁸²

“Social maturity” appeared to be code for “overt sexuality”, and the young women who had gone down that path were not worth trying to teach.

The discourse of intellectual endeavour could operate effectively only in a carefully controlled context. Not only was it ultimately in irreconcilable conflict with the discourse of femininity, it was also firmly linked to elitism. Displays of sexiness were déclassé. AGGS was particularly sensitive about its status vis-à-vis its rivals, Epsom Girls’ Grammar and the private denominational girls’ schools, because of its inner-city location, surrounded by what were then mainly working class suburbs. The public image of the school, as embodied by its uniformed girls, was taken very seriously. Hair styles were restricted, hair colouring was forbidden, along with jewellery and fancy underwear, and there were firm rules about uniformed girls’ behaviour beyond the school gates. In an autobiographical essay, Sandra Coney, who was in the same class as I was, later described how these rules were designed to enforce the proper appearance and behaviour:

We could not...talk to a boy in the street (even if he was a brother), enter a shop in school uniform, or appear in the street without hat and gloves. There were numerous regulations about the length of tunic, colour of tie, material of blouses and rompers – all waiting to be broken... The school...promoted an image of respectable femininity which was completely alien [to me].⁸³

Sandra presented a major problem for the school, because she did not fit their predetermined categories. Intellectually, she clearly belonged in the top academic stream, so she could not be written off as “not worth teaching”; yet her appearance and behaviour deliberately projected the wrong image of lower-class “social maturity”. She

⁸² Northey, *Auckland Girls' Grammar School: The First Hundred Years*, p.171.

⁸³ Coney, *Out of the Frying Pan: Inflammatory Writings 1972-89*, p.35. Sandra Coney, a founder of *Broadsheet* magazine, became its first editor, and was later a regular newspaper columnist. She is also a notable feminist historian. She has worked tirelessly to improve health care for women, and is now involved in regional government.

persistently bleached or coloured her hair, wore jewellery, and tried to look sexy by pulling in her belt and wearing whirlpool bras stuffed with cotton wool. She did all this not only because she was “terrifically interested in boys”, but also to confront authority:

Brought up as I was [by her father, Tom Pearce] to challenge authority and not to blindly accept instructions or rules, I provided a serious challenge...To me rules were an irresistible provocation...It seemed the battle ground with the school was my hair. My assertion of individuality was taking a rather stereotypically feminine form, although looked at another way, I was resisting being moulded into a respectable girl.⁸⁴

The school rulers were determined to defeat this challenge, even when it involved losing the benefit of Sandra’s skills and talents. In the fifth form she was told she could not represent the school on the annual hockey trip, simply because of her appearance: “I was a disgrace to the school. I did not have the proper Grammar school look.”⁸⁵ She took her revenge by playing instead for the Old Girls of Seddon Memorial Technical College, looked down on by AGGS as working class, and therefore seen as the right place for the wrong girls. In the sixth form, she was not allowed to accept her three prizes at the Town Hall prize-giving, “because the headmistress said I couldn’t be trusted to behave for as long as it took to walk across the stage...There was by this time a complete breakdown in relations, and I left.”⁸⁶ The headmistress told her father that the seventh form would be a very much nicer place without her. Intelligence was evidently not enough. When image and achievement clashed, image mattered more, even when a talented girl’s education suffered as a result.

Even at this relatively “academic” girls’ school, only 10 percent of the school’s roll was made up of girls in the lower and upper sixth forms in 1962, my last year at school.⁸⁷ Intellectual achievement was linked not only with the right kind of subdued middle-class femininity, but also with the right kind of ethnicity. Successive headmistresses fought a protracted battle against changes in zoning regulations which

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.35-6.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.37.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ The lower and upper sixth forms were then the final two years at secondary school, when students were usually aged 16 and 17. Schooling was compulsory only to the age of 15.

required the school to accept an increasingly non-European intake of in-zone girls, while restricting the permissible numbers of out-of-zone enrolments.⁸⁸

Part Three: Doing English

In the lower forms I loved English and French, and liked Latin and social studies. I quite liked most aspects of mathematics, too, and was reasonably good at it, but I hated science and wanted to drop it and do history instead for School Certificate.⁸⁹ However, I was told firmly that it was not possible to do both maths and history, and I would have to take chemistry. After I had given in, other girls in my class were allowed to combine maths and history. At the time I had no idea why the teachers had done this to me, except for a vague impression that they favoured science because it was more prestigious, and more girls should be doing it. But that was only part of the story.

The number of university scholarships each urban single-sex school won was an important indicator of its standing. Not only were there more boys staying on to the seventh form, but they mainly did sciences and maths, where it was generally easier to get very high marks than in arts subjects; so boys did better overall. Among the girls, however, those doing arts tended to get higher scores and more scholarships than the much smaller numbers of girls doing sciences and maths, who were handicapped from the start. The female secondary teacher shortage was most acute in those subjects – so much so that girls in my year who did seventh form physics had to be taught after school by men from Auckland Grammar. To solve the problem, the Department of Education had officially decreed that despite such difficulties, as many “bright girls” as possible were to be steered into secondary teaching, especially in maths and sciences. As girls rarely “went on” with their education in these subjects beyond what was

⁸⁸ See Northey, *Auckland Girls' Grammar School: The First Hundred Years*.

⁸⁹ To “pass” School Certificate required a score of 50 percent or more in each of at least four subject examinations, including English. Most pupils sat the examinations at the end of the fifth form. The results were scaled each year to ensure that half failed. Scaling differed according to each subject’s intellectual ranking; for example, a higher percentage of those who took Latin than of those who took Maori were permitted to pass. After many modifications, School Certificate was finally abolished in 2003.

needed for teaching, and there were very few jobs for them outside teaching, the cycle of knowledge transfer could be seen as efficient, if somewhat pointless.

In my case the school's direct exercise of power achieved nothing positive, for me or for girls' education. I missed out on a grounding in New Zealand history, the only part of the whole curriculum which was then locally based. In the sixth form I dropped maths and reverted to the arts subjects which were clearly my forte, adding German and history to English, French and Latin.

In the third form, I had decided English was to be my "main" subject because I loved reading. At thirteen, I had read an eclectic selection of full-text "classics", such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *Jane Eyre*. But all this reading had had nothing to do with required school reading, "comprehension" exercises, or critical judgements about the relative merits of books or authors. At AGGS I learnt to read the books selected for us with another purpose: to discuss them and write essays about them. These were framed as self-evidently worthwhile and valuable activities in themselves, an unquestioned part of "a good education".

The almost invariably British texts we studied were presented to us within the prevalent critical tradition of "Great Literature", as if their standing – and the very fact that we were reading them – placed them beyond time and place, as well as beyond gender, race and class, in "literature's noble republic of the spirit".⁹⁰ The unspoken yet evident premise was that every text we studied was, by definition, a worthy item in the canon, written by a worthy author, otherwise we would not have been "doing" that text or that author at all.

We therefore absorbed the theoretical premise, though it was never overtly stated, that literary achievement had nothing intrinsic to do with gender, either of the author or of the subject matter. Most of what we read did at least bear some observable relation to the lives of women, however distant the context; and some exceptional women had clearly produced work of sufficiently enduring quality to stand alongside that of a considerably larger number of talented men. They included Jane Austen (*Pride and*

⁹⁰ Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Biographical Acts*, p.107.

Prejudice), “Mrs” (Elizabeth) Gaskell (*Cranford*, the only one of her novels then still in print), Emily Bronte (*Wuthering Heights*), Charlotte Bronte (*Villette*), George Eliot (*Silas Marner*, *Adam Bede*), Virginia Woolf (*To the Lighthouse*), Katherine Mansfield (one story in an anthology, though others were read to us), and, in the seventh form, Janet Frame (*Owls Do Cry*).

At roughly the same time, my first husband was studying English at Auckland Grammar. As far as he can now recall, the texts he read there did not include anything written by women. There is ample evidence that prior to the 1980s at least, women authors made up only a very small proportion of canonical lists in Western literary higher education.⁹¹

At that time, teachers did not suggest that we read literary biography, although bits of information about the authors’ lives did surface from time to time, some of them highly sensational. For example, in the seventh form we heard (dramatically presented by our teacher) that new research into Wordsworth’s life had revealed his relationship with a Frenchwoman, leading to the birth of a daughter. I do not remember much, if anything, being said about the women authors’ lives, or the relation of their gender or their lives to their work. We did know that Keats had died young of consumption, and that Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen had been killed in World War I. But I do not think we were told that Virginia Woolf had committed suicide in World War II. The first time I read *Adam Bede*, I did not even realise that Hetty Sorrel had had a baby. Illness, war and the deaths they caused were much safer classroom topics than sex, seduction, suicide or birth.

At school I continued to feel that the reading itself was not work, but rather licensed and approved pleasure. There was also pleasure in the related discussion and writing.

⁹¹ Russ found between 5 percent and 8 percent, although “the personnel change rather strikingly”. Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, p.79. Olsen came to a well-supported similar conclusion that the usual ratio was one in twelve. Olsen, *Silences*. Florence Howe recalled how she and a young male teacher redesigned the required sophomore course in English literature at a women’s university: “We chose a series of “major” and “universal” works...in which there appeared not a single woman author nor a single admirable woman as central character”. She also notes that “there was until 1969 no social context in which [her students] and I could find support” for a different approach. Florence Howe, ed., *Women and the Power to Change, Carnegie Commission on Higher Education Research Series* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), pp.147, 50.

My major writing was in the form of essays – that is, early exercises in analytical writing. The first theory I became consciously aware of *as* theory was about writing – specifically, writing literature. The awareness came in the course of discussing the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. These discussions also provided the first inklings of how writers might actually go about writing, in terms of consciously thinking about what they were doing.

Although we were taught only a few mechanical approaches to the writing process, by the fifth form I had become aware enough of my own practice to know that in order to write an essay I felt satisfied with, it was first necessary to have an idea of what shape and movement it would have, in both intellectual and aesthetic terms – the two could not be separated. This shaping and shapely idea would surface after reading and reflecting on an assortment of related material – usually a piece of literature, plus others' critical comments on it and on the author's work generally. It was necessary to get this general shape down, then go back and rework it until it sounded right, or as nearly right as possible.

I had already grasped that the trick in writing essays for school purposes was to assume an authoritative voice, as if you knew what you were talking about. However, since the ultimate aim was not to express your own ideas, but to receive a good mark, your work should not overtly challenge received opinion, particularly by contesting the literary value of what you were studying. (I learnt this from the shocking D grade I received for an essay asserting, with total sincerity and on what I believed was ample evidence, that much of Wordsworth's poetry was extremely dull.)

In the third form I wrote my first poem, about the sunset seen from the upstairs back windows of our flat over the shops in Mount Eden. Wanting to write this poem and then actually doing it gave me a strong feeling of happiness and power. It proved I was not just a reader, but could be a writer as well, and I felt that I now understood what literature was about in a new way. It was the first time I spontaneously wrote something for its own sake. A few other poems and essays for the school magazine followed, and in the fourth form Camille Guy, my closest friend at school, and I passed

boring class time by writing down a kind of stream-of-consciousness flow of words which we showed each other.⁹²

At sixteen I wrote three prose pieces for an anthology of teenage writing, published in 1963.⁹³ I wrote them at home, and did not mention them at school. Rereading them for this thesis forty years later, I saw they were about remembering childhood, becoming a writer, and working for money; but they were also about identity, knowledge, and desire. All were in the first person, though I think even then I was aware that I was writing in a consciously assumed persona, rather than simply as “myself”, and that this persona was different for each piece. In one, the “I” wonders what it would be like to be a famous writer, like Virginia Woolf, the most “modern” and also the most recent woman author we had then read.⁹⁴

I was the only contributor to have three pieces of writing published in that collection, though I did not notice this at the time. But I had no idea about how to become “a writer”, or even that this was possible. I still saw “authors” as having a special kind of imagination that could make things up out of thin air. I did not understand how they did this, nor did I believe I had that kind of imagination. At school we talked about what appeared on the page, but apart from the poetry of the Great War and the Romantics, we scarcely considered where it came from, let alone how it had reached the page or our classroom.

By the time I finished my upper sixth form year, 1962, I knew I had been nationally certified as “bright”. It was clear that although I was doing arts subjects, I could consistently produce work which got good marks and high rankings. I should therefore, as the headmistress explained to my parents, “go on” to university.

⁹² Camille Guy left school at 16, and applied to be a cadet reporter on a major paper, but was not accepted because she was a girl. She became a journalist in Sydney, and later on the *New Zealand Herald*; she also authored or co-authored a number of important feminist articles.

⁹³ Matthews, “The Twenty by Ten Foot World.”, Anne Matthews, “May,” in *New Zealand through Young Eyes*, ed. Terry Power (Auckland: Paul’s Book Arcade, 1963b), Anne Matthews, “Floss and Nonsense,” in *New Zealand through Young Eyes*, ed. Terry Power (Auckland: Paul’s Book Arcade, 1963c).

⁹⁴ Matthews, “May.”

The two selves, the mind and the girl, came into head-on collision within me when I was called to Miss Gardner's office to be told that I was dux of the school (my school examination marks had added up to the highest total in the seventh form). I was pleased I had "come top" again, in such a decisive way; but I went home consciously feeling it did not matter much, I was still miserable, because all I really cared about was that my boyfriend at the time had just told me he did not want to go out with me any more.

I had confidence in my intellectual abilities, and enjoyed using them, but mainly as a kind of intellectual exercise and approval-winning game, with no relevance to other aspects of my life. Inasmuch as I thought of my future at all, I imagined that I would just continue to "come top" in my chosen field of English literature, and that this would somehow enable me to go on doing the work I believed I liked best: reading interesting writing, and writing about it. I would do this in the context of what I believed I would experience at university: increasing freedom (to say what I really thought), and increasing authority (my ideas would be listened to by some vague group of people who mattered more than my teachers).

But I had literally no idea of how to make this happen, or even of needing to do anything to make it happen, beyond continuing to work hard and get high marks. Going by my previous experience, this would automatically result in scholarships of various kinds, which would then determine the path forward. My vague ideas about my future came partly from the only woman I knew who was neither a housewife nor an old maid, my elegant French teacher. She was about 30 when I met her. She too had gone to AGGS and been dux; she had won scholarships to study in France; and while I was still at school, she left her teaching job to return to France, intending to marry her French fiancé.

Part Four: Losing interest

In 1963, to go to university was to become one of an elite group. Only about 5 percent of the New Zealand population attended university, but the percentage of women who

got there was lower still. In 1930, close to half (43 percent) of those enrolled at university had been women. By 1940, when some of the most highly qualified teachers at AGGS had joined the school staff, the numbers of women at university had risen slightly, but the proportion had sunk to 28 percent; by 1950 it had fallen to 24 percent, and ten years later it had reached only 25 percent. There were no more than 4000 women enrolled at university in New Zealand when I started in 1963, compared with about 12,000 men.⁹⁵ In 1966, the year I graduated BA, only 14 former AGGS students graduated in the arts and sciences combined.⁹⁶

Apart from the essays my course of study required, for which I continued to receive generally high marks (usually with little or no comment, although one young tutor gave me valuable help by explaining why I should use verbs rather than adjectives), the only other things I wrote were some anonymous verse satires for *Craccum*, the university paper. It never occurred to me to try to have more to do with producing *Craccum*. My “own” writing was then too tentative and had too little supporting context for me to make it a more significant part of my life. Instead of writing, I married a writer.

After three years, at the age of 20, I had acquired not only a BA, but also a husband and a son. At that time, in New Zealand as in the USA, it was highly likely that by the time women completed their first degrees they would be married, and many would have children too. By 1964, when all women born in New Zealand the same year as me, 1945, turned 19, more than one in five (21.4 percent) had already given birth to a child either outside marriage, or within eight months of marriage.⁹⁷ A male student’s letter published in Victoria’s student paper, *Salient*, in 1964 summed up (as a straightforward statement of regrettable but inevitable fact) the catch-22 discourse of biological essentialism enmeshing women students and impairing their achievements:

⁹⁵ Kay Morris Matthews, "For and About Women: Women's Studies in New Zealand Universities, 1973-1990" (PhD thesis, University of Waikato, 1993), p.88. In Britain, too, women made up only a quarter of university students. Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Paladin, 1971), p.116.

⁹⁶ Northey, *Auckland Girls' Grammar School: The First Hundred Years*, p.261.

⁹⁷ For statistics for births of children conceived before marriage, for various cohorts of women, see Anne Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), p.2.

Either she marries and her academic duties immediately become subordinate to the biological, or she does not, and her thwarted instincts distort her behaviour and impair her thoughts.⁹⁸

If it had not been for the incentive of winning a scholarship (based on my English marks) which required me to begin work for my Master of Arts no more than a year after completing my BA, I might well have dropped out of university study at that point. This would have been mainly to do with ignorance and the politics of gender, rather than with biology. I was surprised to win the scholarship, and also a prize for New Zealand history, not because I doubted my ability, but because I did not even know they were available. At no stage had any staff member ever talked to me about my academic future or career, of which I still had only the haziest notion myself. I did not notice this at the time, because I did not expect lecturers to help me in that way. I was like the women of Betty Friedan's generation: "When we were growing up, many of us could not see ourselves beyond the age of twenty-one. We had no image of our own future, of ourselves as women."⁹⁹

After a year at home with my son, which I used to read the weighty collection of major texts prescribed for my chosen papers – Dickens, Henry James, Conrad, Lawrence, Joyce, Forster, Faulkner, Hemingway – I took him to the new university crèche, and joined the Masters course. I did not feel out of place, as there were several married women in the class. I did not notice or attach any personal or political significance to the fact that we studied only one woman writer, Christina Rossetti, as part of one paper. Nor did I notice or see as significant the fact that there was only one woman lecturer in the English department: the apparently elderly, unmarried and (commonly agreed to be) eccentric Dr Shepherd, who taught Old English and Henry James. Her expertise in these arcane subjects was highly respected, but at the same time she appeared to be regarded, albeit affectionately, as a figure of fun (and some fear) by staff and students alike. She was certainly not a feasible role model for young women.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Beryl Hughes and Sheila Ahern, *Redbrick and Bluestockings: Women at Victoria 1899-1993* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1993), p.148.

⁹⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), p.61.

I remained completely ignorant of the very existence of the kind of unwritten knowledge needed to construct a career as an academic – for example, how to acquire mentors, build networks, or even plot an appropriate course of study. I did not know, for example (and no one tried to explain to me), that in order to have even a chance of being taken seriously, I should do a full Masters thesis. I did know that a thesis usually took two years, and was equivalent to only one paper. With a one-year-old child, and a scholarship lasting only one year, I decided instead to write a prepared examination-room open-book essay, because it would enable me to work on a topic of my own choosing, and was also the equivalent of one paper. My essay, on the insipidity and vapidness of Dickens' later heroines, showed the first faint glimmering of a feminist consciousness, although it was entirely confined to the texts, without any reference to the historical context.¹⁰⁰

Despite being both married and a mother, and not doing a thesis, I completed my MA in 1967, achieving first class honours. But I did not begin any course of study leading to a higher degree. Neither did any of my school classmates, although four of us embarked on doctorates in our fifties. I did not know about the unwritten requirement that a Masters degree should be followed by post-graduate study overseas, and had no idea of what scholarships were available, or how to apply for them. At Victoria University of Wellington, Professor Joan Stevens (the only woman professor on the staff, and one of very few in New Zealand) was at that time ensuring that every student in her English Masters class applied for an overseas scholarship.¹⁰¹ At the University of Auckland, this did not happen.

A few years later, a Carnegie Commission study focusing on US women's lesser achievement in higher education (written by a male professor) noted the crucial role played by mentoring for women students in particular:

If given encouragement by professors, women appear as dedicated as their male counterparts ...Paying less attention to them results in women becoming less

¹⁰⁰ The dominant critical theory was the New Criticism, which excluded any consideration of the historical context; this is discussed below.

¹⁰¹ Hughes and Ahern, *Redbrick and Bluestockings: Women at Victoria 1899-1993*, p.137.

dedicated, hence, the [professors'] belief [that women are less dedicated and capable] is upheld.¹⁰²

As well as the lack of mentoring, the US study noted another prominent factor that appeared to be contributing to women's lack of postgraduate success:

We have found that for women, marriage has a deleterious effect on the role of student and that the least successful female students are those who attempt to combine the student and spouse roles.¹⁰³

Marriage did not have the same consequences for men; if anything, it appeared to enhance the likelihood of PhD completion. But knowledge of its "deleterious effect" on women may have fostered a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading professors not to waste their time or patronage on married women, let alone married women with children, who were unlikely to remain "dedicated" enough to complete their higher degrees – or even to begin them.

In New Zealand in general, as in the USA,¹⁰⁴ graduate women were much less likely than their male counterparts to proceed to doctorates. By 1970, although 30 percent of those completing Bachelors degrees were women, as were 25 percent of those completing Masters or second professional degrees, only 9 percent of those completing doctorates were women. While the small numbers of women doing Masters theses and PhDs must have reduced women's chances of academic employment, even for those who did proceed, the prospects of lasting employment were poor. Between 1960 and 1970, the numbers of university students more than doubled, greatly increasing the numbers of staff required; yet the proportion of full-time academics in New Zealand universities who were women fell, from 13 percent to 10 percent. By 1980 it was back to 13 percent.¹⁰⁵

Not continuing with my studies was not solely the result of ignorance and lack of mentoring, combined with domestic distractions and demands. During and after my

¹⁰² Saul D. Feldman, *Escape from the Doll's House: Women in Graduate and Professional School Education* (Berkeley: Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1974), p.123.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.125.

¹⁰⁴ In the USA, 13.3 percent of doctorates then went to women, despite women obtaining 43.2 percent of Bachelors degrees and 34.8 percent of Masters. Ibid., p.5.

¹⁰⁵ Morris Matthews, "For and About Women: Women's Studies in New Zealand Universities, 1973-1990", p.95.

Masters, I felt an insistent and growing sense of boredom with the texts and authors we were “doing”. I felt it would be impossible to come up with any literary topic that would engage me enough to embark on doctoral study. In 1968-70, the period when I might have been expected to be completing a Masters thesis and beginning a PhD, only six of the 22 theses completed in English nationwide were by women (despite a heavy preponderance of women in both BA and MA English enrolments). None of them were on the work of women authors, let alone on topics to do with gender. Only four theses overall were on New Zealand literature, and only one of those was by a woman. Over the years I spent at university, only one woman author (Janet Frame) appeared as the subject of an English thesis done in New Zealand.

In the small market for New Zealand literature, staying in print and being studied, at school or at university, were interdependent. Not only were comparatively few new works by women being published;¹⁰⁶ earlier works which are now seen as highly significant were out of print, were not taught or discussed, and therefore had effectively ceased to exist. For example, one major work which I think that even then I would have recognised as directly relevant to me, Robin Hyde’s autobiographical novel *The Godwits Fly* (1938),¹⁰⁷ set largely in the urban world I too had grown up in, was out of print and completely unknown to me in the 1960s. Its close contemporary, John Mulgan’s *Man Alone* (1939),¹⁰⁸ set mainly in the rugged rural backblocks, had been championed by the academic Paul Day (who became Gabrielle Mulgan’s second husband). It was first republished by Blackwood and Janet Paul in 1949, and has since been almost continuously in print. *The Godwits Fly* was not republished until 1970.

The language and theory of literary criticism worked to exclude any consideration of such issues. Right through my years at university, I was reading critical texts couched in language such as this:

The ultimate democracy of poetic language; the words of a man speaking to men in the tongue all men know because they are men...

His powers ripened gradually, reached a peak in his middle and late thirties and thereafter very gradually declined. In that development and decline, as in so

¹⁰⁶ See the discussion of published work by New Zealand women in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁷ Robin Hyde, *The Godwits Fly* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1938).

¹⁰⁸ John Mulgan, *Man Alone* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1939).

many other respects, the giant Wordsworth is one of us: the epitome of the normal man...¹⁰⁹

At the time, I did not work out for myself that this was a problem, let alone why it was a problem. I was not even explicitly conscious of such language. It was ubiquitous; it was the normal language of literary criticism. We knew no grounds on which to object to it. I became accustomed to performing a kind of mental conjuring trick which enabled me to read the exclusive masculine pronouns and assumptions as somehow not excluding me.

Playing this trick was made easier by studying English literature during the reign of Leavisite criticism in England and the New Criticism in America.¹¹⁰ However, not until Masters level (in 1967) did we explicitly study the history and theory of literary criticism. At that point the New Criticism, particularly the work of its American exponents, was presented as the culminating achievement of a progressively advancing discipline, which proceeded in a purely intellectual context, in complete isolation from any extraneous considerations. One of its defining characteristics was that it “was anti-personal and declared the personal off-limits at every turn – the intentional fallacy, the affective fallacy”.¹¹¹ It therefore barred the way to any overt consideration of social context, or anything relating to “personal characteristics” such as gender. The proper stance of critical literary analysis was to attend to the words on the page, and ignore or minimize how they got there. It was to be another fifteen years before I began to understand the implications of such theories, and of how they operated in practice, for my own work and life.

Yet when we did study New Zealand literature, the rules of the New Criticism seemed to be partly suspended for this special case. Its New Zealandness was, after all, why we were studying it in the first place. It was also difficult to hold to the tenet that personal

¹⁰⁹ Carlos Baker, “Sensation and Vision in Wordsworth”, in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M.H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp.103, 109. Quoted in Anne Else, “One of Us,” *New Zealand Books* 5, no. 2 (1995): p.5.

¹¹⁰ For useful retrospective discussion of Leavisite criticism in relation to feminism, see Erica Schouten, “Strange Affiliations: Germaine Greer, F.R. Leavis, and a Literary Critique of Modernity” (Master of Arts thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2002). On the New Criticism, see William J. Spurlin and Michael Fischer, eds., *The New Criticism and Contemporary Literary Theory: Connections and Continuities* (New York: Garland, 1995).

¹¹¹ Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Biographical Acts*, p.13.

characteristics were irrelevant when several of the lecturers were themselves prominent writers and critics, and lectured on each other's work.

Though the New Criticism was dominant, it did not have total possession of the theoretical field. Some of our lecturers took what I now see as a different approach. Tom Crawford, a world authority on Scottish literature of the eighteenth century, made the most profound impression on me. He gave me my first real insight into the way in which how and what writers wrote was connected with how, what and with whom they were reading and thinking and talking, as well as living, when he talked about Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu*.¹¹² In his wide-ranging lectures on Burns, Boswell and Johnson, he highlighted the importance of understanding the social and economic contexts in which they wrote, and the way in which literature is never the product of one individual mind alone.

His work thus offered a way in to a different kind of critical thinking and writing about literature, one which, broadly speaking, enabled it to encompass society, politics, and therefore gender. But although I knew that I liked what he was saying, I did not understand why. He did not explicitly discuss his theoretical approach, and with no grounding in Marxist theory, I did not understand its basis or become aware of its possibilities. The discourse which would have made it possible for me to understand and take advantage of such approaches did not then exist for me, although it had already begun to be constructed. My experience at university paralleled that of my contemporary Dale Spender. Noting "how quickly and completely women's ideas can disappear", she wrote:

[F]orty years after Virginia Woolf and twenty years after Simone de Beauvoir, I reached adulthood and gained a university degree in history and literature, without knowing about their ideas on women.¹¹³

¹¹² John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1927).

¹¹³ Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas (and What Men Have Done to Them)* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p.138.

Chapter 3: Coming to feminism, 1965-1980

Introduction

This chapter covers four interwoven trajectories over fifteen years. The first runs from marriage and motherhood to separation and the start of a new relationship. The second runs from graduating BA, then returning to complete my MA, to taking on assorted paid jobs. The third involves a series of literal moves: leaving home, flatting, buying a house, then moving to Albania, to London, and finally to Wellington. The fourth covers “coming to feminism” and to feminist writing. I compare the impacts of reading *The Feminine Mystique* in 1966 and *The Female Eunuch* in 1971, in the context of a society where “women” were consistently subordinated, excluded and belittled. I recount how the subsequent re-emergence of New Zealand feminism led to my becoming one of the founders of *Broadsheet* magazine, and provided me with the basis for a more coherent subjectivity which included writing. Putting together and interpreting my recollections of how I attempted to make sense of what I was experiencing across these years, the chapter works through what I think these experiences meant in terms of feminism, writing, and subjectivity, and why it was not until after 1980 that I began “thinking and writing for myself in a new way”.

Part One: A married mother

In 1965, at the beginning of my final BA year, I married Chris Else, whom I had met at university. I was 19 and he was 22. He was an arts student too, but he saw himself primarily as a writer. I did not expect marriage to change who I was, or interrupt my intellectual life. I expected simply to carry on studying alongside my husband, living on his earnings as a postman, my scholarship money and savings, and what I could earn from full-time office work in the summer holidays.

The biggest change in terms of my everyday life was leaving a home where everything domestic had been done for me. When I married, I had very little knowledge and no first-hand experience of the physical and mental work involved in running a home and

taking care of my own domestic needs, let alone those of a husband and, ten months later, a baby. By contrast, my husband's father had died when he was eight, and he had been used to carrying a solid load of both paid and unpaid work responsibilities, although these had not included cooking and washing. He had flatbed with a male friend (Chris cleaned, John cooked) for a year before we married; then John married and moved out, leaving the flat for Chris and me. It had a bedroom, sitting room and kitchen, on half the ground floor of a large old inner-city house, close to shops and transport. The shared bathrooms and laundry in the basement were kept spotlessly clean by another tenant, who lived with her husband in one large room and sunporch, and acted on the landlord's behalf.

When I married, I simply assumed that as Chris's wife, the washing, shopping and cooking were my job, not his. He must have had a similar assumption, because he let me do it, even though I knew less than he did and often made a mess of things. My major anxieties were working out how to manage the housekeeping money, what food to buy and cook, and how to get everything ready to eat at the same time; I was relieved when I discovered frozen fish fingers. We shared the cleaning, but I had so little knowledge of housework that it never occurred to me to wash the kitchen floor; I suddenly realised that this needed to be done when Chris cleaned it just before we moved, and I felt stupid and ashamed.

Although the difficulties and anxieties arising out of my new responsibilities were part of being a wife, they seemed to me to be separate from my thinking, reading, writing self. I was not a housewife, I was a married student, which at that time was an unusual identity, and had a certain status. And very soon I was a pregnant one. It began to seem as if others saw the pregnancy as the only thing about me which mattered. My mother went to a great deal of trouble to get a book on pregnancy and motherhood for my twentieth birthday, but it was the last thing I wanted. At a party, a lecturer looked at my bulging stomach and said wistfully and admiringly to Chris, "That's wonderful – I've never impregnated anyone". Pregnancy and future motherhood seemed already to be taking over who I was, in a way that wifehood and housekeeping had not done.

By the time my first son, Jonathan, arrived in December 1965, two weeks after my final BA examination, we were living in half an old house in Mt Eden, and Chris was studying to be a primary teacher, as well as finishing his degree.¹¹⁴ For a year, I stayed at home. At first I had no washing machine or refrigerator. Perpetually tired after a long and difficult birth and rapid weight loss, and experiencing what, in retrospect, was probably a form of post-natal depression, I used to pile the dirty nappies up in the bath until I could face washing them. The hand-knitted woollen baby clothes shrank and felted because I washed them the wrong way. During those first difficult months, Chris gave some signs that he was deeply concerned about me, but I think he felt helpless. He did not generally expect to be waited on, and he helped with both the housework and the childcare; but apart from some routine jobs of his own, such as taking out the rubbish, he responded to my requests rather than taking any initiatives. I might have felt worse if he had seemed to be “taking over” what ought to have been my job.

I lived in an uncomprehending fog. I was no longer myself, as a mind or as a woman. Instead I was a mother, and that seemed to mean I was not and could not be anyone or anything else. Most of the time I enjoyed being with my husband, when he was home, and as I recovered physically, I enjoyed being with my son, who was strong, cheerful, determined and healthy despite my inept care. But I did not want to be nothing but a housewife and mother. In my limited experience, on a daily basis that life was lonely, boring and frustrating. It seemed to suit my mother well enough, but it did not suit me. Yet what else could I do?

At first I would leave the flat as early as I could every morning, wheel the pram down to my mother's, and stay there until it was time to go home and cook tea (or heat up something she gave me). We disagreed about how to look after my son, but at least it was company and she fed me. I tried to make friends with other young mothers living nearby, but there seemed to be nothing to talk about except children, sewing and cooking. I went to but very quickly retreated from the various organised forms of

¹¹⁴ He went to teachers' college for the same reason as I did later: because we needed the money, and he couldn't think what else to do. The college also enabled him to finish his BA. Teachers in training were then paid a wage, and helped to complete their degrees if necessary. Chris received just enough to keep himself, a wife and a baby in a rented flat, and run an old car. He was bonded to teach for three years, although he managed to avoid doing this.

“fellowship” on offer, for example the Young Wives Club at the Anglican church across the road; they were too like the kindergarten mothers’ evenings I tried later, where we played a game to see who could be the fastest to unpeg nappies from a clothes-line with one hand. They all appeared to be futile attempts to bolster the notion that motherhood and housewifery could themselves provide a basis for the kind of connection and recreation that was all we were assumed to need. Reading my MA texts for the next year was my only link with my former life, but most of them seemed so remote as to be barely comprehensible, let alone relevant.¹¹⁵ Like Plath’s Esther Greenwood, stumped by *Finnegans Wake*, I feared I had lost the power to think and write.¹¹⁶

My first feminist “click”, that “sudden discovery that things are not what they seem”,¹¹⁷ came halfway through that year, through an older woman and through reading. Augusta Ford, an erudite American woman on the staff of the primary teachers’ college,¹¹⁸ gave me Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which had just come out in the paperback Penguin edition.¹¹⁹ What instantly made sense to me was Friedan’s sustained attack on what I had so recently been forced to recognise as the central assumption of New Zealand’s gender discourse: that all women were properly and inevitably destined to marry, have children, and be primarily housewives and mothers for the rest of their adult lives, perhaps with a nice little part-time job once the children were at secondary school. My mother had followed this pattern. But she had not married till she was 35; she was 39 when she adopted me, and 44 when she adopted my sister. More importantly, as I saw it then, she had no education, so what else did she have to do? I was a different being from her. Katherine Mansfield had expressed similar disdain to her husband:

¹¹⁵ These included selected novels of Charles Dickens, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence, and Ernest Hemingway, as well as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

¹¹⁶ Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (London: Faber, 1966).

¹¹⁷ Langton, “Feminism in Epistemology: Exclusion and Objectification,” p.127.

¹¹⁸ Chris met Augusta Ford (1914?-2005) at teachers’ college, and brought her home to meet me. She was the first woman I knew who was both married (though with no children) and a lecturer (though she had formerly been a secondary teacher); she was also an intellectual who utterly refused the role of housewife. The Fords generously lent us the second mortgages we needed to buy our Auckland and Wellington houses.

¹¹⁹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. It was first published in 1963, the same year as *The Bell Jar* appeared (Plath, *The Bell Jar*.)

Yes, I hate hate HATE doing these things that you accept just as all men accept of their women. I can only play the servant with very bad grace indeed. It's all very well for females who have nothing else to do...¹²⁰

But if I was not to be like my mother, who was I to be like? Friedan gave voice to this dilemma:

We did not want to be like [our mothers], and yet what other model did we have? The only other kind of women I knew, growing up, were the old-maid high-school teachers...I dreaded being like them, even the ones who had taught me truly to respect my own mind and use it.¹²¹

Friedan's brilliant phrase, "The problem that has no name",¹²² exactly defined how I was feeling, and what I took to be her core message about that problem made welcome sense to me. The lack of "fit" between how I was suddenly living, and who I thought I was, stemmed not from some peculiar individual malaise, but from a false premise about who all women were supposed to be and how they were supposed to live:

It is my thesis that the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity – a shunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique. It is my thesis that as the Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role...¹²³

The "feminine mystique" at the heart of this problem was, she said, mainly due to what she called "the sexual counter-revolution".¹²⁴ This had happened so quickly and pervasively that between 1945 and 1960, "this mystique of feminine fulfilment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture".¹²⁵ The overall impression her book gave was that while there were certainly powerful forces in business and the media dedicated to keeping women immured in wifedom, motherhood and domesticity, and above all buying things, to bolster the US economy, this counter-revolution had mysteriously come about all by itself. Resisting and

¹²⁰ Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds., *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, Volume I, 1903-1917* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1984), p.125.

¹²¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, pp.66-7.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.68.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.330.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

defeating it was merely a matter of women committing themselves to serious, worthwhile employment of some kind.

Friedan said almost nothing about women's pay or working conditions, and clearly focused on relatively affluent middle class households.¹²⁶ *The Feminine Mystique* described a world which, apart from the problem which had no name, was in most respects unfamiliar to young New Zealand women. One major difference between me and my peers, and the women Friedan focused on, was that we were not immersed in the multifarious material trappings of affluent American middle-class life, before or after marriage. At that time, only a very small proportion of New Zealand women lived or expected to live such a life. I had read about it in *Seventeen* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*, but it was all unreal.

Yet I was far from indifferent to the whole world of "material trappings"; they were saturated with meaning for me. I despised what I saw as the dull, conventional consumer world of my parents' generation, where painstakingly acquired suites of what I considered hideous furniture were carefully protected by covers and coasters. My glory box consisted of one tablecloth, but I set great store by creating what I saw as the right kind of domestic setting, because it proved how advanced and enlightened we were as a couple, and set another kind of distance between me and housewives like my mother. The wedding presents I was most pleased with were chunky New Zealand pottery and brown Finnish plates. The ones I hated most were Crown Lynn and bone china teaset. Our flat was furnished mainly with cast-offs from home, which I tried to do up with cheap fabric and paint. Although I took playing house seriously, enjoyed it much more than most other aspects of domesticity, and saw it as an expression of my own creativity, as well as my superior taste, it was no substitute for intellectual work.

¹²⁶ Daniel Horowitz has pointed out that this focus did not in fact reflect Friedan's own experience: "Friedan's portrayal of herself as so totally trapped by the feminine mystique was part of a deliberate reinvention of herself...Her story made it possible for readers to identify with its author and its author to enhance the book's appeal. However, it hid from view the connection between the union activity in which Friedan participated in the 1940s and early 1950s and the feminism she inspired in the 1960s." He goes on to suggest that her strategy was deliberate: "Whatever may yet be learned of Friedan's personal life and political journey, along with shifts in her politics and the consequences of McCarthyism, issues of genre, audience, and persona go a long way in explaining why *The Feminine Mystique* did not more accurately reflect her experience." Daniel Horowitz, "Rethinking Betty Friedan and *the Feminine Mystique*: Labor Union Radicalism and Feminism in Cold War America," *American Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1996): pp.3, 23.

My situation in 1966 did, I came to believe, have one advantage: my predicament was not concealed or confused, as it appeared to be for many of the women Friedan wrote about, by being enmeshed in even an everyday version of the full “house and garden” enterprise, let alone the glossy ideal. I did still feel guilty about my strong reactions to my situation, because I knew very well that things could have been much worse. I might have “had to get married”, or been left pregnant and alone. I lived in Mt Eden, where I had grown up, not in a bare new house in some barren new dormitory suburb, distant from even my mother and the shops, let alone the university. But even before I read Friedan, I also felt very strongly that no educated young woman in her right mind would actively choose to be alone all day, save for her baby, in a grotty rented flat with very little money, and no occupation beyond wifehood and motherhood. I did not believe that living in better material circumstances would have made any difference to how I felt; rather, living as I did, neither in affluence nor in poverty, with the home beautiful so clearly out of reach, made it easier to know that something was wrong, and that it was connected with being a woman. Friedan gave me to understand that what I was feeling was a legitimate reaction to an untenable and unnecessary situation.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of reading Friedan was that for the first time, to make sense of what was happening and what was wrong, I had to look at being a woman and having a mind in relation to each other. Guided by her book, or rather by those parts which seemed to relate directly to my life and my generation, I believed the immediate problem lay entirely in being expected – though exactly how or by whom was difficult to say – to stay at home and stop thinking, simply because I was a woman. An apparently straightforward short-term solution to this problem was at hand: in 1967 I took up my scholarship and went back to university.

Being a student again was a great deal better than being solely a mother/housewife, and several other women in the almost all-female class were in the same situation. I soon found it was not easy to combine the two, not so much because of the actual work involved, but rather because of how I felt. Whichever one I was being seemed to be the wrong one. Once I clumsily tried to express what I was feeling to an eminent academic in my field. He told me, with some irritation and impatience, that it was “just your *role*

for a few years”. In other words, it was silly and pointless to have such thoughts or feelings. They were not just inappropriate, they were of no significance or interest. It was like complaining that only women had babies.

As I got the only first class MA in my year, in 1968 I automatically became a “junior lecturer” (meaning a Stage 1 tutor, although I did give some lectures). But this meant there was no one else from my year on the staff. The tutors were isolated in a distant block of prefabs, and there was almost no formal (and very little informal) contact with the rest of the staff or each other. I was happy to be back at the university and to be getting paid, and I enjoyed reading and thinking for teaching, but I was confused about what I was meant to be doing and where I was heading. I did not know how to sustain an intellectual life outside an academic course of study, let alone how to establish myself as a staff member.

That year I deliberately and joyfully became pregnant again, and my second son, Patrick, was born in March 1969. But again, for me this was not something I did *instead* of continuing my intellectual life – it was quite separate from it. I had no intention of leaving the university permanently. I knew that the accepted tenure for junior lectureships was usually three years, and simply assumed I would be able to take a year off, go back on the same footing for two more years, and somehow work out what to do next – perhaps even get a scholarship to go overseas, when the children were older. With a far easier and better experience of giving birth, much more confidence as a mother and wife, and access to a car and friends, I enjoyed that year at home far more than I had before. I saw it as just an interlude in being a junior lecturer.

When I phoned about resuming my lectureship in 1970, I got a terrible shock. I was told there was no position available, as there had been 12 first class honours MAs in English the year after mine. The professor who gave me this news cheerfully and briskly advised me to go to teachers’ college for a year, and then go teaching. I took his advice, very reluctantly, as going to college appeared to be the only option offering both reasonable pay and relatively short hours. I had absolutely no desire to become a secondary teacher, seeing it as a kind of going backwards; but staying home was even less appealing, and we needed the money.

The impact of Friedan's book had been strong, but limited. Her analysis shied completely away from issues of masculinism, misogyny, and entrenched power, let alone the gendered construction of knowledge. So it was easy for me to believe at first that what mattered most, both for me personally and for young housewives in general, was refusing to stay at home full-time with young children, and finding some interesting work to do. As long as I could keep my identity as "someone else" outside the home alive, I would be successfully defying the stereotype, and both avoiding and countering its discursive power and its malign effects. I would also be earning, and it was important to me to control money of my own.

However, teaching did not count. Going back to the classroom not only felt like going backwards, it also felt like giving in, because teaching seemed to be the one kind of paid work which mothers with arts degrees were allowed and even encouraged to have. It also kept women firmly associated with children. I was extremely relieved when, after an unhappy year at teachers' college and a difficult term as a part-time lay teacher at a Catholic girls' school (the only manageable teaching job I could find after college), Augusta Ford helped me get two well-paid terms relieving as an English lecturer at the primary teachers' college. Again, I floundered, and did the job badly, partly out of sheer ignorance about how to teach a different group of students, who were obviously not going to be interested in the finer points of Eliot's poetry or the New Criticism; partly because of the almost complete lack of outreach and support from other staff, who were considerably older than me; and partly because I was preoccupied with marriage, children, and decorating the ex-state house we had by then managed to buy. To some extent, I think I was trying to make up for being plunged so quickly into motherhood by becoming frivolous again – getting my relatively short hours of paid work over and done with, then pouring my creative energies into painting walls, trawling through second-hand shops, and driving round to see friends. Meanwhile I tried unsuccessfully to become a writer of humorous "housetime" columns for two new women's magazines, *Eve* and *Thursday*. It was the only form of writing I could imagine myself doing.

Although I had my own office (another isolated prefab), and could have spent more time there than I did, there seemed to be no connection between my job and my own confused morass of emerging thoughts and feelings about women, men and society. My husband was not committed to his job with a tertiary publishing company either; but he both claimed the identity of an intellectual and writer (mainly of fiction), and knew how to “do” it. At night, he read Camus and Sartre and worked alone in his study. I sewed myself clothes and avidly read contemporary novels about young married women,¹²⁷ taking pleasure in not having to critique them or teach them or sit exams on them, but talking about them with my friends. I wanted to read without dissecting and judging, instead thinking about what I was reading and applying it to my own life.

Part Two: Sexual politics

By 1970 I had consolidated two of the most significant friendships of my life, both with women I had known at school. Camille Guy became the first woman I knew who, instead of marrying young and having children early, moved into a flat with her boyfriend, then went overseas. We did not reconnect until the later 1970s.

Sandra Coney had returned to Auckland with her accountant husband and two-year-old son, and I was pregnant with my first son, when we met again in 1965, and found we had a great deal in common. She was materially better off than I was, and was not consciously unhappy; but she seemed to have no energy, and was tired all the time. The doctor she saw prescribed Librium.¹²⁸ What rescued her, as it did me, was going back to university to finish her interrupted degree. We have no clear memory of talking about Friedan, or about de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*,¹²⁹ which she was then reading.

¹²⁷ The novels which made the most impact on me then were Margaret Drabble, *The Millstone* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), Fay Weldon, *Down among the Women* (London: Heinemann, 1971).

¹²⁸ Personal communication, October 2003.

¹²⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: New English Library, 1969 (originally published 1949)).

When my second son was a few months old, I made contact again with Rosslyn Noonan,¹³⁰ who had recently had her own first child, and was working at the university. When Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*¹³¹ appeared, Rosslyn had moved to Wellington. We both read it, and I flew down to see her, taking my younger son with me; "we talked about what was then called 'women's liberation' far into the night".¹³²

Reading Greer again now, it is more difficult to see what made her book strike us so much more forcibly than Friedan's had done. Much of it went over our heads. As with Friedan, we must have simply ignored what seemed irrelevant or incomprehensible, and seized on the parts that hit home. Greer was funnier and stroppier and much more irreverent than Friedan, and she tackled problematic relations between men and women in general, and husbands and wives in particular, much more frankly (though her scarcely veiled insistence that she herself was different and had therefore escaped such snares led her to say some appallingly foolish things about wife-beating, as well as abortion and child-rearing). Her apparently detached, mandarin, eye-of-God approach to writing about women, men and society may have made a stronger impression on the New Zealand women who read her than Friedan's more personal, accessible approach, because it conveyed more authority. It also deliberately set out to shock rather than persuade (a characteristic of most of Greer's subsequent writing).

Greer began with a confident statement which Friedan could not have made eight years earlier: "This book is a part of the second feminist wave."¹³³ Her book and her 1972 visit certainly helped to initiate the second wave in New Zealand. As an Australian transplanted to Britain, and a journalist, Greer wrote effectively about a familiar contemporary suburban landscape of isolated families serviced by enforcedly

¹³⁰ Rosslyn Noonan, a historian by training, became New Zealand co-ordinator for the United Nations' International Women's Year (1975). She subsequently moved into union work, playing a major role in organising kindergarten teachers. She was appointed to the Royal Commission on Social Policy, and in 1987 became head of the primary teachers' union, followed by five years in Brussels working for the international body of teacher unions and representing New Zealand on the International Labour Organisation. She was appointed Chief Human Rights Commissioner for New Zealand in 2001.

¹³¹ Greer, *The Female Eunuch*.

¹³² Anne Else and Rosslyn Noonan, "Unfinished Business," in *Heading Nowhere in a Navy Blue Suit and Other Tales from the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Sue Kedgley and Mary Varnham (Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates Press, 1993).

¹³³ Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, p.11.

dependent and insecure wives and mothers. She came up with some sharp and sweeping insights into urban Western women's "secondariness", focusing on the crucial interconnections between private and public life:

The ancillary aspect of women's work is almost universal; in the home she must make her husband's lot easier and build up his confidence as breadwinner, and this is an aspect of the secondariness of female work outside the home which has not been evaluated. It is assumed that wives earn less than their husbands...Even at work women must serve men...The most overt kind of handmaidenship is practised by secretaries...The sad fact is that prejudice and discrimination cannot be legislated out of existence.¹³⁴

She saw women's predicament as arising not simply out of their lack of meaningful work, but out of their lack of sexual autonomy and agency, and the kinds of relationships with men to which female passivity and addiction to the Cinderella fantasy of romantic dependence inexorably led:

A teenage girl yearns for love and romance as things that could happen to her, but which she cannot bring about...she offers at one time both more and less than he is asking...¹³⁵

Most women who have followed in the direction indicated by the myth [of romantic love] make an act of faith that despite day-to-day difficulties they are happy, and keep on asserting it in the face of blatant contradiction by the facts, because to confess disappointment is to admit failure and abandon the effort. It never occurs to them to seek the causes of their unhappiness in the myth itself.¹³⁶

Unlike Friedan, Greer did not avoid using the term "oppression"; but despite her insights, she placed most of the blame for women's plight on women (that is, *other* women), and castigated them for not doing more to liberate themselves (as she clearly considered she had already liberated herself). Like Friedan, she insisted that the solution was for women to change themselves and their behaviour, especially their behaviour towards men: "If women are to be better valued by men they must value themselves more highly."¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.123.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.181.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.215.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.268.

But she did not want them to deal with the problems of being frustrated housewives by getting good jobs. Despite her own lecturing position, she characterised getting good jobs and positions of power as simply aping men. She called instead for revolution, which meant women liberating themselves by casting off the chains of femininity, romance and marriage, and embracing their (hetero)sexuality.

Perhaps the most important difference between Friedan and Greer, for me and the women I joined up with after reading *The Female Eunuch*, was simply that Greer was in no doubt that, as we had already come to suspect, the problem which had no name was only one symptom of what was wrong. The riddle of what was wrong with relations between women and men was a great deal more complex than Friedan had suggested; and to solve it, women would have to do a great deal more than find a good job. The entire edifice of male-female relations would have to be rethought and rebuilt, so that men no longer hated women, and women were no longer subservient to men.

Part Three: The facts of life

The Female Eunuch and *The Feminine Mystique* were both full of startling statistics, but they were all based on Britain and the USA. In New Zealand, not only did the problem have no name, but no empirical evidence seemed to be available for it. The facts of life for New Zealand women of my generation, in the years just before what is known as the second wave of feminism became apparent here, were then unknown to us. All I knew was that judging by my own limited experience, the pattern of my life so far was more or less “normal” for women of my generation.

Marrying at 19, as I did, was not quite the norm, but the most common age for female first marriage then was 20-24, only slightly older. (In the USA, according to Friedan, the average marriage age had dropped to 20 by the end of the 1950s, and went on dropping.¹³⁸) Overall, women made up 27.3 percent of the paid workforce in 1966, and 41.5 percent of these “working women” (as they were called, highlighting their

¹³⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p.14.

deviance from “women” in general) were married.¹³⁹ Married or single, women were effectively barred from a wide range of occupations. Even where they made up the vast majority of employees, they rarely held the better paid, higher status positions, especially positions of authority. For example, while a third of all employed women worked in clerical jobs, only one in 10 clerical supervisors was a woman.¹⁴⁰ This pattern was remarkably persistent. In 1973, women made up almost half (47.4) of all assistant teachers in secondary schools, but only 11 percent of secondary principals. They fared even worse in primary schools: as late as 1979, although women made up over 78 percent of all Scale A primary teachers, only 4.7 percent of principals were women.¹⁴¹

Such statistics were rarely even compiled until feminists started to raise the issue of discrimination against women. Apart from a limited range of official data, before the mid-1970s it was not usual for women to be seriously compared with men in any respect. Even when such comparisons were undertaken, they were not usually publicised or seen as evidence of a problem. Marked quantifiable differences were of course known to exist, for example in academic achievement, employment, occupations and earnings, but they were seen as perfectly normal and proper. Women and men were supposed to be different, and the statistics proved that they were. Problems were much more likely to be discerned where such differences appeared to be eroding, for example in the periodic panics over men becoming “feminised”, or working mothers “neglecting” their homes and children.

Within the official organs of power, women played virtually no role. Until 1960, only one woman¹⁴² had ever entered Parliament in a general election, rather than a by-election. The number of women MPs rose from four to five in 1963, and to six when

¹³⁹ Anne Horsfield, *Women in the Economy: A Research Report on the Economic Position of Women in New Zealand* (Wellington: Ministry of Women's Affairs, 1988).

¹⁴⁰ Statistics New Zealand, *All About Women in New Zealand* (Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, 1993), p.94.

¹⁴¹ Department of Education, "Teacher Career and Promotion Study," (Wellington: Department of Education, 1982), pp.128, 30. The fact that such statistics were not available until this report was compiled, and that even then, as the report notes, they were difficult to assemble, indicates the length of time it took for even such blatant vertical segregation to be officially acknowledged as a matter for concern.

¹⁴² Catherine Stewart, Labour Member of Parliament from 1938 to 1943. For a comprehensive summary of individual women MPs in the New Zealand Parliament, see Janet McCallum, *Women in the House* ([Wellington]: Cape Catley, 1993).

Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan won a by-election in 1967, but from 1969 to 1981 it was back down to four.¹⁴³ When Allison Webber began work as a reporter on *The Dominion* in 1968 (partly thanks to the editor recognising her as the daughter of a well-known male journalist), she was one of three women on a staff of 40:

Quite simply, the media was male...The world we were reporting was also very male dominated. There were no women judges, and very few women doctors, politicians or police officers. Our contact books were full of men, interviews were nearly always with men, and when we covered meetings we were invariably the only women present apart from the tea ladies or stenographers.¹⁴⁴

Women did of course appear in the media, though rarely as “newsmakers”. In the women’s pages, as daughters, fiancées, wives, mothers and “homemakers”, they were praised, blamed, warned and advised in relation to their feminine role as men’s helpmeets. Everywhere else, except for parts of the women’s magazines, they were held up as the inferior, inherently funny and frequently ridiculous antithesis of the (usually unstated) masculine norm. As Rosslyn Noonan and I put it, in an essay written jointly in 1993, the centenary year of women’s suffrage: “every form of public utterance, from mass media productions to old boy network speeches, was riddled with sexism of the most demeaning kind”.¹⁴⁵ Women were constantly stereotyped and belittled: most often as brainless bimbos, obsessed with their appearance and “getting a man”; as boring housewives, obsessed with consuming, cleaning, and avoiding sex; or as ugly battleaxes, obsessed with controlling their henpecked husbands and their hapless sons-in-law. This was so much taken for granted as the everyday currency of gender discourse that I did not consciously take much notice of it, any more than I did of the absence of women from positions of power or from literary canons. It was simply the status quo.

This was the context out of which New Zealand feminism, or rather “women’s liberation”, emerged towards the end of the 1960s.¹⁴⁶ For me, becoming a writer and

¹⁴³ Arthur Baysting, Dyan Campbell, and Margaret Dagg, eds., *Making Policy... Not Tea: Women in Parliament* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.201-3.

¹⁴⁴ Allison Webber, "All the Prejudice That's Fit to Print," in *Heading Nowhere in a Navy Blue Suit and Other Tales from the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Sue Kedgley and Mary Varnham (Auckland: Daphne Brasell Associates, 1993), pp.35-6.

¹⁴⁵ Else and Noonan, "Unfinished Business," p.192.

¹⁴⁶ For an account of the New Zealand movement’s first fifteen years, see Christine Dann, *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand, 1970-1985* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1985).

becoming a feminist (the term which was used from the outset to describe those who supported women's liberation) were closely interdependent. Feminism provided the space and ground, the means and words for "speaking up" and "speaking out", that I had been unable to find anywhere else. It also provided community, through membership of a new form of "invisible college" that was not guarded by masculinist gatekeepers. Taking part in the women's liberation movement generally and in producing *Broadsheet* magazine in particular meant that for the first time in my life, thinking, feeling, reading, writing, being a woman and belonging all fitted together, each strengthening the other. Finding my subject meant not only finding what I wanted to write about; it also meant finding the urgent desire to write that I had previously lacked, and enough confidence and autonomy (at least in terms of writing for women readers) to get the writing done.

The first issue of *Broadsheet*, typed and cyclostyled, appeared in Auckland in July 1972. In the editorial, Sandra Coney explained how it had come into existence:

We were sitting around, this group of us, wondering what to do. We wanted some action, but were having a spot of bother deciding where it was going to be....Well, what could we do – we could read, we could write and "Hey", someone said, "we can type!"

A NEWSPAPER .. that's great.

Anyway we enthusiastically set to work and here's our baby and we hope you like her. Because she's for you. We want letters (for and against), articles, news, instances of discrimination, suggestions, personal stories, in fact, anything. Our baby is going to get bigger and better but we need your help. If you think W[omen's]L[iberation] is important then a newspaper is important.¹⁴⁷

It was not surprising that that group of young women, of which I was one, thought of taking this form of action. Our explicit knowledge of feminism as a discourse had come mainly through reading. We had grown up with women's magazines as the only readily available form of writing by, for and about women that we knew. The *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* was run by women; at that period, it took them and their lives more seriously than the other print media did. Cherry Raymond's column in it, as well as the much newer magazines *Thursday* and *Eve*, had broken some new ground,

¹⁴⁷ Sandra Coney, "Editorial," *Broadsheet*, no. 1 (1972).

for example in articles about sole parents. A regular magazine seemed the obvious way to reach a broad female audience, and we were certain it was within our powers to produce one. As I wrote confidently in that first issue, after looking at how sexism had bedevilled even the process of choosing a name:

If the name puts you off all that much, don't buy it, because the contents probably won't be your cup of tea either. If it doesn't, take out a subscription. It will be worth it. We mean to be around for quite a while.¹⁴⁸

At first we knew very little about any earlier feminist work, and not much about other forms of critical theory, although some did know something about Marxism. Doing a Stage 1 course in the new subject of sociology in 1972 gave me a broad introduction to critical social theory, and enabled me to begin to make connections between feminist knowledge and official knowledge. The lecturers welcomed and encouraged my preoccupation with interpreting New Zealand women's lives in my reading and coursework. Not wanting to teach in schools, I combined the course with a part-time job as a sales representative for a firm selling English sheets and towels. Their office was conveniently close to the university, and my earnings covered childcare. It was the first in a long line of relatively undemanding jobs which left me enough spare time at work to get in a good deal of reading, and even some writing. It was there that I read Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*.¹⁴⁹

Part Four: Moving away

The relatively satisfying combination of working part-time, going to university and writing for *Broadsheet* did not last long. At the beginning of 1973, I left with my husband and children for Albania.

In 1972, my husband had suddenly made it clear that for some time, completely unknown to me, he had been working out how to make a major change in his and therefore our life. His revealed unhappiness seemed to stem mainly from the conflict between his drive to be a writer, his job as a textbook publisher's sales representative,

¹⁴⁸ Anne Else, "What's in a Name?," *Broadsheet*, no. 1 (1972).

¹⁴⁹ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978). Millett's book was first published in 1969. I discuss its impact on me in Chapter 4. A contemporary article by Evelyn Reed notes that male critics who had attacked Millett's book were quick to praise Greer's *Female Eunuch*. Evelyn Reed, "Feminism and 'the Female Eunuch'," *International Socialist Review* 32, no. 7 (1971).

and our increasingly comfortable suburban life. My own developing sense of purpose and belonging in relation to feminism and *Broadsheet*, and a possible second chance of future academic employment in the rapidly growing sociology department, were nowhere near strong enough to set against his determination. Although it was never explicitly raised, I felt sure that if I refused to shift, he would leave.

He had contacted Riverside Community¹⁵⁰ in the South Island, and proposed that we move there. One visit to Riverside convinced me that it was still deeply conservative in terms of gender relations; and I shied nervously away from the requirement that after a year's trial, we would have to burn our escape bridges by handing over all our painfully acquired assets, consisting mainly of the equity in our house. So it was with a huge sense of relief that an accidental meeting resulted in the offer of an alternative that was even more dramatic and unconventional, and much more attractive to me: teaching English in Albania for two years, with travel expenses and free housing, and the prospect of going on to work in London (since Chris had been born in Britain).

We were away for four years. Though I continued to read *Broadsheet*, I wrote only two articles from Albania for it. In Albania, the impact and demands of making a life for ourselves and our children in strange and sometimes difficult circumstances, and my sense of being an isolated, disengaged outsider looking on, meant that the development of my own writing voice seemed on hold. We were outsiders not only because we were not Albanian, but also because, unlike all the other foreigners working there, we knew nothing about the intricacies of left-wing politics, and were not in Albania as a result of our political convictions or of persecution for them. We were not Communists or Marxist-Leninists and had had no involvement with the local party.

This sense of disengagement did not end when I moved on alone to London, followed five months later by Chris and the boys, and we both taught foreign students at a large English language school. Combined with the pressures of holding down a full-time job and keeping a home and family going, it meant that I never tried to join any London women's groups, though I went to some events. I had none of the contacts necessary to

¹⁵⁰ Riverside Community, which is still flourishing today, was founded in 1941 by Christian pacifists in the Moutere Valley. In the 1970s it was owned in common and run predominantly by members of the founding families, and derived its income mainly from growing apples.

find a way into what I could dimly see were London's complex and otherwise impenetrable "invisible colleges" of feminism. Besides, the context for feminism there seemed very different. Although the friends we made were much the same age as us, in their early thirties, very few were even living as couples, almost none were married, none had children, and all the women supported themselves. My energies went into teaching, coping, and taking in London. Those four years away adversely affected my writing, because they interrupted my contributions to *Broadsheet*, and I did not even think of writing for any other publication.

We came back to New Zealand at the end of 1976. To me there was never any question of not coming back, and Chris never raised any other possibility. Reasoning that Chris clearly wanted to be a writer and not to have any kind of conventional career, whereas I definitely wanted to go "out to work", I made deliberate efforts to find the kind of job I thought I would enjoy: definitely not school-teaching, something to do with my skills with words, and paying enough for me to be the main breadwinner. I thought myself lucky that Chris did not object to my "working full-time", and did not himself have the kind of career-oriented work which would take priority and require dedicated servicing. Through Rosslyn, I learned that Mary Sinclair was about to leave her job as education editor for Reed Publishers in Wellington. I flew down, she introduced me to the men in charge, and after a second long interview, they gave me the position. When Chris went to ask about a job at the university bookshop, he was employed as the new manager. At the end of 1977, we were able to buy a house in Wellington.

Alongside my determination to work full-time for pay, and the store I set on "working" as a vital part of my identity, security, and difference from the feminine stereotype, ran my intellectual preoccupation with feminism and feminist writing. Writing was not just a hobby, but nor did it appear to be a way of earning anything, let alone enough to live on. We all wrote for *Broadsheet* for nothing, and even as the editor, Sandra was not paid anything until 1976. I wrote for a defined audience made up almost entirely of women who were feminists or feminist sympathisers. For some time, the only writing I did for the mainstream press was letters of protest. I worked for a living, and I wrote as a feminist, although feminism did inevitably affect my work too. I thought I was very lucky to have a decent job which was better paid than most jobs for women, was not

absolutely stereotypical, and bore some relation to my interests and talents and education – even to my feminism.

My work was at first totally absorbing. Mary Sinclair also involved me in the planning for the first Working Women's Convention, held in March 1977, and I reported on it for *Broadsheet*, focusing on childcare and equal pay – one of four articles I wrote in 1977. I was now 32, my children were older, and surviving overseas and getting the editing job had boosted my confidence, not yet as any kind of "writer" or scholar, but as a kind of feminist commentator. Books and *Broadsheet* and the women I knew made up my intellectual community. It was almost like being part of a secret society, inhabiting a world of oppositional discourse, of women simultaneously studying, practising and inventing feminism in the English speaking world.

Even in the years when I did little writing, I read constantly. In the 1970s and early 1980s, like many other women, I worked through the equivalent of a degree in feminism.¹⁵¹ At that time it was still possible to read most of the new feminist books coming out. While the focus on reading could be seen as elitist, self-education through reading and discussion had traditionally been strong among both women and men excluded from higher education (including many upper- and middle-class women) in New Zealand. As the output of feminist books grew, I focused on the two linked, close-to-home sets of themes that had already emerged as a strong focus in my own reading and writing as well as my life: marriage, work, and the gendered division of labour; and women, writing, creativity, and knowledge. The kind of writing I enjoyed reading most was where the two overlapped, as in discussions of women writers which set them in the context of their (and sometimes the contemporary writer's) times, and paid attention to material realities of survival and relations of cultural production, as well as to aesthetics.

In a book discussing writing – principally autobiography – by Victorian working women, Julia Swindells highlights the way in which women's lives in the paid

¹⁵¹ An early *Broadsheet* article stressed that "Reading is the key to enlightenment. Your new understanding will help you face and try to cope with your situation and give you confidence in defending your stand to the outside world. And it's guaranteed to put you in a bloody rage as well." Sandra Coney, "Liberation Begins at Home," *Broadsheet*, no. 3 (1972): p.8.

workforce were typically fragmented, in contrast to the self-directed, advancing, coherent “careers” which were supposedly typical of male subjects:

What is most significant in women’s work is the separate sphere...and, most typically, a pattern of work characterised by the short term, by interruption, by low pay, by intervening demands from all kinds of structures of kin...and, most signally, by the absence of any kind of predictable or secure route...These kinds of work practices, with their fragmentations, discontinuities, are found in [working women’s] autobiographies in tension with that ideology or mythology of labour which bears on the complete, the coherent, the importance of work to meaningful subjectivity – which still, now, has a close bearing, particularly on the construction of masculinity...As with marriage, the possibility of work which is economically or materially stable, emotionally reflexive, a route, turns out to be part of a pure fiction.¹⁵²

Although Swindells is writing about Victorian working women, I recognise important aspects of my own “working life” in this analysis. The kind of paid work I did in the 1970s and early 1980s was privileged and comfortable in comparison with paid work for the majority of New Zealand women. It was physically undemanding, interesting, not overly stressful, manageably full-time and regular, and relatively secure. In terms of the narrow range of women’s earnings then, it was comparatively well-paid.¹⁵³ It was also socially irreproachable; at the Auckland Girls’ Grammar centenary reunion in 1977, saying that I was an education editor for Reed brought approving smiles from my former teachers.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, for me it turned out not to fit “that ideology or mythology of labour which bears on the complete, the coherent, the importance of work to meaningful subjectivity”. Contrary to Friedan’s confident predictions, it offered no “predictable or secure route” to such subjectivity.

In 1978-9, the stability and emotional reflexivity of my marriage also turned out to be “part of a pure fiction”. Although I had come to feel since 1972 that “thinking, feeling, reading, writing, being a woman and belonging all fitted together, each strengthening the other”, I did not understand the extent to which this supportive matrix was underpinned by a confident reliance on the solidity of my relationship with my

¹⁵² Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985), pp.171-3.

¹⁵³ In 1979, women’s average full-time (30 hours) weekly earnings were 71 percent of men’s. Horsfield, *Women in the Economy: A Research Report on the Economic Position of Women in New Zealand*, pp.324-5.

¹⁵⁴ This was in marked contrast to their reaction when Camille Guy told them she was a counsellor at the abortion clinic.

husband. As that relationship began to unravel in 1978, I stopped writing. In mid-1979 Chris suddenly left, just as Reed was transferring me, along with its education list, to the Auckland-based publisher Longman Paul.¹⁵⁵ The change meant moving from a large organisation to working alone in a small office. At first I spent part of the long solitary days miserably grieving for my husband and marriage and fractured family, and trying to come to terms with the profound injury to my sense of who I was and what I was worth. I had seen other women go through this kind of rejection and loss; now it was my turn to experience just how personal the political really was.

From the women's writing she studied, Swindells concluded that:

It is into these tensions, these contradictions, that the possibility of writing, of being a professional writer, enters as the prospective or preferable subjectivity in relation to work...This activity of writing enters as a set of possible subjectivities available to women as ideals in an extension from learning, the arts, the literary, being a writer. They were generally not available [to Victorian women, especially those outside the middle classes]...as anything other than ideals, available, that is, in self-construction, but not in the material (formal, institutional) production process.¹⁵⁶

The "material production process" of becoming a professional writer of any kind was no more available to me in 1979 than that of becoming a professional academic had been in 1969. Even after I had begun a new relationship with Harvey McQueen that, for the first time, provided me with a share of a secure, mid-career male middle-class salary, I never even considered making writing my main daily work. I believed more strongly than ever that earning my own regular income was essential to protect me and my children from the perils of financial dependence on either a man or the state.

Investigating complex issues of enormous significance to women, such as abortion and manslaughter, in the course of campaigns to bring about change, had developed my ability to understand and explain how profoundly gendered dominant discourses were, and how they worked against women. In 1980, in response to the high-profile trial of Dr David Minnitt for shooting his wife Leigh, I undertook a detailed examination of the case and of the highly gendered way the concept of "provocation" worked in law,

¹⁵⁵ I had no say in this transaction, and was virtually sold along with the books and the authors, as I realised when I came across a memo from Reed's directors stating: "Editor to go or stay as suits us."

¹⁵⁶ Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence*, pp.173-4.

so that men who were judged to have killed their female partners (or even former partners) because they were sufficiently “provoked” were found guilty not of murder, but of manslaughter. The reception of my work in this area also developed my confidence.¹⁵⁷

By the early 1980s, thanks to having the time and space at work and increasingly, as my sons grew and my new relationship stabilised, at home too, I started thinking and writing for myself in a new way, beyond the immediate demands of my job, or of producing articles and conference papers directly for the feminist movement. I began to think of my paid editorial work as primarily, and merely, an economic necessity, and of my own writing as my “preferable subjectivity”.

¹⁵⁷ Evaluating both the law and the way that the trial of David Minnitt was conducted, I argued that Leigh Minnitt was the one put on trial and found guilty, because she was presented as solely responsible for the breakdown of their marriage and the shooting. Minnitt himself was thereby absolved of almost all moral responsibility for his actions, as the verdict of manslaughter and the sentence of four years confirmed. See Anne Else, "The Killing of Leigh Minnitt," *Broadsheet*, no. 84 (1980), Anne Else, "Man's Laughter?," *Broadsheet*, no. 85 (1980). I also spoke on the law on provocation and proposed changes at a seminar on Women, Violence and the Law, held in Wellington on 29 November 1980, which was organised by the Committee on Women and the Women's Gallery. My exposition of the law was judged by the trial lawyer commenting on it (who assumed I was also a lawyer) to be the best he had heard.

Chapter 4: Writing women, 1978-1984

Introduction

In Part One of this chapter, I discuss how I and other writers responded to the modest upsurge in the publication of fiction and poetry by New Zealand women which began in the mid-1970s, and consider the issue of the “position of the text”, as distinct from the gender of the writer. Part Two explores the discursive context of “high maculinism” in which New Zealand women’s writing was produced, received, positioned and discouraged before the 1970s, and how this related to the gendered reception of new writing by women. In Part Three, I give an account of how and why I came to write critical essays on Antony Alpers' *Life of Katherine Mansfield*¹⁵⁸ and other aspects of New Zealand literary discourse, and discuss the feminist theory which helped me to start thinking about Alpers' own “frame of assumptions”. I conclude with a discussion of how my major essay was written, and what its significance was for me.

Part One: The shock of recognition

Since the mid-1970s, I had been reading new writing by New Zealand women.¹⁵⁹ For *Broadsheet*, I interviewed Patricia Grace and Fiona Kidman about their first novels, as well as reviewing Rachel McAlpine’s second and third poetry collections and Patricia Grace’s second short story collection. I also reviewed McAlpine for *Landfall*.¹⁶⁰

What did these women and their work mean to me? In a short statement contributed to the first “special issue” of *Landfall* on women’s writing, I wrote:

¹⁵⁸ Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁵⁹ As I discuss below, most earlier writing by New Zealand women was then out of print and/or unknown to me.

¹⁶⁰ Anne Else, "Fiona Kidman [Interview]," *Broadsheet*, no. 75 (1979), Anne Else, "Patricia Grace [Interview and Review of *the Dream Sleepers*]," *Broadsheet*, no. 85 (1980), Anne Else, "Rachel McAlpine [Review of *Fancy Dress* and *Stay at the Dinner Party*]," *Broadsheet*, no. 78 (1980), Anne Else, "Rachel McAlpine [Review of *Fancy Dress*]," *Landfall* 134 (1980). I was asked to do the *Landfall* review by the editor, Peter Smart, who knew me because I was the editor of his school textbooks.

Today I care about what women writers have to say because I am a woman. There is no more point in telling me that the sex of writers is immaterial than there is in asserting that the language they write in is immaterial...Any woman writing in English...about what it is to be female in a male-dominated world has something to say to me. But no matter how well work from other countries may show what life is really like “down among the women”, the shock of recognition is always most acute when the work is by a New Zealander.¹⁶¹

It was not the mere fact of a writer’s womanhood which mattered to me, so much as what she had to say about women, particularly “about what it is to be female in a male-dominated world”. I knew already (and some of the contributions in that issue of *Landfall* reconfirmed) that being a woman was not synonymous with being a feminist.

Yet there was a sense in which simply reading work by New Zealand women *was* important. When Sue Kedgley interviewed eight women writers in 1989, all said that reading New Zealand women’s work had been vitally important to them. For example, Sue McCauley recalled that when she discovered *The Godwits Fly* in the late 1980s, she was angry:

If I had read it when I was fifteen or sixteen it would have made a world of difference to me, because the New Zealand writers I had come across by then (mostly ones I discovered myself, because we weren’t taught New Zealand writers at school) were Ngaio Marsh and Katherine Mansfield, and I didn’t particularly like either of them. I was resentful when I came across Jane Mander in my twenties that I hadn’t discovered her before.¹⁶²

Marsh and Mansfield had still been significant in terms of her becoming a writer: “I read their books avidly because they were written by women, and so they made me realise it’s possible to be a writer; someone has done it!” In the 1970s, she, like me, “read women’s novels obsessively...It was almost like trying to make up for a hunger or a vitamin deficiency.”¹⁶³

In 1979 I too believed that New Zealand women had to be “immensely grateful” for women’s writing on the “underground ‘culture’” of women, who were “seen and treated by men as a kind of peculiar minority”, but I qualified this by saying:

¹⁶¹ Anne Else, “[Untitled],” *Landfall* 130 (1979): p.101. This contribution, too, was at Peter Smart’s invitation.

¹⁶² Kedgley, *Our Own Country: Leading New Zealand Women Writers Talk About Their Writing and Their Lives*, pp.41-2.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.42.

In the end, despite the fact that we are not men, neither are we a minority of any kind; and anyone, male or female, who writes as if we were, is thereby limited both in conception and audience. [Marilyn] French seems to be such a writer; [Margaret] Sutherland does not. Like Mansfield or Frame...her work deals in depth with New Zealand women, but also with children and men – with people who live here. In this sense it foreshadows a possible future beyond feminism, when the sex of a writer may, finally, no longer matter. But that future is still a very long way off.¹⁶⁴

That same year, Fiona Kidman replied to my question about whether she felt she was regarded simply as a writer, or rather as a “woman writer”, by saying:

I had thought that we’d passed the stage of “women writers” – until I went to the PEN Writers’ Conference. It was wholly a male academic exercise. Women were virtually ignored, treated as if they had had no influence at all on New Zealand writing over the past ten years, except maybe for Janet Frame – male writers were the norm. Women poets have changed the whole *shape* of New Zealand poetry, but only three were even mentioned, and one only to be disparaged. I’m torn apart over this – I want to do without the “woman writer” label, but if it’s still *necessary* in order to get recognition, we’ll just have to use it.¹⁶⁵

My response to contemporary New Zealand women’s writing cannot be explained solely as welcoming the reflection of my own or other women’s gendered experience. Nor do I think, reading back, that I assumed a writer’s being a woman had any essential meaning in relation to what was written, rather than in relation to her particular time and place, although the shorthand language of “women” and “men” I used could sometimes be read that way. I knew, as did the writers themselves, that there is no straightforward correspondence between writers’ bodies and their texts, in terms of gender or any other category. I wrote that sentence for this chapter before I found this useful elaborating statement by Elizabeth Gross:

[T]here is no (direct) correspondence between feminine or feminist texts and female authors, or between phallogentric texts and male authors. The sexual “position of the text” can only be discerned contextually and in terms of the position which the speaking subject (the implicit or explicit “I” of the text) speaks from; the kind of subject (implicitly) presumed as the subject *spoken to* (or audience); and the kind of subject *spoken about* (or object)....the text’s

¹⁶⁴ Else, “[Untitled],” p.102., referring to Marilyn French, *The Women's Room* (London: Deutsch, 1978), Margaret Sutherland, *The Love Contract* (Auckland: William Heinemann, 1976).

¹⁶⁵ Else, “Fiona Kidman [Interview],” p.35.

position also depends on the *kind of relations* asserted between these different subjects ...¹⁶⁶

Like Gross, I believed feminist criticism involved analysing the sexual or rather the gender “position of the text”, as she defines it, and that this could not simply be “read off” from the gender of the author (although I would not have put it in those terms at the time).

What mattered to me most in the early work of writers such as Grace, Kidman, and McAlpine, I think, was precisely that the “I”s in their texts are predominantly contemporary New Zealand women seeking (more or less tentatively) to make sense of their lives in relation to other women and men. In other words, they represent “women” as speaking subjects. But these fictions and poems also represent speaking subjects of a particular kind. They work on the basis of a concept of “self” which is the opposite of “man alone”.¹⁶⁷ As Patricia Grace put it in 1989, “Relationships are always the starting point.”¹⁶⁸ This is similar to the concept of self outlined by New Zealand critic Kim Worthington in her book *Self as Narrative*, where:

Selves are already always *in* community, and cannot simply choose or contract to enter the social context in which they have meaningful being...Personhood is always embedded in the social (and, significantly, linguistic) context in which one has meaningful being; selves are constituted in and by a society and that society’s history.¹⁶⁹

I think that for me and for many other women readers, that was why the work of these contemporary women writers provided the kind of crucially necessary “aesthetic performance” discussed by Maria Pia Lara.¹⁷⁰ They made “symbolic interventions” with the power to “reconceptualise the male particularity” – and, in the case of Grace and others, the Pakeha particularity too – of the public sphere; so that their fictions

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Gross, “What Is Feminist Theory?,” in *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge*, ed. Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p.366.

¹⁶⁷ This phrase became shorthand for the archetypal “New Zealand” (male, Pakeha) character. It came from the title of the novel by John Mulgan, which was celebrated by high masculinism as the most significant novel written in the prewar period. Mulgan, *Man Alone*.

¹⁶⁸ Kedgley, *Our Own Country: Leading New Zealand Women Writers Talk About Their Writing and Their Lives*, p.57.

¹⁶⁹ Worthington, *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Continuity in Contemporary Fiction*, p.55.

¹⁷⁰ Maria Pia Lara, *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

afforded New Zealand women, including me, the opportunity to see ourselves for the first time as publicly speaking subjects, and therefore as “the very subjects of collective action”.¹⁷¹

Part Two: The withering effect

To understand the political significance of these works at the time, it is important to understand how what Kai Jensen calls “high masculinism” had shaped the discourse of “New Zealand literature” from the 1930s on.¹⁷² The writing of the men concerned, he says, was “permeated with an anxiety about how that activity of writing stands up to popular definitions of masculinity”:

At the centre of the maze of masculine literary concerns stands the erect male body, a metaphorical yardstick by which to distinguish tough, vigorous masculine writing from weak, slack, sentimental feminine writing. The whole complex is animated by a desire to depict writing as a manly activity, to make room for it among larger popular definitions of masculinity.¹⁷³

This was not a uniquely New Zealand phenomenon. In a range of English-speaking cultures, the onset of modernism was marked by similarly gendered concerns and rhetorical strategies, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explained in 1988:

...as much as the industrial revolution and the fall of God, the rise of the female imagination was a central problem for the twentieth-century male imagination...¹⁷⁴

...a number of twentieth-century men of letters, in defending themselves against the emergent frailties of literature’s patrilineage, have surrounded literary women with a wall of resistance and rage. Countless texts build that wall and affirm its strength...¹⁷⁵

In the United States, for example, poet Robert Frost described his attempts to make the lyric safe for masculine use in metaphors which strongly recall New Zealand high masculinism:

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.168 ff.

¹⁷² Kai Jensen, *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996).

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.221.

¹⁷⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The War of the Words* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p.156.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.223.

The mark of [his own] manliness lay (this is a frequent boast in his letters) in the success he had in breaking through the genteel lyric, as if through a cultural chastity belt, a vernacular desert from which...genteel cultural critics had outlawed the conversational voice... Poetry...must become “hard” and “dry”. It must cease being “the great passive vulva” [Pound’s description of the “London literary scene” at the turn of the century]. The act of summoning voices from the vernacular would be the sign of masculinity in poetry, a invitation to poetic reading that real (economically earnest) men might find seductive because redolent with the odors of a world they knew...¹⁷⁶

In New Zealand, too, the literature characterised by this “new manly” writing, so concerned with its ability to attract “real men”, was strongly linked with an equally “manly” and exclusive concept of nationalism.

Analysing similar attacks by New Zealand men writers on women writers and their work, Jensen describes them as:

...not primarily about the women writers they purport to describe. These women are getting burnt by the hot exhaust of a phallic rocket pointed elsewhere. These are statements of the writers’ self-definition as masculine...¹⁷⁷

Others have made similar claims about similar discourses elsewhere. I do not find such interpretations reassuring. They imply that women writers and their work mattered so little to the literary exponents of high masculinity that they were merely strategic ciphers in the real contest, which was exclusively among men. Beyond its usefulness as a metaphor in the discursive manoeuvres among male writers, the silencing and burying of women’s words therefore had no significance. For them, for their potential readers, and for New Zealand literature in general, nothing of any importance had been lost: it made no difference whether women wrote or not.

I do not accept that high masculinity was as self-referential as Jensen makes out. The “withering effect”¹⁷⁸ which he notes that the “phallic rocket” exhaust had on women’s writing was not the primary objective of the men in charge of the firing site; but nor was it an accidental side-effect, mere collateral damage, mattering so little that even

¹⁷⁶ Frank Lentricchia, “The Resentments of Robert Frost,” in *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender*, ed. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p.275 ff.

¹⁷⁷ Jensen, *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature*, p.220.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.101.

the number of casualties went unrecorded. It was an indispensable component of the modernist masculine literary rescue strategy, wherever it occurred. Men certainly sought to discredit other men's writing by labelling it "feminine"; but the strategy also required almost all writing by women to be characterised and dismissed by this clearly derogatory label, with only the occasional surprising exception to prove the rule. In a fiercely gendered culture, only by repeatedly insisting that women were almost incapable of becoming "real" writers at all, let alone of writing well enough to be included in the steadily rising edifice of the New Zealand canon, could literature be made safe for "real men" to write, read, define, debate, and eventually teach.

This enterprise made literature so unsafe for women that even when they did write and manage to publish what they intended to be "serious" work, they were mainly consigned to oblivion, to such an extent that looking back from the 1980s, it seemed that women had virtually abandoned the field. Jensen acknowledges this when he says, "for four decades masculinism governed a literary culture in which women simply did not flourish".¹⁷⁹ The extraordinary implications of what he is saying here can be understood only by considering what its impact would be if the gendered terms in his sentence were reversed.

Jensen sees the years 1948-1966 as merely the "aftermath" of high masculinism, its "period of decline".¹⁸⁰ This ignores the way in which, during that period and beyond (covering the years of my formal education), New Zealand academics and critics were entrenching the central place of high masculinist work in the New Zealand literary canon, and perpetuating its shibboleths, including the inferiority and irrelevance of almost all writing by New Zealand women.¹⁸¹ My own university courses in New Zealand literature (an emerging field within "English literature" in the early 1960s, although foreshadowed at school) were shaped by this "aftermath".

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.99.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.84.

¹⁸¹ Lentricchia suggests that the "issue of manliness is the historical thread linking [Robert] Frost and [Robert Penn] Warren's New Criticism". Lentricchia, "The Resentments of Robert Frost," p.179.

As Joanna Russ wrote in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, “undoubtedly one response to *Women can't write* is not to”.¹⁸² Jensen's own graphing of literary publication by decade shows plainly that although the “withering effect” of masculinism was at its worst in the 1940s, when only two new literary works by women were published in New Zealand, it continued right through the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s¹⁸³ – in fact, until the advent of International Women's Year in 1975 induced some publishers to take the risk of putting “serious” writing by women into print. While the numbers of publications by women rose steadily each decade after that, as a proportion of all literary publications they stayed below 25 percent over the 1970s as a whole, and rose only a little higher during the 1980s, because the numbers of such publications by men were rising much more quickly. The specific history of high masculinism in New Zealand was then generally unexplored; all that showed up was long years of an apparent absence of New Zealand literature written by women.¹⁸⁴

This absence partly accounts for the significance which feminist commentators, in particular, accorded to the modest upsurge of new books by women appearing from the mid-1970s on. It also partly accounts for the extraordinary virulence of some masculinist critical reactions, which could be even more explicitly uncomprehending, patronising and dismissive in the 1970s and 1980s than they had been earlier. These reactions taught me a great deal about gender, writing and criticism. Not only did they undermine any lingering belief in “objective”, “universal” artistic standards; they also reinforced my timidity about speaking my mind too clearly where literary men could hear me. Specifically, they warned me off trying to write again for *Landfall*. I knew a set-up when I saw one.

¹⁸² Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, p.97.

¹⁸³ Jensen, *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature*, pp.100-1. A 1968 survey of New Zealand fiction since 1945 gave three of the 15 chapters on individual authors to women: Ruth France and Sylvia Ashton-Warner, both born in 1913, and Janet Frame, born in 1924. A much younger Marilyn Duckworth got told off for “paddl[ing] in the ocean of sex”. H. Winston Rhodes, *New Zealand Fiction since 1945* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1968), p.51. As for poetry, the one woman in Charles Doyle, ed., *Recent Poetry in New Zealand* (Auckland: Collins, 1965), was Fleur Adcock; in Arthur Baysting, ed., *The Young New Zealand Poets* (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), it was Jan Kemp.

¹⁸⁴ For a comprehensive account of fiction by New Zealand women to 1987, see Heather Roberts, *Where Did She Come From? New Zealand Women Novelists 1862-1987* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin in association with Port Nicholson Press, 1989).

Peter Smart's editorial for *Landfall*'s first "special issue" on women's writing began,

The slaves of ancient Greece and Rome were not always grateful to be offered their freedom...much of the writing which is recording individual response to such changes as have already occurred [through the women's liberation movement] shows a pervading sense of loss.¹⁸⁵

He went on to express concern (from the position of the purportedly impartial, disembodied "One") about the dire effects of women's bodies appearing explicitly in women's writing, as they had not done in the work of Jane Austen and George Eliot:

Although some writers are still exploring the same experience as provided Jane Austen and George Eliot with material for high art, many women are deliberately seeking new subjects. Readers are confronted with women who menstruate, masturbate, have sexual fantasies, bash their babies, love other women, and laugh at the clumsy lovers who can't understand themselves, let alone the women they presume to love. One is not sure whether the current fashion for realism is an attempt at absolute honesty, capable of revealing truth, or a shallow exhibitionism, capable of distracting both writer and reader from the primary concerns of art.¹⁸⁶

Kidman's *A Breed of Women* was the first novel to deal overtly with New Zealand women's sexual experience.¹⁸⁷ An academic reviewing it in *Landfall* in 1980 criticised the scene where the central character, Harriet, first experiences heterosexual intercourse for being "all uncertain in its tone"¹⁸⁸ – an uncertainty which can of course be read as precisely and skilfully constructing Harriet's own state of mind. He believed the problem lay in the author's closeness to the character: there was "too little sense of ironic authorial detachment from Harriet herself to make this (or half a hundred episodes like it) either fully pathetic or fully tragi-comic".¹⁸⁹ He went on to pinpoint the real source of his annoyance – feminism:

In this novel we are at least spared the edge of frenzy that keeps rasping in the polemic of a novel such as *The Women's Room*; but the bland alternative of *A Breed of Women* isn't much preferable. Perhaps what is really irritating about *A Breed of Women* is that it pretends to be a novel in the vogue of modern feminist writing, but it reads like a thinking woman's Mills and Boon.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Peter Smart, "Liberation and Literature," *Landfall* 130 (1979): p.99.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.100.

¹⁸⁷ Fiona Kidman, *A Breed of Women* (London: Harper & Row, 1979).

¹⁸⁸ W.S. Broughton, "Review of Fiona Kidman: *A Breed of Women*," *Landfall* 136 (1980): p.366.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p.367.

Into the 1980s, contemporary women writers continued to receive the kind of critical response which took it for granted that not only was their gender the most salient issue to address, but it had a predetermined and harmful significance. In masculinist criticism, their work was determined to be “feminine” and/or “feminist”, and therefore not to count, unless it could be found to have redeeming “masculine” and/or “universal” qualities. Those few women whose work passed muster were placed in the awkward and anomalous position of being, at best, male impersonators. As such, they could have no more lasting impact on the mainstream literary tradition than their weak or strident sisters.

By the mid-1980s a definite critical shift was under way. Although it had much more to do with post-modernism than with feminism, it did make literature and literary criticism safer for writing by women, and even for some expressions of feminism.

Part Three: A larger understanding

This was the background against which I read *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, by Antony Alpers, in January 1984.¹⁹¹ I had been reading Mansfield since I chose her collected stories as a school prize in 1961, at the end of my lower sixth form year, but I had never written on her work.¹⁹² Alpers’ book was the first full-length biography of any woman writer that I had encountered. It had been widely hailed as the definitive biography of the person who was then still recognised as New Zealand’s “most famous writer”,¹⁹³ so I was delighted to get it.

But as I read, the feeling grew that something was wrong with it. I talked about this to Harvey, who had given me the book, and he encouraged me to begin trying to work out what it was. When I talked to Jock Phillips, the first Director of the Stout Research

¹⁹¹ Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*. Alpers’ book appeared in 1980. My essay, and this chapter, refer to the 1982 paperback edition.

¹⁹² Katherine Mansfield, *Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Constable, 1945). This edition (I had the 1959 reprint) consisted of the texts of all the collections of her stories previously published, with the addition of some “Introductory Notes” by her husband, John Middleton Murry.

¹⁹³ Alpers’ book won the 1981 annual New Zealand award for non-fiction.

Centre,¹⁹⁴ he asked me to present a short paper at “Biography in New Zealand”, the Centre’s inaugural conference.¹⁹⁵ In 1985 this was published in a book based on the conference papers.¹⁹⁶ A substantially different, longer essay was published in the first issue of the *Women’s Studies Journal* in August 1984.¹⁹⁷ With the support and encouragement of Phillida Bunkle, Victoria’s first director of Women’s Studies, I wrote a revised and expanded version for publication in *Women’s Studies International Forum* in 1985.¹⁹⁸

This essay was the first piece of “oppositional imagining”¹⁹⁹ that I wrote as a feminist critic for an acknowledged academic audience. Apart from my brief invited contributions to *Landfall*, I had never even thought of sending my own critical commentary to any journal, here or overseas. The Stout Centre provided exactly the sort of inter-disciplinary focus for “New Zealand studies” needed by those who, like me, wanted to do such work, but were outside the academy, and to some extent alienated from it. The advent of the *Women’s Studies Journal* provided, for the first time, a local opportunity for publishing a kind of feminist writing different from what was appropriate for *Broadsheet* or the mass media in general.

Joan Cocks notes that “a large array of feminist thinkers...begin their analyses upon the ground of dominant cultural texts” or “with the marginal texts of women who created them against the grain”.²⁰⁰ The Mansfield biography encompassed both kinds of texts. I began reading it with no preconceptions about whether or how the gender of its author would influence what was written. This was partly because it was classed not as a creative work of fiction, but as scholarship. The very fact that Alpers had written it

¹⁹⁴ The Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies was established at Victoria University of Wellington in 1984 “to encourage scholarly inquiry into New Zealand society, history and culture, and to provide a focus for the collegial atmosphere and exchange of ideas which enrich the quality of research” (<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/stout-centre/about/welcome.aspx>).

¹⁹⁵ This conference was held at Victoria University of Wellington on 28-29 July, 1984.

¹⁹⁶ Anne Else, “Katherine Mansfield: A Re-Examination,” in *Biography in New Zealand*, ed. Jock Phillips (Wellington: Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1985), pp.75-9.

¹⁹⁷ Anne Else, “Limitation, Selection and Assumption in Antony Alpers’ *Life of Katherine Mansfield*,” *Women’s Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (1984).

¹⁹⁸ Anne Else, “From Little Monkey to Neurotic Invalid: Limitation, Selection and Assumption in Antony Alpers’ *Life of Katherine Mansfield*,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 8, no. 5 (1985). It is this final version of the essay that I quote from in this chapter.

¹⁹⁹ As the first chapter explains, this phrase is derived from Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.98.

was impressive. As I acknowledged in my essay, in the 1940s and early 1950s, Alpers (then a journalist) had been the only New Zealand writer to see Mansfield as important enough to warrant a full-length biography, based on four years of research. However, as he noted in his preface to the new book, when his first biography was published in 1953,²⁰¹ many crucial documentary sources, including Mansfield's letters and notebooks, were only partially available; even more importantly, many of those close to Mansfield, including her husband John Middleton Murry, were still alive.

In the 1970s, "The task [was] taken up again under totally different conditions".²⁰² By then Alpers was an academic in the English department at Queen's University, Ontario, where he had obtained a lectureship in 1966, on the strength of his early work on Mansfield. Unlike the proponents of high masculinism discussed by Jensen, Alpers does not appear to have had any deliberate intention of undermining Mansfield's reputation as a person, a woman, or a writer; rather he intended to write a new account of her life which would be as accurate, comprehensive and close to "the truth" as he could make it.

Cocks suggests that theory must first obtain "a larger understanding of history from outside the covers of any fictional text".²⁰³ I had begun to obtain this "larger understanding" when I first encountered feminist ideas in the receptive context of living as a wife, mother and student in 1960s New Zealand. If it had not been for second wave feminism, I do not think I would have noticed anything wrong with Alpers' *Life*. Kate Millett had been the first person in my experience to discuss how the "politically expedient character of patriarchal convictions about women" permeated high culture itself.²⁰⁴ One of my MA papers had been devoted to D.H. Lawrence, and it was Millett's analysis of the "sexual politics" of his work, as well as of violently misogynist work by Henry Miller and Norman Mailer (which I knew was revered by men whose literary judgement I respected) that made the greatest impact on me. I was appalled by the mystical masculinism we had been taught to revere, as well as my own

²⁰¹ Antony Alpers, *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1953).

²⁰² Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, p.xii.

²⁰³ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.102.

²⁰⁴ Millett, *Sexual Politics*, p.64. As Chapter 3 notes, I first read *Sexual Politics* in 1972. Based on Millett's doctoral dissertation, it sold 80,000 copies within six months of publication.

earlier failure to recognise its implications for the full humanity of women – and in particular, ironically, of educated women.

Reading Millett, I was also suddenly enlightened about the nature of the other kind of “problem with no name” which had troubled me in connection with my university education, and which Friedan and Greer had not openly addressed. Contrary to what I had learnt at school, and had implicitly continued to believe, Millett argued that a great literary text was not “timeless and self-sufficient...an aesthetic object to be contemplated”,²⁰⁵ and its greatness was not transparently self-evident. Literature, learning and knowledge in general were as thoroughly imbued with “sexual politics” as every other aspect of human culture.

Seventeen books dealing generally with feminist perspectives on women and literature were published between 1970 and 1977.²⁰⁶ Apart from Millett, by 1984 the only one I had read was Louise Bernikow’s collection of poetry by women, *The World Split Open*, which included a striking introduction.²⁰⁷ In 1979, Germaine Greer’s *The Obstacle Race* appeared, getting to grips with a charge repeatedly thrown back at feminist arguments about women’s capacities: the apparent absence of any “great women artists”.²⁰⁸ Then came Dale Spender’s accounts of the substantial body of work by earlier “women of ideas” – that is, feminist theorists – and how it had been derided, discredited and suppressed.²⁰⁹ These books gave me a rudimentary framework within which to start thinking about exactly what was wrong with Alpers’ *Life*. They foregrounded how significant “reputation” had been for the small group of women who had managed to become and remain committed artists and theorists, and how, during and after their lives, judgements of their work by those with the power to determine its

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Data from Carol Fairbanks, *Women in Literature: Criticism in the Seventies* (Methuen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1976), Carol Fairbanks, *More Women in Literature: Criticism of the Seventies* (Methuen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1979). These invaluable bibliographies list a wide range of Anglo-American criticism, interviews and reviews dealing with women as writers and as characters, as well as with themes relating generally to women and feminism.

²⁰⁷ Louise Bernikow, ed., *The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America, 1552-1950* (New York: Random House, 1974).

²⁰⁸ Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979). Harvey gave me this in 1981.

²⁰⁹ Spender, *Women of Ideas (and What Men Have Done to Them)*, Dale Spender, ed., *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions* (London: The Women's Press, 1983).

reputation – almost all of whom had until recently been men – were inseparably confounded with judgements of their gender, their behaviour (particularly towards men), and their femininity.

Like all biographies and autobiographies, Alpers' *Life* selects from and creates its own interpretation of the very extensive historical traces of Mansfield's life/work. As I read through and, as widely as possible, around his book, I came to believe that in this case it does so within a particular set of firmly gendered assumptions, without ever explicitly acknowledging them. The process in which Alpers was engaged, both as biographer and as editor, has been called "engendering".²¹⁰ Taken as a whole, the words used by the implicit "I" in Alpers' text, as well as the selections made, seem to refer back to a strikingly androcentric, subordinating frame of assumptions about how "women" ought to behave (and write), and especially how they ought to behave towards (and write about) "men". In general, connections with men and men's ideas and writing, as well as men's perspectives, are reflected as serious; but connections with women, women's ideas and writing, and women's perspectives are not. The main male figures are reflected in a consistently enlarging, sympathetic, often flattering light; the main female figures are by contrast diminished, discredited and often ridiculed.

The result, I concluded, is that the figure of Mansfield as a committed writer persistently producing her work both in response to and against the shifting context of her life and times, often under difficult material and bodily circumstances, is for the most part curiously absent. She appears as a woman situated primarily in relation to men, only secondarily in relation to women, and firmly distanced from any taint of feminism. On the one hand, Alpers "relies disturbingly often on shallow theories about Mansfield's 'masculine/feminine' character, illness, or female biology";²¹¹ on the other, he:

²¹⁰ Caws discusses this process in relation to the editing of Mansfield and other women writers and artists, who also died relatively young – Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Charlotte Brontë, Alice James, Dora Carrington. See Mary Ann Caws, "The Conception of Engendering: The Erotics of Editing," in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

²¹¹ Else, "From Little Monkey to Neurotic Invalid: Limitation, Selection and Assumption in Antony Alpers' *Life of Katherine Mansfield*."

has not seen fit to take seriously into account the important implications of Mansfield's being a woman writer trying to live and work in what was so obviously a patriarchal world. The political aspects of her sex are ignored virtually throughout the book. The biological aspects are conveniently made use of not so much to explain, as to explain away, her anger and distress...²¹²

To show another example of the shaping power of interpretative frameworks, I want to compare Alpers' account of Mansfield's friend Edith Kathleen Bendall with Claire Tomalin's in her 1987 biography²¹³ (which was not available to me when I wrote my essays). As Tomalin explains in her Foreword, she had in fact started work on a biography of Mansfield in the 1970s, but stopped when two others, that by Alpers and another by Jeffrey Meyers, appeared.

After some years, however, I began to think that there might be something else to say about Katherine Mansfield after all, some fresh material to be considered, a different perspective from which to view her...Both seemed to me to have underestimated the importance of certain aspects of her life.²¹⁴

Both authors had access to Edith Bendall herself. Alpers talked to her (he acknowledges her as Mrs G.G.S. Robison) for his first biography; Bruce Mason recorded an interview with her for Tomalin in 1977; and Tomalin herself had "many talks" with Edith's only daughter.²¹⁵

Alpers constructs "Edie" archly, as feminine, frivolous and negligible, but at the same time as less "unfeminine" than Mansfield:

Edie Bendall, a pretty girl with a sweet and simple nature and none of Kathleen's egotisms, had lately returned from an art school in Sydney, where she had learned how to be a sort of Colonial Kate Greenaway.²¹⁶

By contrast, Tomalin constructs her as a committed professional artist who had worked hard to achieve independence:

Edith Kathleen Bendall was strikingly beautiful, twenty-seven years old (nine years older than Katherine), and had shown remarkable talent and initiative in her life...The family were not well off, and Edith, who loved drawing, had paid her own way through art school by taking a job in the library. In 1904 she had earned enough from an exhibition of her work to pay her fare to Sydney, where

²¹² Ibid., p.501.

²¹³ Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life* (London: Viking, 1987).

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.1.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.2.

²¹⁶ Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, p.47.

she continued to study and was introduced to various magazine publishers; she was immediately given commissions, for her highly stylized drawings of children in particular. Frances Hodgkins, who became New Zealand's most famous painter, gave her some lessons and, although she had to return to Wellington when her mother became ill, she was now a fully fledged professional artist, selling her drawings regularly in Australia and New Zealand.²¹⁷

Where Alpers trivialises and dismisses her work ("a sort of Colonial Kate Greenaway"), Tomalin sees it as an important factor in Mansfield's attraction to her. She quotes Bendall as saying, "I was a worker and that's why she [Mansfield] liked me. I was working all day in my studio and at 5 o'clock I went for a walk and she used to come with me."²¹⁸ Tomalin also notes that after her marriage, Bendall "continued to paint into her old age, selling and exhibiting her work successfully".²¹⁹

Although both Tomalin and Alpers quote significant passages from Mansfield's notebooks describing her "affair" with Bendall, which lasted roughly three months, Alpers repeatedly slides rapidly away from this awkward topic. Tomalin explores its significance, raises an interesting possible connection with the work of D.H. Lawrence, and concludes: "Katherine had learned that there was something in her nature that would not quite fit in with the accepted pattern of behaviour required by society; at the same time, she never wanted to reject that pattern entirely."²²⁰

In 1985, Sophie Tomlinson wrote about gender politics and Mansfield in another "special issue" of *Landfall* on women and writing.²²¹ Citing my essay, she agrees with my conclusion that Alpers uses what she calls a kind of "essentialist biologism" to "suspend moral judgment which would [otherwise] work to indict Mansfield".²²² She notes that he does the same when he writes of Virginia Woolf, quoting: "No doubt we must look on this jealousy [which Woolf said she felt of Mansfield's writing] as part of her illness, and not regard it in a moral light." Focusing on what she calls Alpers' "reductive biographical reading" of Mansfield's fiction in his "Definitive Edition" of

²¹⁷ Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, p.35.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.38.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.37.

²²¹ Sophie Tomlinson, "Mans-Field in Bookform," *Landfall* 156 (1985).

²²² *Ibid.*, p.475.

Mansfield's stories, which appeared hard on the heels of his *Life* in 1983, Tomlinson concludes:

in operation everywhere in this edition, in guise of objective, defensible criteria, is Alpers' own masculist morality, working assiduously to devalue and downgrade those areas of Mansfield's oeuvre that come in for his condemnation.²²³

In trying to work out what was wrong with Alpers' biography, I came to a similar conclusion about his "masculist morality", and how it works in dealing both with Mansfield's life and with her work. Rereading Alpers recently, I noticed a number of passages where he does openly "indict" her on what seem to be moral grounds, often in the course of agreeing with a critical assessment by a man who knew her. For example, quoting at length from the "criticism of her character and attitudes" which Frederick Goodyear sent her in April 1916, urging her (according to Alpers) to "an active life of some description", Alpers concludes (sounding exactly like a disapproving headmaster):

No one who knew her – neither Lawrence, who saw much more of her, nor Orage, nor Murry of course – ever described more acutely *the defects of Katherine's attitudes to life and nature and art* [my italics] than Goodyear in this letter. "Your overtwanged inelastic literary nerve" – in four words, there she is.²²⁴

His statement that Goodyear's criticism "sprang from a wish to put her right, because he was fond of her" seems to me to locate his own position exactly.²²⁵

Like other feminist critics I encountered later, notably Mary Ellmann,²²⁶ I believed that the only way I could speak effectively about such issues to a non-feminist audience was to stage an irreproachably cool, restrained, well-groomed public performance, in deliberate contrast to Alpers' own arch innuendo. My conference paper displays this more clearly than my published essays, because I was additionally constrained by time, by presenting to a live audience, and by the fact that Alpers himself was to attend the conference (although he had left before I gave my paper).

²²³ Ibid., p.479.

²²⁴ Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, p.198.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Mary Ellmann, *Thinking About Women* (London: Virago, 1979). Originally published in 1968, Ellmann's book did not become widely known until the second wave of feminism brought renewed attention to and republication of such titles.

My thoroughly self-conscious use of plain language and facticity was a kind of camouflage. It was designed to produce what I then believed was the necessary effect of careful scholarship, rational analysis and measured response. I do not mean to suggest here that the quality of scholarship and thinking underpinning my essay was flawed or faked. I see this work, carried out entirely in my own time and without any institutional support, as a good example of the solid research and analysis undertaken entirely “for love” by many second wave feminists in many different fields. But I was deliberately using the acceptable language of “disinterested” scholarship in a context where, as other New Zealand critical responses and Alpers’ book itself showed, women’s expressed anger at any aspect of their situation was likely to be quickly reinterpreted as a kind of irrational, illegitimate and therefore dismissable “frenzy”.

Emotion was in fact central to my work. Introducing my essay, I explicitly discussed the issue of “empathy” in the writing of biography. I did not suggest that it depended on biographer and subject sharing particular experiences, or even salient characteristics such as gender. Tomlinson thought that what I meant by empathy was “a willingness on the part of the biographer to consider the precise and particular historical and political determinants acting upon his subject”.²²⁷ But this rather arid intellectual definition implies a traditional interpretation of both objectivity and detachment, and fails to catch the tangle of emotions at work in all such undertakings. These emotions are, I believe, connected with the complexities of perception and identification which inevitably underpin the “position of the (critical) text”. Tomalin hints tentatively at this in her Foreword:

As I worked on Katherine Mansfield’s story, I often thought of my mother-in-law, herself a wild colonial girl from Canada who brushed the fringes of Bloomsbury; and of my mother, who came to London from Liverpool in 1917 with a music scholarship...they were both gallant and gifted outsiders, and through what they told me of their adventures, ambitions and terrors I felt I approached Katherine Mansfield’s experience at certain points.²²⁸

My own reaction to Alpers’ *Life* encompassed bafflement, dismay, incredulity, and anger. My carefully controlled sentences indicate the effort that went into concealing

²²⁷ Tomlinson, “Mans-Field in Bookform,” p.473.

²²⁸ Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, p.2.

these emotions. In my case they centred, I think, not simply around Alpers' "masculist morality", but around what I saw as his persistent evasion of the kind of seriousness Tomalin's Foreword (and indeed her whole text) conveys.

Like Tomalin, I believed that "any woman who fights her way through life on two fronts" was likely to "find some of [Mansfield's] actions and attitudes less baffling than even the most understanding of men".²²⁹ But I did not believe that as a woman, I automatically had access to and could convey the truth about her where Alpers had failed. I did not think it was possible for anyone to know or explain who or what Mansfield had "really" been, or what the "truth" about her life/work was. Doing my own research, I became angry not because the "real Mansfield" had been traduced and needed to be defended, but because the "Katherine Mansfield" produced by this acclaimed, substantial, powerfully positioned text was, in the end, reduced to an all-too-familiar gendered caricature within a predetermined, subordinating script. What seemed to be personal had turned out, once again, to be profoundly political.

When it came to Murry, however, and in particular the detailed evidence about money in his own letters to Mansfield (which had not been available to Alpers),²³⁰ the temptation to set up my own emotional counter-truth, focusing on Murry's behaviour and how Mansfield "must have felt" about it, was sometimes too strong to resist. This shows through where the text slips into speaking directly *for* Mansfield, rather than *about* her: "He was obviously trying hard to get it right – and thanks to her advance, she would manage."²³¹ Mansfield herself pinpointed the problem with what I was doing here when she wrote to Murry about his critical treatment of Hardy:

You seem to be hinting at a special understanding between yourself and the author. That's not fair: it puts me off. You (in the name of your age, true, but not quite, not wholly) intrude your age, your experience of suffering ... This destroys the balance.²³²

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Cherry A. Hankin, ed., *The Letters of John Middleton Murry to Katherine Mansfield* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

²³¹ Else, "From Little Monkey to Neurotic Invalid: Limitation, Selection and Assumption in Antony Alpers' *Life of Katherine Mansfield*," p.504.

²³² This quotation comes from a letter from Mansfield to John Middleton Murry, written in December 1920, about his new book *Aspects of Literature*. Clare Hanson, ed., *The Critical Writings of Katherine Mansfield* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p.47.

Alpers' *Life* hints repeatedly at a "special understanding" of Mansfield precisely because he does *not* share her "experience"; but it also implies a special understanding between Alpers and the men around her, especially Murry. I think now that these hints of "special understanding" are one indication that complex emotions were strongly at work in Alpers' text. But the most obvious indication of emotion at work is the strange and disconcerting see-sawing of tone. This is most clearly evident in the many sudden and jarring retreats into undercutting coyness or archness. They tend to cluster around some awkward aspects of Mansfield's life/work, such as bisexuality, venereal disease, and feminism. By 1980, such aspects had become much more insistently evident, and open to discussion, than they had been in 1953. Within the frame at work in the *Life*, they cannot be ignored; on the contrary, they loom alarmingly large, threatening the frame itself. Safely distancing them in footnotes,²³³ flippancy, and mysterious female biology means that they need not be taken seriously, and the frame can remain intact. But the conflicting emotions clustering at such points show through in the sudden shifts of tone.

In his own paper for the 1984 biography conference, Alpers says that he embarked on the second *Life* not out of any sense of commitment, but only because, when his boss suggested it:

I saw at once [that it] could mean a sabbatical year in New Zealand, and a year or more at home with a homesick wife and two small children. For that reason, *and no other* [original italics], I agreed. We had no idea then how much new material would become available, and besides, it was no desire of mine to become known as "the Mansfield man".²³⁴

Yet the text indicates that at the very least, and perhaps in spite of himself, Mansfield mattered a great deal to the writer. Perhaps that is why his *Life* could not afford to take her seriously enough.

When I read Alpers' book, I felt that I could not afford *not* to take Katherine Mansfield seriously. Yet (like Alpers himself in 1953), I was not an academic, and had no prospect of becoming one; I had made no special study of Mansfield; and I did not

²³³ For example, see the footnotes about gonorrhea on pages 122 and 150 in Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*.

²³⁴ Antony Alpers, "Literary Biography (in New Zealand)," in *Biography in New Zealand*, ed. Jock Phillips (Wellington: Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1985), p.22.

write fiction. Why did setting down and making public what I thought about this book matter so much to me?

This work, the first draft of which I completed on 1 April 1984, was my first venture into what I was starting to think of as “my own writing”, undertaken primarily because I wanted to set down what I thought in my own words, and because doing this seemed to be an important and necessary part of who I was. Writing for myself was coming to mean acting as myself, becoming my own subject. Roland Barthes has analysed the modern shift in the verb “to write”: as it becomes intransitive, requiring no object, “the subject [the I who writes] is constituted as immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it...”²³⁵ I had grown up in a context where “to write” in this sense had scarcely existed as possible; now I was beginning to understand what it might mean for me.

²³⁵ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.19.

Chapter 5: How to write, 1984-1987

Introduction

This chapter centres on four notebooks, dating from January 1984, when I first began thinking about Alpers' book, which provide traces of my development as a writer over the next few years. Their contents show how preoccupied I was with embarking on my own writing, and in particular on some kind of book. They show the intricate interconnectedness of being concerned with writing and reading, and being concerned with feminism, as well as with the web of thinking, feeling and doing related to my family, friends, resources, house, and workplace (although what I actually did "at work" is rarely mentioned). I constantly moved back and forth across these elements of my world, trying to make writeable sense of the workings of my "oppositional imagination".

Part One looks at how I began to keep these notebooks, and what they meant to me. Out of the mass of material in these notebooks, I then draw out three recurring strands related to writing, knowledge, and identity. First, "Finding the subject" (Part Two): the genesis of almost every subject I have since focused on can be found in these years. Secondly, working out how to write the "oppositional imagining" of feminism (Part Three): most of the pieces I completed and published between 1985 and 1987 were about women and creativity, and issues of voice and standpoint were a constant preoccupation. Thirdly, the difficulties of "claiming the right to write" (Part Four), and the extent to which this claim was beset by uncertainties and conflicts which the writing itself continued to be at pains to conceal. Part Five centres on a 1987 conference paper, "The Daffodil Doiley", and looks at why this was "the first piece of work in which I felt that I consistently achieved the kind of writing I was seeking, encompassing the reconciliation of thought and pleasure, philosophy and poetry".

Part One: Four notebooks

From seeing my father at work as a commercial artist, and working through the “how to draw” books that he gave me and I found in the school library, I had understood to a limited extent how and why artists kept sketchbooks, but not how and why writers kept notebooks. This was partly due to the emphasis in my education on the finished written product, rather than the writing process, or associated “private” writing such as letters and diaries. As I noted in Chapter 2, books, especially literature, seemed for a long time to appear as if by magic, emerging original and complete out of the author’s uniquely creative brain. These differing understandings had material expression for me. I intermittently bought and used sketchbooks, but I felt (and still feel) a kind of reverence towards nicely bound books with blank lined pages. I wanted them, but they seemed too good and too costly to spoil with my tentative, messy writing.

Around December 1983, I found some Chinese-made A4 hardback notebooks bound in red, with black spines and corners. They were cheap enough not to matter too much to write freely in, but durable and attractive enough to use and keep with pleasure. It was in these notebooks that, as noted in Chapter 3, “I began thinking and writing for myself in a new way”.

There is a generative interaction in the notebooks – both positive and negative – among taking notes from what I was reading, working out what and how I wanted to write, and sorting out my own feelings about writing. The prospect of moving beyond literary criticism into other fields of feminist oppositional imagination was both compelling and frightening. I was also searching for help with the sheer practicalities of writing, much as, when I was a teenager and a young married woman, I had searched magazines for help with the practicalities of femininity and home-making. In February 1984 I was reading *Housewife-Writer* by Elaine Tuttle Schoenberg, and “Trying to get my surroundings organised and take my work seriously”. The first entry in the notebook labelled “Ideas” was written after returning to Wellington from the holiday on which I first read Alpers’ new biography of Mansfield:

9 January 1984

Beautiful new books, very 1920s looking. I have been enjoying moving around the kitchen, rearranging, fiddling, touching things. It's so hard to concentrate on one thing at a time, but most of all I want to arrange and organise. But also do the Alpers article. My grandmother²³⁶ was 37 when my mother was born, and had her first book (at least in NZ) published in 1938, when she would have been about 55.

Over the next few years, I had contemporary exemplars to follow. By the mid-1980s, feminist thinking was clearly challenging the official culture of knowledge, not only through new women's organisations and publications such as *Broadsheet*, but also by means of new courses, publishers, and distribution networks. The books I bought were mainly published by feminist enterprises such as Virago and the Women's Press.²³⁷ My own easy access to this knowledge was due to my improving material circumstances, joined with what was now a decade of involvement in feminism. My alliance with a higher-earning middle-class man meant that I could afford to attend the Women's Studies Association conferences (from 1981) and buy the books I wanted. I also had time to read and write, especially after December 1984, when I left my full-time job as editor of *National Education*, the primary teachers' union magazine, to become a freelance editor, working from a room of my own at home.

Knowing that my own circumstances were infinitely more favourable to writing than those of many other New Zealand women increased my feelings of guilt at not making faster progress. At Labour Weekend 1985, after freelancing for ten months, I wrote:

I dabble my toe on the edge of a writing identity/commitment, afraid to plunge in. A bit scary, too, that it seems to have taken all the running I can do to stay in the same place financially ... nearly \$3000 less than I was earning last year, but with increased commitments/costs. Of course, I still waste a lot of time. Hard to know what is wasted time and what isn't. I have

²³⁶ My birth mother's mother, Kathleen Hawkins – see Chapter 6.

²³⁷ Virago began in 1973; a note in *Broadsheet* (No.57, March 1978, p.32) records that its publications first became available in New Zealand in 1978. The Women's Press began in 1978. In New Zealand, from 1979, the Women's Studies Association (WSA) began holding annual conferences, at which books were sold by what was by then a widespread network of local women's bookshops.

a feeling that doing my own work is energising, but at the same time I need fallow bits to let things germinate in between...

Part Two: Finding the subject

In the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a surge of feminist history, sociology and autobiography, as many different women sought to account for the development of the sex/gender system and their own positions within it, and to understand how it could be changed. I looked to some of these new books (for example, Ann Oakley's *Taking It Like A Woman*,²³⁸ quoted below) as inspiring models. Around the end of February 1984, I read Deirdre Beddoe's *Discovering Women's History: a practical manual*,²³⁹ and took extensive notes, beginning with:

Key: a piece of work which is manageable
Limitations of time, space and scale
Dig where you stand
History is what it is selected to be

My reading and developing feminist thinking combined with the contradictory political upheavals of the early 1980s and my vivid memories of the period when I was growing up to produce the idea of a book on the 1950s. The immediate political impetus came from what I saw as the urgent need to counter the campaign stemming from what I then called "the moralist right", which was led by the burgeoning fundamentalist churches. They pushed for a return to and reinforcement of "family values", and were vociferously opposed to what could broadly be described as pro-feminist moves by the new Labour Government, such as setting up a Ministry of Women's Affairs and ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).²⁴⁰

My original conception of what I was going to write ignored Beddoe's advice, and was far too broad for one book:

²³⁸ Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman*.

²³⁹ Deirdre Beddoe, *Discovering Women's History: A Practical Manual* (London: Pandora, 1983).

²⁴⁰ See Chapter 8 for a detailed discussion of these events.

9/4/84 A much better Monday! The 1950s book starts to take better shape. An examination of the images of men, women and families in the 1950s and the use to which we put these images today – harking back to a Golden Age of “proper families”, proper men and proper women. Lots of commentaries on change in the family – it is always a problem, a change for the worse. 1) Was it so different then anyway? 2) Is it a problem? If so, why? 3) It certainly can't be solved by advocating a return to a mythical past and/or a short-lived historical phenomenon. Rather, the crisis of capitalism/sexism/racism has now reached the family visibly rather than in a hidden way. The illusion of stability and tradition and the “best” arrangement has gone.

Dworkin: Pornography: Men Possessing Women W[omen's] P[ress] 1981

“This is not a book about what should or should not be shown, it is a book about the meaning of what is being shown.”

My 1950s book is about the meaning of what we believe to have happened in the 1950s. It is not about what should happen now, but about what is happening, and what it means.

I soon narrowed it down to focus on the myths and realities of adult women's lives in the 1950s, interviewing women such as the writer Lauris Edmond (who had not yet written her own autobiography),²⁴¹ and using other kinds of sources advocated by Beddoe, such as magazines, movies, and Plunket manuals, as well as prestigious New Zealand commentaries:

1/7/84

One major feature emerges...from 1950s material...relations between the sexes are extremely important. Both men and women care deeply about how they get on with each other, and are anguished by their difficulties and failures. One of the most striking examples I came across was in Robert Chapman's renowned essay, “Fiction and the Social Pattern”. At university it had been quoted to us for its reflections on fiction. What had not been pointed out was that it is concerned, above all, with men and women,

²⁴¹ Lauris Edmond (1924-2000), poet, autobiographer, novelist and editor, was an inspiration for me, because she published her first collection of poetry when she was 51. She went on to become one of New Zealand's most significant and acclaimed poets; her many awards included the 1985 Commonwealth Poetry Prize.

especially with what Chapman sees as the gulf between them. Like many male writers before and since, he blames women and social forces.

When I found out that Helen May (then Cook) was writing a thesis on a similar topic,²⁴² and also realised that I wanted to write about my own recollections, I shifted to focusing on my own generation. In a 1986 article, "Edmonds Cookery and Bernardine",²⁴³ I outlined what I wanted to do, in the hope that announcing it publicly would spur me on to get it done:

I am writing a book about growing up in New Zealand in the 1950s...I was born in 1945, part of the extreme advance guard of the famous post-war baby boom...Like the baby boom itself, very little about the 1950s turns out to be what it seems on the surface. I was drawn to write about that decade for two reasons: first, in order to look at some of the social factors that helped to shape me and my generation; and secondly, to bring a little more depth and reality to recollections of that time, so as to counteract the vague image of a post-war golden age which is currently being so effectively evoked by the reactionary moralist right.

In *Taking It Like A Woman*, Ann Oakley (1984) writes:

I felt and still feel an enormous nostalgia for the rural masculine-feminine idyll of my childhood. Such a nostalgia perhaps inhabits, in one way or another, the minds of all urban twentieth century people, since it stands for the successful merging of the human with the natural environment, for roses round the unmortgaged door and space around the peaceful self, for the idealised and unhurried dalliance of those whose currency is seemingly not money nor acts of violence of any kind.

It is precisely this type of nostalgia – though with a suburban, rather than rural, setting – which the moralist right is attempting to exploit, through its calls for a return to "traditional values". In its account of humanity's most recent fall from grace, several serpents entered the settled, godly, prosperous world of the 1950s: Maori activists, homosexuals, feminists – but the worst of these were feminists, since they sought to subvert the foundations of family life (and hence of national life) by stirring up selfishness and discontent among women, urging them to abandon their God-given role of caring for others and instead become as demanding and competitive as men.²⁴⁴

²⁴² See Helen Cook, "The Art of Marriage: A Career for the 1950s," *Women's Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (1985), Helen Cook, "Images, Illusions of Harmony: The 1950s Wife and Mother," *Women's Studies Journal* 1, no. 2 (1985)., Helen May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1992).

²⁴³ Anne Else, "Edmonds Cookery and Bernardine," *Women's Studies Journal* 2, no. 2 (1986).

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.70-2.

I set out how I planned to structure the book, showing the influence of my reading on structuralism and semiotics:

In order to set manageable boundaries, and also to be able to complete the book in discrete sections, I am using a structure consisting of a series of essays, each centring around a 'sign' from the period[,] for example, the Edmonds cookery book, the *Janet and John* series of readers, the social studies textbook *Our Nation's Story*, the 1957 film *Bernardine* (with Pat Boone), the Mazengarb Report; then branching out to examine a related area – food, family, the image of the Maori, gender, sex, and so on.²⁴⁵

I also discussed what I planned to write about adoption. By mid-1987, I had successfully applied for a Literary Fund non-fiction grant to help me finish the book, and had completed drafts of five substantial chapters.

For reasons I discuss below, the book was not finished and did not find a publisher, but my work for it laid the foundation for much of my later writing. "The Perfect Solution", the chapter on adoption, was rewritten for journal publication, and led to my first published book (discussed in Chapter 6). That book incorporated much of the material I put together for "Bad Girls", a proposed chapter on sex and sexuality, which was never written. The original intention of looking at the construction of change in "the family", past and present, was taken up later in work on New Right philosophies and policies (discussed in Chapters 8, 9 and 10). "Melting Moments", on food and cooking, became a paper for the Stout Research Centre conference on "Te Tinana: The Body".²⁴⁶ "Janet and John", on reading, formed the basis of a paper for the 1995 conference on the history of the book in New Zealand, and was published in 2000.²⁴⁷ I had not originally planned to write about women and creativity, perhaps because it was too close to home; but after writing "Edmonds Cookery and Bernardine", I added a chapter which I called "Bright Ideas". It formed the basis of my 1987 Women's Studies Conference paper, "The Daffodil Doiley",²⁴⁸ discussed later in this chapter, and

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ This conference was held at Victoria University of Wellington, 3-5 July, 1987. The proceedings were not published.

²⁴⁷ Else, "Up the Garden Path: *Janet and John* Revisited."

²⁴⁸ Anne Else, "The Daffodil Doiley" (paper presented at the Women's Studies Association Conference, Dunedin, 1987).

I drew on it again when I came to write on women's arts and crafts organisations for *Women Together*.²⁴⁹

Part Three: Oppositional imagining

Distance, then, was what I was to strive for. Distance from the body, from the heart, but most of all, distance from the self as writer. I could never understand exactly what they meant or how to do it; it was like trying to follow the directions on a home permanent in 1959.²⁵⁰

The problems I struggled with in writing about the 1950s were related to the contradictory currents which flowed through the project from the start. These were in turn linked with the profound difficulties of making satisfactory critical and autobiographical sense of what Joan Cocks calls the "cultural-political regime of mutually confirming ideas and practices"²⁵¹ that constitutes the sex/gender system at any given period. As a perceptive critique of my manuscript by Elizabeth Caffin (director of Auckland University Press) indicated, my 1980s perceptions of the discourse of femininity in the 1950s, and my anger at contemporary attempts to revive some of its worst aspects, in feminist terms, for political ends, were at odds with my affection for what that decade had meant to me at the time, as a child and a teenager. In contrast to bell hooks, struggling with writing about her "tormented and anguished childhood" because she "did not want to be the traitor, the teller of family secrets",²⁵² I struggled with writing about the security and satisfaction of my childhood.

It was because of what those years had originally meant to me that I was so strongly attracted by the idea of revisiting them. Spurred on by Beddoe, and by reading the mass media analyses she cited,²⁵³ I particularly wanted to see again the women's magazines that loomed so large in my memory. I think now that they were so

²⁴⁹ Anne Else, ed., *Women Together: A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand/Nga Ropu Wahine O Te Motu* (Wellington: Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs/Daphne Brasell Associates Press, 1993).

²⁵⁰ Mary Gordon in Sternburg, ed., *The Writer on Her Work*, p.29.

²⁵¹ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.62.

²⁵² bell hooks, "Writing Autobiography," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p.429.

²⁵³ Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, [c.1973]), Cynthia L White, *Women's Magazines, 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (London: Pandora, 1987).

compelling for me partly because, unlike almost everything else I was reading, they centred on women and on a familiar, secure, contemporary domestic world. At the same time, they seemed to connect me with the desirable wider world of Britain and America, where most of them came from. Apart from the images, what I remembered most vividly was the multiplicity of stories they told me every week about women's lives – not just in the fiction and advertisements, but also in the features, letters, and advice columns, where readers sometimes spoke in their own (selected) words.

Going back to these magazines in the 1980s, I was appalled by their sheer dullness, and their relentless focus on the desirability and rightness, for the mass of women, of a life spent almost entirely “at home”, serving men and children and things. Such mixed feelings, not only about the magazines but about everything else I researched, undermined my writing. In places I resorted to describing what I had found²⁵⁴ in an apparently straightforward way, but with an implied irony, similar to the archness I had identified and criticised in Alpers' work, which sat uneasily alongside the loving detail of my personal recollections. I could not work out how to convey and respect the value and appeal of that world of women at home, and then to analyse its damaging limitations:

6/6/84

It isn't just the propaganda. One has to give some credit to the power of the picture, because, for the moment, it embodies the Good Life, the Right Way to Live. It seems so attractive – and such a contrast to women down mines or in mills, or aloof rich mothers, or even sheer idle middle class women. The busy NZ housewife is a lovely Colonial ideal – sheets, scones, babies. But it doesn't work... I guess the central [question] I am wrestling with is explaining, again, why it doesn't work – what could possibly be wrong with such a lovely picture, which so many women cling to, because it is so attractive, on the surface at least. Opposites – the way myths about men and women turn out to be the opposite of the truth. But they remain powerful – the need they meet... The longing in Chapman's essay for intimacy and understanding [between] the sexes.

²⁵⁴ For example, a fashion photograph (source unknown) of a fitted brown velvet dress with a white fur collar, and a caption describing it as “reminiscent of a glass of beer with a foamy topping”.

I framed the problem in the context of how to write, rather than how to think. I felt strongly that I needed to find a “different” way of writing which enabled me to blend my own consciousness and remembered experience with my current feminist thinking, broadened by the experiences and the thinking of others, in a thoroughly serious and yet readable way. This was at odds with my education in scholarship and analysis, as well as in femininity. Neither theorists nor women were supposed to speak seriously as, for, and about themselves: theorists were above doing this, and women were below it.

At first I wrote about my difficulties mainly in terms of “voice”. By mid-1984, I knew that the conventional scholarly voice or persona I had deliberately used for the Alpers essay, and would use again, could not work for the 1950s book:

1/7/84

Finding a voice: I have read lots of books by women, but finding my own voice is still difficult. I feel a bit trapped by the impersonal, academic style I was drilled into at university; also the cool, detached observer, the one I've tended to come up with, or the “reminiscence”. None of these are quite right. I don't know how much of myself to put in, how to bring in the voices of others. Arrogant masculine assertion seems wrong, but assertion is necessary to say what I think and believe – bolstered by evidence but not drowned by it.

By the time I wrote “Edmonds Cookery and Bernardine”, I had found more examples that gave me glimpses of how I wanted to write, and I now saw the problem as centring on genre:

A number of women writers have suggested that since the genres as we know them are male-defined to suit men's experience, thought and writing, it is not surprising that women should have difficulties in working within them. As a result, they are now producing “new” kinds of writing, which cross all the familiar genre boundaries. What I am attempting to do is to combine personal recollection (mainly my own but sometimes that of others) with cultural analysis. This method of working is not my own invention: I owe much to the models provided by writers such as Jane Lazarre and Rachel M. Brownstein.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Else, “Edmonds Cookery and Bernardine.” The books mentioned are Rachel M. Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), Jane Lazarre, *On Loving Men* (London: Virago, 1981).

My theory seemed to be borne out by the responses of the two publishers who read the manuscript before I sent it to Elizabeth Caffin at Auckland University Press. Both were uneasy about what they saw as my attempt to combine two distinct genres, and both accurately judged this to be only partially successful. Their proposed solutions were based on steering my work firmly in one direction or the other. One suggested making it more conventionally academic and historical, for example by setting it in the context of 1950s events usually understood to be the proper “stuff of history”, such as the 1951 waterfront strike and the Cold War (although I had been completely unaware of both in the 1950s); the other suggested making it more popular, by playing down or leaving out the analysis, and strengthening the recollections with the addition of more detail and even “remembered” dialogue.

As my comment about genres being “male-defined” indicates, my difficulties were not simply to do with voice or genre boundaries. They were related to the position of the implicit “I” in the text, and in particular to the problematic concept of “false consciousness”. In this case, the critical theorist sees himself or herself as setting out to explain “the truth” about what is “really” going on in everyday experiences that may seem harmless, sensible, even profoundly pleasurable, at the time, but are revealed to be instances of an oppressive power at work on falsely conscious subjects. Joan Cocks has thought about why this is a problem in terms of relations between “theory” and “groups”:

[Critical theory’s] historical relation to the groups it is being theoretical *for* [original italics] always has been deeply troubled...there [is] something profoundly insolent and offensive – which however is not to say false – in critical theory’s characteristic refrain: “You do not understand your own situation. I am here to reveal it to you; it is a situation, as you will see, that anyone – and certainly you and I – would find it humiliating to be in.”²⁵⁶

What Cocks does not deal with is the way in which the consciousness of the “I” who speaks here is implicitly separated and distanced both from the oppressive discourse being laid bare, and from the false or imperfect consciousness of the “others” shaped by that discourse. In the kind of critical theory I wanted to write, this separation, this distance, could not be sustained. I could not afford to be “insolent and offensive” in

²⁵⁶ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.105.

this way, because I belonged to the very group I was being theoretical *for* – a group which had so often been treated as incapable of theorising about its own condition. It was my own experiences as a member of that group which provided the basis for theorising; and it was by writing in a way which acknowledged this, and included those experiences, that I expected to attract readers, because it was what attracted me most in the work of other feminist writers.

This meant that I could not take my shift in understanding for granted, as simply a matter of arriving, thanks to feminist learning, at a position where I could “see through” a fundamentally “false” ideology to “the truth” of oppression beneath. Instead I needed to find a way of thinking and writing which would enable me to encompass both past and present, self then and self now, without resorting to any notion of false consciousness. What I was struggling with was how to make sense of the way in which what I later came to call “discourse” fused with and constructed experience, without denying agency altogether, or positioning myself “outside” what I was seeking to explain. This was necessary because neither of these positions could provide me with the ground from which to write effectively as a feminist theorist, especially about my own history. Feminist theorists are still grappling with this problem, which centres on subjectivity, objectivity and desire.

Part Four: Claiming the right to write

It will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against.²⁵⁷

At Easter 1985, I wrote:

The only “ought” is writing but that doesn’t make it easier to actually do. Lack of confidence saps my willpower... I had forgotten that I had written that Mansfield essay, till Harvey reminded me. I forget my growths and achievements very quickly and seem to have done nothing worthy of note at all.

²⁵⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), p.62.

This undermining feeling of lack of achievement, and therefore lack of confidence, based on a deep sense of incapability and unworthiness, surfaces repeatedly in my notebooks. In one form or another, it seems to underlie all my other difficulties with writing.

Morwenna Griffiths sees such lacks of confidence as part of “the politics of self-esteem”.²⁵⁸ Instead of seeing self-esteem in the conventional way, as “entirely bound up with [accomplished] achievement”, she sees achievement as depending on self-esteem or self-concept: “I am loved and valued, therefore what I do is good.”²⁵⁹ The formation of a positive self-concept on which achievement may be based is, she says, political. It comes “from a lifetime’s patterns of exclusion and inclusion and reactions”, which are “not easily seen by the individual herself”.²⁶⁰

In my own formation as a writer, the patterns related to gender cannot be simply summed up as a matter of “sexism”; they involve both inclusion and exclusion, by women as well as men, and are intertwined with all the other patterns of self-formation. While I remained convinced that I did not have the right kind of brain to be a “creative writer”, an identity my first husband had confidently claimed for himself, I had found it relatively easy to “speak my mind” in the pages of *Broadsheet*, to gatherings of women, and even to guffawing male members of the Lions service club, as part of a collective endeavour. Being active in the feminist movement had overcome my feelings of difference and isolation from other women to a greater extent than any previous involvement. Now, as a would-be feminist author, I no longer seemed to fit into any available feminist group. While I continued to have some involvement in current feminist campaigns, the day-to-day, practical activism they called for not only took scarce time and energy; they excluded and even denigrated the kind of substantial, analytical (but not Marxist), feminist writing I wanted to do, as an irrelevant luxury.

Working out what was wrong with Alpers’ *Life* helped me to start working out what was disabling in my own intellectual life. Completing that piece of work and having it published, both in New Zealand and abroad, helped me to begin to recognise and

²⁵⁸ Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity*, p.120.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p.116.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.120.

confront the powerful emotions clustering around writing beyond *Broadsheet*. In April 1984, I carefully copied out a quote used by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, because it seemed to explain and also help to overcome my own diffuse anxiety about tackling a larger project:

Anxiety occurs at the point where some emerging potentiality or possibility faces the individual, some possibility of fulfilling [her] existence; but this very possibility involves the destroying of present security, which thereupon gives rise to the tendency to deny the new potentiality.²⁶¹

My anxiety and lack of confidence stemmed partly from my ambiguous position in terms of what I still saw as the “official” culture of making and disseminating knowledge, based on what had seemed to me to be a casual, ignominious exclusion from it, as embodied by the university. It seemed to me that intellectually, despite my results, I had been judged as simply not good enough to become a theorist in my own right. By working out and making sense of what Alpers was doing, and how, and then making my work public in various academic settings, I was facing up to the cultural gatekeeping and gendered discourses that had deterred me before, and beginning to understand the creativity of theory itself. Even so, it was not until Labour Day 1985 that I could write:

My advantage is that coming from Nowhere I have nothing to lose. The worm turns. Remember me? Your forgotten first-class honours student? You certified me bright – well here I am! (Only [now I’m] 40, so with not a lot of time left to bug you...

Tutoring in a second-year women’s studies course on “Images of Women” at Victoria in 1986²⁶² did more to reinforce than to allay my already ingrained feelings of marginality in relation to the university. Besides the low pay and precarious employment status, there was nowhere for tutors who were not staff members or students to work or meet outside the classroom; we were expected to come in, take the tutorial and go.

²⁶¹ Rollo May, *Contributions of Existential Psychotherapy in Existence, A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*, p.87, quoted in Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. p.270. I copied this quotation into my notebook on 2 April 1984.

²⁶² The course was WISC 202. It began just after the women’s studies programme at Victoria had celebrated its tenth anniversary. At that time it had only two half-time lecturers, and my notes from the first lecture recorded that the demand for student places had “far outstripped supply”.

Paradoxically, some of my difficulties stemmed from my greatest source of encouragement: reading new books of feminist theory. In 1983, in *Feminist Theorists*, Dale Spender identified the combination of men's suppression of women's knowledge and theories, and women's instruction in "the art of woman-devaluation", as the key internally experienced factors holding back feminist theorising:

All of these women [feminist theorists] in some way started from the position of feeling that they were perverse. Without the knowledge that women of previous generations had protested and without the understanding that women of their own generation shared their experience of dissatisfaction, they invariably felt themselves to be misfits. They often doubted the reality of their own pain and anger, for if it were real why were there no other women who expressed similar feelings?

...As men erase the subversive thoughts of women from the traditions which are transmitted from one generation of women to another, we must begin anew. With no received history of resistance and rebellion...each generation must start again and re-invent its own.²⁶³

Spender went on to discuss how she saw the contemporary feminist movement as doing much to overcome both these factors; not only was "the knowledge that other women did indeed feel the same way – knowledge gained by communication with other women ... a source of strength", but "the discovery that women of the past had been through the same process helped to remove the doubts and increase the confidence"²⁶⁴ of those theorising in the present, through a kind of retrospective consciousness-raising. My own response was far more complex and ambivalent than Spender appeared to envisage. It showed through in the most obvious problem with my unpublished manuscripts from that period: their over-dependence on the words of the various "expert" authors I was reading. The notebooks, too, are full of lengthy extracts, marked to show where I might be able to quote these authorised gems to back up what I was saying, or to avoid speaking for myself.

A few years later, in 1987, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar would discuss how and why "the existence of both past and present authorial foremothers" might have "inspired feelings of intense ambivalence in turn-of-the-century, modernist, and contemporary women writers":

²⁶³ Spender, ed., *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions*, pp.2-3.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

On the one hand, as some feminist critics have suggested and as we ourselves have argued, female artists, looking for literary mothers and grandmothers whose achievements certify the female imagination, have been delighted to recover the writings of their ancestresses. On the other hand, we are now convinced that female artists, looking at and revering such precursors, are also haunted and daunted by the autonomy of these figures...²⁶⁵

It was the apparent autonomy of my feminist contemporaries that both encouraged and daunted me. The new feminist critiques that impressed me most conveyed confidence in the worth of what they were saying, and originality in how they were saying it, adding up to a kind of freedom in writing. I felt these qualities to be essential, but could not seem to attain them consistently enough to complete a sustained piece of work:

19/12/85

I must let my work go more – just thinking out loud about the topics, not worrying about sources etc. usually something comes to mind to illustrate the point, anyway. I am terribly wary of unexamined statements/ideas, but perhaps I should just trust my mind more.

Two books specifically on women and writing came to my rescue. *The Writer on Her Work*²⁶⁶ showed me that the difficulty of claiming the right to write was a strong and persistent strand running through the words of other women writers, especially when they were talking to themselves, or to each other:

Perhaps this is the lack in my work, which prevents me leaping into the full power which is mine – that I cannot face myself, have not been able to come to recognition of my past, myself.²⁶⁷

The voice of despair arrives as a kind of terror ... I am certain before I begin writing a piece that I will not be able to put sentences together, or worse, that all I have to say has been said before, that there is no purpose, that there is no intrinsic authority in my words. And that is where the struggle begins.²⁶⁸

Who is the wolf? He is strangers. He is the risk of one's own judgement, one's own work.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁵ Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The War of the Words*, p.195.

²⁶⁶ Sternburg, ed., *The Writer on Her Work*.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p.82. (Michelle Murray)

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.110. (Susan Griffith)

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p.32. (Mary Gordon)

There is a force in me that resists my work ...The battle is to hold to the vision I know I must express, but the confidence to do it, where does that come from?²⁷⁰

Finding how persistent this structure of feeling was among such a wide range of women writers, the authority and value of whose work seemed to me to be already firmly established in feminist terms, if not always in terms of the “mainstream” literary and/or critical canon, did provide me with the kind of reassurance Spender wrote about. It indicated that what I felt was not solely a personal failing, as I had believed, but political. This was confirmed when I read Tillie Olsen’s *Silences*²⁷¹ in September 1987. I responded to it so strongly that I cried:

*How much it takes to become a writer. Bent (far more common than we assume), circumstances, time, development of craft – but beyond that: how much conviction as to the importance of what one has to say, one’s right to say it. And the will, the measureless store of belief in oneself to be able to come to, cleave to, find the form for one’s own life comprehensions. Difficult for any male not born into a class that breeds such confidence. Almost impossible for a girl, a woman.*²⁷² [original italics]

Olsen’s painfully fragmented words pointed to the part played for women by fear:

The other determining difference – not biology – for woman...Reprisals, coercions, penalties for not remaining in what was, is, deemed suitable for her sex.

The writer-woman is not excepted, because she writes.

Fear – the need to please, to be safe – in the literary realm too. Founded fear. Power is still in the hands of men. Power of validation, publication, approval, reputation, coercions, penalties.

“The womanhood emotion.” Fear to hurt...²⁷³

Importantly, Olsen also brought to light the hampering part played for women by love, and fear of the loss of love, both in others and in oneself:

The need to love and be loved... The oppression of woman...entangled through with human love, human need, genuine (core) human satisfactions, identifications, fulfilments...

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p.59. (Honor Moore)

²⁷¹ Olsen, *Silences*. *Silences* was first published in 1965, with new editions in 1972 and 1978. The copy I own is the 1989 reprint, but I first read it around 1985.

²⁷² Ibid., p.256.

²⁷³ Ibid., p.257.

The changes that will enable us to live together without harm (“No one’s fullness of being at the cost of another’s”) are as yet only in the making (and we are not only beings seeking to change; changing; we are also that which our past has made us). In such circumstances, taking for one’s best achievement means almost inevitably at the cost of others’ needs.²⁷⁴

At the 1985 Women’s Studies Association conference, I used Olsen, Bernikow and Sternburg, as well as my own experience, to run a workshop on how such structures of feeling could impede women in their writing and also affect the writing itself. It was well attended, and every woman there identified with and responded strongly to what I was talking about. I highlighted the difficulty of avoiding what I called “the lurking smile” and “the dithering knife”:

[Either] I become just a bit too arch, even rather coy, when what is called for it straight-out statement and assertion. What I am doing is saying – to men – “Look, it’s okay, I don’t really mean what I’m saying, and of course I do have a sense of humour too”...[or] I draw back, soften my words, cautiously qualify them so much that they lose their force...The lurking smile and the dithering knife are insurance policies; they do not crop up when I am writing for a feminist audience. But when I write for the public at large, they undermine what I want to say, just in case men take it seriously and turn on me, as they have always turned on disagreeable women – women who failed to reflect back the male view of the universe, or worse, set up their own opposing view.²⁷⁵

Olsen describes these evasions as follows:

Being charming, entertaining, “small”, *feminine*, when full development of the material would require a serious or larger tone and treatment. Pulling away from depths and complexity. Irony, wit, the arch, instead of directness; diffuse emotion or detachment instead of tragedy. Avoiding seriousness altogether. [original italics]²⁷⁶

Most of the work I published in the mid-1980s kept to literary criticism. This was the one area in which I knew that I had some official credentials. In searching for insights into Alpers’ construction of Mansfield, I had begun to look for insights into my own predicament as a would-be feminist writer. By continuing to explore the work of other women writers, and how earlier critical responses had constructed them and their work, I hoped to gain a better understanding of my own difficulties. Gilbert and Gubar

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.258.

²⁷⁵ Unpublished notes for workshop on writing run by Anne Else, Women’s Studies Association Conference, Hamilton, 1985.

²⁷⁶ Olsen, *Silences*, p.252.

specifically discuss the significance of feminist literary criticism for Virginia Woolf and other interwar feminist writers:

In her critical essays, in particular, [Woolf] reveals both the anxiety and the exuberance which she and many of her contemporaries experienced as, for the first time, they confronted a female literary inheritance. Indeed, for Woolf, as for a number of other modernist women of letters, it was the comparatively new enterprise of feminist or protofeminist literary criticism that made possible a voyage of dread and desire, a voyage “forward” into the geography of an unprecedented female past...However, not only for Woolf but for other feminist critics this combination of exploration, rivalry, and affiliation is risky as well as rewarding.²⁷⁷

In mid-1980s New Zealand, feminist literary criticism was still a “comparatively new enterprise”. In writing the Mansfield essay, I had staked a conscious claim to be worthy of inclusion in the new “invisible college” of feminist knowledge-making which I so much admired and valued. Making a start gave me the confidence to keep going in this field at least. In 1985 I was asked to contribute to the “special issue” of *Landfall*, guest-edited by Linda Hardy, that focused on “women’s writing”. Reading Louise Bernikow’s anthology of poetry by women,²⁷⁸ and an essay by John Berger,²⁷⁹ as well as rediscovering the poetry of Mary Stanley,²⁸⁰ prompted me to look at how poetry by women was reviewed in *Landfall* between 1947 and 1961.

The resulting essay was “‘Not More Than Man Nor Less’: The Treatment of Women Poets in *Landfall*, 1947-1961”.²⁸¹ It made explicit the idea that judgements of women poets did not arise spontaneously in response to individual work, guided by universal literary criteria. Instead they were gendered “readings” based on “commonly held – though usually obliquely expressed – preconceptions about women and their poetry”.²⁸² Praise repeatedly used “‘feminine’ terms of approbation – *simple, direct,*

²⁷⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The War of the Words*, pp.196-8.

²⁷⁸ Bernikow, ed., *The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America, 1552-1950*.

²⁷⁹ John Berger, Introduction to Michael Quanne, *Prison Paintings* (London: John Murray, 1985).

²⁸⁰ Mary Stanley published only one volume of poetry, *Starveling Year* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1953). The quotation in my essay title comes from her poem “The Wife Speaks”. I came to know her work because my husband, Harvey McQueen, included it in the anthology he co-edited with Ian Wedde, *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1985), and drew it to my attention.

²⁸¹ Anne Else, “‘Not More Than Man nor Less’: The Treatment of Women Poets in *Landfall*, 1947-1961,” *Landfall* 156 (1985).

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p.431.

careful, exquisite, instinctive”²⁸³ – which carried derogatory implications of difference from and inferiority to the masculine work of men. Criticism recycled a number of themes related to women’s inherent inferiority; these included not being a “true poet” (a defect which no effort by the writer could remedy); “close-to-the-hearth simplicity”; “unoriginal religion”; “the embarrassing female” (in response to women writing about exclusively female experiences, such as being pregnant); and “the unspeakable experience” (lesbianism).

I was extremely nervous about this essay and whether it was “good enough” for Linda and for *Landfall*. In October 1985, after it had been accepted, I wrote:

I was absolutely delighted that Linda was delighted with the Landfall essay. I am sometimes quite sure it is OK but this time I really did have doubts about the basic thesis, which still has less shape and theory than I would have liked. But it must have worked...

Pleased as I was, such essays were not the “new” kind of writing I wanted to achieve. They were beginning to feel like a diversion from my major writing concerns, which centred on the projected book on the 1950s.

Part Five: Reconciling philosophy and poetry

All writing, having fundamentally to do not only with stylistic proprieties, generic rules and the like, but with language (that maker of the world as a world filled with *this* sort of entity and *this* and *this*) is imaginative at its very core.²⁸⁴
[original italics]

In the mid-1980s, when I was working on my projected book about the 1950s, I met a woman who lent me her large collection of *Stitch* magazines, and in one issue I found a pattern for the daffodil doiley. In “Bright Ideas”, my draft chapter for the 1950s book on women and creativity, I discussed this doiley briefly in the context of “women pouring their creative energies into the narrow outlets allotted to them”, then being derided and attacked by male intellectuals for their efforts, while at the same time

²⁸³ Ibid., p.443.

²⁸⁴ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.36.

being firmly warned off trying to scale the manly heights of “real” art. My standpoint moved uneasily between sympathetic identification with the doiley makers and home decorators, and agreement with Simone de Beauvoir’s pejorative analysis of their activities as pointless and deluded:

Man is but mildly interested in his immediate surroundings because he can find self-expression in projects. Whereas woman is confined within the conjugal sphere; it is for her to change that prison into a realm...Her home is thus her earthly lot, the expression of her social value and of her truest self.²⁸⁵

In late 1985, I read and took lengthy notes from a book by Jonathan Culler on structuralism.²⁸⁶ Much of what he said made immediate sense. The concept I found most useful dealt with how the cultural elaboration of (often binary) systems of meaning was based on the constructed differences between objects or actions, that is, the relations between them, rather than their actual properties. Culler led me to Barthes, to Christopher Norris, and eventually to Foucault and discourse theory.²⁸⁷

None of these writers focuses for long, if at all, on gender. I was struck by how closely, in their accounts, the “unconscious subject” – now “deprived of its role as source of meaning”, since its functions had been “taken up by a variety of interpersonal systems that operate through it” – resembled the apparently unconscious figure (both mind and body) of the traditional female, perpetually at the mercy of the male philosophers and analysts who alone held the power to determine who she was, what she meant, and what she wanted. This theory of the subject did not account for how the theorists themselves could attain a position which enabled them to “see through” these impersonal, omnipotent systems, and work out how they operated.

Joan Cocks describes discourse theory as “theory’s last step away from immediate experience”, because it is where “conventional classifications, while posing as the mirror of some deeper, objective truth, have in fact no bedrock at all beneath them but

²⁸⁵ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp.188-9.

²⁸⁶ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

²⁸⁷ The books I read first were Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973; reprint, 1987), Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction, Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 1982).

rather are the deepest bedrock of a system of power”.²⁸⁸ The development of the idea that sex/gender classifications are not based on any essential, irreducible bodily realities, but are themselves the “deepest bedrock” of the sex/gender system, can be traced through various strands of feminist theory.

Other important perspectives came from feminist economics. Lisa Leghorn and Katharine Parker²⁸⁹ helped me to think about women’s home-based creativity in terms of economics and power, and to consider how, because the systems of meaning which cultures develop are multiple and sometimes contradictory, groups of women may be able to find enough space and dignity within them to survive and support each other. These “loopholes” therefore enable society as we know it to continue, while also allowing for the possibility of change.

All these strands came together in 1987. The woman who lent me the *Stitch* magazines offered to crochet a real daffodil doiley for me. When it arrived, I thought of using it as the centrepiece of a paper for the women’s studies conference. The text of that paper follows.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.106.

²⁸⁹ Lisa Leghorn and Katherine Parker, *Woman's Worth: Sexual Economics and the World of Women* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

²⁹⁰ Else, "The Daffodil Doiley".

The Daffodil Doiley

Paper presented to the Women's Studies Conference, Dunedin, 1987. Published in *Women's Studies Association Conference Papers 1987*, ed. Mary O'Hagan, 47-52. Auckland: WSA, 1987.

I'd like to start with some ideas drawn from Jonathan Culler's book giving an overview of structuralism. Structuralism, as he describes it, focuses on relations: "not the properties of objects or actions, but the differences between them which the system employs and endows with significance".(1) A structural analysis "relates an object or action to a system of conventions which give it its meaning and distinguish it from other phenomena with different meanings".(2) It deals with "the need to postulate distinctions, and the rules operating at an unconscious level, in order to explain the facts about social and cultural objects".(3) To feminists, the primary distinction employed by the system of cultural meanings, the distinction which underlies all other distinctions, is that between male and female.

The aim of a structural explanation, says Culler, "is to render as explicit as possible the conventions responsible for the production of effects – to determine the nature of the system underlying the event".(4) The analyst comes to focus "on the play of the legible and illegible, on the role of gaps, silence, opacity".(5) This kind of analysis teaches one "to find challenges and peculiarities in works which the prospect of pleasure along would make boring".(6) The focus is on exploring the complexities of order and meaning.

A work (or an object) makes sense, however, only because it is embedded in a context – "a complex of knowledge and expectations of varying degrees of specificity, a kind of interpretive competence, on the part of those who make use of it".(7) This competence is of course learned in society. "Rather than try to get outside ideology, we must (therefore) remain resolutely within it, for both the conventions to be analysed and the notions of understanding lie within. If circle there be, it is the circle of culture itself".(8)

[THE DOILEY IS DISPLAYED]

This is the daffodil doiley. The pattern for it appeared in *Stitch* magazine in 1950. *Stitch* was a New Zealand publication put out by Paragon, a company which supplied crochet cotton, hooks and all kinds of other materials for women's handcrafts. It consisted largely of patterns – for clothing, for toys, for home furnishings. In between were articles about how to catch a man, how to keep a man and how to look after a house and family. Here is the October 1950 editorial:

A woman's hands ...

If you go to a football match or to a political meeting ... If you look in an office or peep behind the blinds of a cosy home, you will generally see a pair of hands idle and another pair busy. The idle

hands are usually the man's; the busy hands belong to the woman. For centuries it has been the same, with the woman busy; with her knitting, mending, sewing, tatting, and the man reading or just sitting after a day in the fields or at the office. Woman has trained herself to use her mind AND her hands ... those busy, useful hands which clothe a family and dress a home. We can thank women for their skill and patience today as much as in the days of tapestry and petit-point. Her work today is just as useful and in many ways, more ornamental, thanks to magazines like "STITCH", which spread the word from designers the world over. Throughout the year "STITCH" caters for the busy hands of every age ... from the girl who wants to knit her first scarf or jumper to the grandmother who has the time and patience for crocheting a bedspread or knitting a frock. A woman's hands have many things to do. Their work, like ours is never finished!

Stitch had a winner in the daffodil doiley. The pattern was so popular that it had to be repeated for readers who had missed it the first time.

This doiley symbolises, for me, one large aspect of my own history of learning to be a woman. I was born in 1945. By the time this pattern appeared, I was in Primer One making a potholder out of sacking sewn round with coloured wool blanket stitch.

In the upper primers, I learnt to draw different coloured threads of stranded embroidery cotton through the raised stitches in a piece of huckaback to make a guest towel. Later I moved on to a duchess set stamped ready to embroider in snail stitch, satin stitch and lazy daisy. I had exactly the same design, and felt the same way about it, as Yvonne du Fresne's Mrs Robinson, so shocked by the Danish custom of embroidering the wild flowers of the land:

"I wonder you'd bother to embroider *weeds*," Mrs Robinson would murmur, pulling out her embroidery ... It was a crinoline lady standing with a parasol on crazy paving under roses hanging from a trellis. Behind her were cumulus clouds, marked by five flying swallows.

"It's very easy!" Mrs Robinson would cry. "I mean, it makes you feel nice just doing it. I'd get the stone-cold horrors doing that though," she would add, looking warily at Thyra's flax and grass and reeds. "I like to have pretty things about me," Mrs Robinson would say.(9)

I did all the interesting bits of my crinoline lady first, and then got sick of it; my mother patiently finished it off, crocheted lace round the edge, and put it on my dressing table where I could take the credit.

Girls were supposed to go in for this sort of thing, not just as a hobby but as a duty. The 1942 Thomas Report on secondary education urged that every pupil

should take a “course in a substantial craft”; for boys, this meant woodwork and metalwork, whereas for girls “the homecrafts and embroidery will probably take first place”.⁽¹⁰⁾ Embroidery was “an excellent activity for girls, giving scope for the acquirement of skill in a craft that woman has practised throughout recorded history”.⁽¹¹⁾

Looking at this doiley and setting it in its context, we can work out four different and in fact contradictory sets of meanings, all of them arising out of the complex system of distinctions, material and social, between male and female.

First, there are the official meanings, created by men for their benefit, but also absorbed and upheld by women. The doiley symbolises a specific kind of angel in the house, to use Virginia Woolf's phrase. In colonial society, such objects symbolised women's mission of civilising uncouth, lawless and therefore dangerous men. Women were responsible not only for the moral tone of society but for keeping up the niceties, the finer things of life. Something of this official role remained even in postwar society.

The doiley is in a sense classless. It could have been made by a woman of almost any class. Working-class women who produced these objects were hardworking – after their essential day's work had ended, they went on working at such things. Doing this other kind of work, they were content, happy to be making something to beautify the home – their home. On the other hand, women of more leisure were fortunate to be able to undertake such work more often. They were kept by a man earning enough to support their non-productive existence. They too, enjoyed this kind of work, particularly as it symbolised their fortunate lot in life.

These are the official meanings, expressed and upheld in public. The very existence of *Stitch* magazine bears witness to their acceptability.

Then there are the unofficial meanings given to the doiley by men, which serve to put down women, and thereby reinforce male superiority. They do have some limited public expression, especially on the underside of the culture – for example in all kinds of humour, which in the 1950s depended heavily on what was jokingly called “the war between the sexes”.

In this set of meanings, the doiley serves as proof of women's inferiority. They are clearly lacking in the higher mental faculties. What man would spend his time making such pointless, purposeless trivia? It symbolises woman's frivolous nature, wasting her time and energy on such trifles. On the other hand, it proves her capacity for fiddly, repetitious work, and is good practice for that. It proves she is innately suited to jobs which require this capacity – a typist, a bookkeeper, a light assembly worker.

The doiley is of course merely craft. It has no pretensions to the status of Art (another category of useless objects). It is unoriginal and uncreative – the woman who makes it merely follows a pattern. It is a pathetic, ugly imitation of nature. Unlike Art, it is anonymous, unsigned, bearing no trace of its maker.

These meanings, like the first set, reinforce the distinction between men and women. But whereas the official meanings raise women higher than men, these unofficial meanings belittle women and place them below men.

Beneath both these sets of meanings lie what we could call the economic meanings. The doiley is a form of home decorating. Like all home decorating, it has a function. It symbolises a standard of living above mere subsistence. By making it, a woman raises the status of the family, and thus of the man who heads it, in the eyes of society. Like all home decorating too, it may in fact raise the actual value of his real estate for a potential buyer. Until the passing of the Matrimonial Property Act, none of this increased value was likely to get into the hands of the woman. The profit of her unpaid labour went once again to the man only. Economists Lisa Leghorn and Katherine Parker call the value of this kind of product “potential money”. It cannot be realised into actual money for the woman, unless she produces it for sale.⁽¹²⁾

Women in New Zealand do sell doileys and other similar objects, either to get some personal income or, more often, to raise funds for some essential thing they or their children need, such as a community centre or a kindergarten. Sold, the doiley is likely to fetch a low price, because, like housework and childcare, it is produced by other women for nothing. So even then, an element of potential money remains, because the makers do not receive the true worth of their labour. It is not real work.

Making a doiley takes up the so-called leisure time of the woman who makes it in a way that may be profitable for men but is certainly completely harmless for them. It keeps her from other, possibly more dangerous occupations. It is done in the home, so it keeps her out of sight and out of mind. What is more, it can easily create more work to keep her occupied further. It once had a function – to reduce housework by keeping marks off furniture (his furniture). Now it increases the complexity of housekeeping.

It pits the woman in competition against her sisters, to see who can best produce these objects. So it serves to divide rather than to unite women. At the same time, it keeps them out of male preserves of creativity, where they might be a threat. If women do try their hand at Art of any kind, they can immediately be attacked by references to their work as decorative, reminiscent of embroidery.

It is not only anonymous, it is also silent. It imitates the most desirable condition for women: it cannot speak or pass on its history of women past to women in the future. It speaks a language of form without content, made up not of symbols but of mere technique.

Women must continually reinvent the wheel. When a magazine reproduces a pattern it is rarely presented as having any history at all; instead it appears as if it has just that moment appeared, as if women have only just thought of this new way to use the techniques they know. The techniques themselves appear timeless, that is, outside time and so outside history. Girls learn them completely out of context as techniques only; unlike real Art, they are unworthy of a history. So the

timeless and therefore unchanging and unchangeable nature of women's work is reinforced in each new generation.

These economic meanings are thoroughly concealed. The official meanings conceal them from women, so that they cannot see how they are being exploited. When women come across the unofficial meanings, they grin and bear it, because they know it is only a joke.

The unofficial meanings screen the economic meanings from men. Thus they need not face up to what they are doing, and can continue to bask in the illusion that it is their work which supports women, rather than the other way round.

And finally, women themselves have a set of meanings for the doiley which subvert the official meanings, contradict the unofficial male meanings and make the hidden economic meanings tolerable.

To the woman who makes it, the doiley represents her striving for order and beauty among the daily chaos of domestic life. The centre is a green field; the daffodils around it will not fade or die. It is something permanent, something accomplished, unlike cooking and housework and even childrearing. The fact that it is useless means that it can be preserved. It will not vanish or wear out with use like everything else she makes. Nor will it grow up and leave home.

It is irreproachable – no one can criticise her for sitting down with her crochet. It is, briefly, an absorbing exercise. At the same time, it is a form of creativity which fits neatly with her life. It can be put down at a moment's notice, and picked up again, without the thread being lost; the pattern serves as a constant guide.

It is difficult to make, a challenge to her skill, both to invent (because undoubtedly a woman somewhere did invent it) and to reproduce. It can be compared with the work of her peers; it serves as a source of pride. It is an esoteric craft for women to share, something of their own to discuss and to collaborate on, passing on patterns, suggesting shortcuts, admiring each others' work, given as gifts to each other, even used to raise money – albeit in very small amounts.

Even the fact that men place little or no value on such things can be turned to women's advantage. Although it cannot speak, the doiley can still be handed down from mother to daughter, from aunt to niece, through generations of women, providing mute evidence of their work, their talent – or simply their existence.

NOTES

Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist poetics: structuralism, linguistics and the study of literature*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, p.10.

1. Culler, p.27.
2. Culler, p.28.
3. Culler, p.37.
4. Culler, p.260.
5. Culler, p.263.
6. Culler, p.95.
7. Culler, p.254..
8. Yvonne du Fresne, *The Book of Ester*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1982, p 226.
9. Department of Education, *The Post-Primary School Curriculum* [the Thomas Report], Wellington: Government Printer, 1942, 2nd edition 1959, p.43.
10. Department of Education, p 59.
11. See Lisa Leghorn and Katherine Parker, *Woman's Worth: Sexual Economics and the World of Women*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p 188. Potential money is “the value that accrues to unpaid or underpaid services performed or goods produced ... because the economy is structured without taking [these] into account ... actual cash does not exist to pay for it”.

At the conference, I began by showing the doiley to the audience and asking for their reactions. I got a very strong but mixed response. Some women said just seeing it made them feel sick, because it represented all the futile time-wasting activities that their mothers used to fill up their frustrated lives. Others said they owned and treasured similar pieces of work, passed on by family members, rescued from being thrown away when someone had died, or collected from opportunity shops.

Although I began by quoting Culler, consciously seeking to establish my intellectual credentials as well as setting out how I wanted to use his outline of structuralism to set up a theoretical framework, most of the paper was my own words. I grounded my analysis in my own history of being deliberately trained to do “fancywork”, and how I felt about it. Then I introduced the main part of the paper, showing how the argument was structured:

Looking at this doiley and setting it in its context, we can work out four different and...contradictory sets of meanings, all of them arising out of the complex system of distinctions, material and social, between male and female.²⁹¹

I put forward each set of meanings in turn, enabling them to interweave and play off each other. The “official” and “unofficial” meanings embodied the complex double cultural standard protecting masculine power, similar to the double standard applying to sexual behaviour. The “economic” meanings related to control of both material and cultural resources, and the ways in which women may be excluded from speech and from history. Finally, the “women’s meanings” solved the problem of false consciousness, by recognising how women are able to make their own tolerable and even triumphant sense of constrained lives:

To the woman who makes it, the doiley represents her striving for order and beauty amid the daily chaos of domestic life. The centre is a green field; the daffodils around it will not fade or die. It is something permanent, something accomplished...Even the fact that men place little or no value on such things can be turned to women’s advantage. Although it cannot speak, the doiley can still be handed down from mother to daughter, from aunt to niece, through generations of women, providing mute evidence of their work, their talent – or simply their existence.²⁹²

This piece of work also seemed to me to achieve something else, something more. When I discovered Joan Cocks’ book, *The Oppositional Imagination*, in the course of reading for this thesis, this passage made an immediate impact on me, because it seemed to go to the heart of what I am trying to do in the way I write:

However loyally theory works off concrete life as its original material and ground, it has for its own governing principle not life but logic. There is a natural aridity and formality about it as a consequence, with all the advantages (clarity and rigor) and disadvantages (desiccation and abstruseness) that aridity and formality bring in their wake. It is partly, then, in preparation for appearing before and giving pleasure to an audience of readers and listeners that theory ought to cultivate in itself a vivid and sensuous quality. But it is also for the sake of illuminating the world to which it claims to be so deeply and centrally tied that theory should be able to think and speak evocatively as well as abstractly. It would be perhaps too overblown to say that there can be no real insight into social life without a reconciliation of philosophy and poetry, but the basic idea is right.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Ibid., p.49.

²⁹² Ibid., p.51.

²⁹³ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, pp.107-8.

The doiley and how it was made, together with the historical context specific to its place and time, constitute what Cocks calls the “concrete particulars” which anchor theory in social life. These “serve as source material at the start and illustrative material at the finish” for the “abstract logic of practice” that is my main focus.²⁹⁴ Just as importantly, they provide the basis for the “vivid and sensuous quality” Cocks describes as necessary to “give pleasure” to the audience, and also, necessarily, (although Cocks does not mention this) to the writer herself.

Through my reading and writing, I had become strongly conscious of the aesthetics of writing critical theory, and the sense in which, like all other kinds of writing, it is “imaginative at its very core”.²⁹⁵ I tried to remain constantly aware of what “story” I was telling, and how. I wanted readers to get the impression of a voice speaking to them, and making both rhetorical and sensual sense, in a way that encouraged them to read on. By the time I wrote “The Daffodil Doiley”, I had a very strong sense of the flow and balance of language, achieved through the choice and arrangement of words and syntax. The voice that speaks here only occasionally verges on the arch or ironic; its tone is predominantly serious and straightforward. Once past the introduction, the language and syntax are pared back; but although “everyday” words are used, increasingly so as the paper moves on, they are arranged in cadences that are slower and more deliberate than everyday speech, and thus give them more weight. In other words, in this piece I had begun to find an answer for what Cocks describes as “the great question of whether it is possible to unite critical theory with an evocative and imaginative prose”.²⁹⁶

In writing “The Daffodil Doiley”, I experienced something which many other writers have described. All the materials had been gathered, and I had been thinking about them for some time. There came a point at which the shape of the ideas for the paper itself, and the “feel” of the words for it, seemed to come to me more or less as a whole, all at once. In places, particularly towards the end, it felt as if it were writing itself.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p.36.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p.12.

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Last night I felt marvellous after doing what I felt was a remarkable piece of work for the conference on the daffodil doiley. This morning I still think it's good - certainly unusual. The framework was worked out in notes. I am getting on much better now I am combining handwriting and the computer... Now to starch the doiley! All the bits of thinking and reading seemed to come together to make sense... All the meanings work against each other, since the distinctions they draw are in tension and conflict and cannot be simultaneously true... This framework could I think be applied to many ... aspects of women's lives.

This was the first piece of work in which I felt that I consistently achieved the kind of writing I was seeking, encompassing the reconciliation of thought and pleasure, philosophy and poetry, that Cocks describes as necessary for “real insight into social life”.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.108.

Chapter 6: Writing adoption, 1945-1995

Introduction

As the previous chapter showed, I had planned to include a chapter on adoption in the 1950s book. By the time I began work on it in the mid-1980s, I was acutely aware, both from my own experience as an adopted person and from contemporary political developments, of how complicated everything to do with adoption is, and how it throws issues of identity, “nature”, power and knowledge into sharp relief. I have since come to see adoption as centrally important in my own narrative of self, as well as being a remarkably concentrated locus of feminist issues and concerns. I have written about it in a book and several papers, which are the main focus of this chapter.

Part One covers my son’s death and other events in my life in the 1980s relating to adoption and to my writing on adoption. Part Two covers my own adoption history, including the process of finding my birth mother before this was sanctioned by law, and the complex relationship between this history and my writing on adoption. Part Three centres on the issue of knowledge, which is so insistently present in adoption, and its crucial function in conferring and withholding power, as well as on the different ways in which I wrote about adoption.

Part One: Birth and death

After a lengthy search (discussed below), I located my birth mother in 1983. Two years later the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 was passed, after seven years of heated debate. In 1986 I met my birth mother for the first time, and wrote “The Perfect Solution” for an international journal.²⁹⁸ By January 1987, when it appeared, I had realised that adoption in the post-war years required a whole book to itself, and that

²⁹⁸ Anne Else, “The Perfect Solution: Adoption Law and Practice in New Zealand,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 15 (1987). Through Phillida Bunkle and Women’s Studies at Victoria, I had met Maureen Kane, one of the editors of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*. I expanded my notes for the 1950s adoption chapter into an essay which the *IJSL* accepted for publication.

plenty of source material would be available.²⁹⁹ On 2 October, I heard that my application for a Claude McCarthy fellowship to write a history of post-war adoption in New Zealand had been successful, enabling me to work full-time at the Stout Research Centre for a year. There was then no such history of any kind, let alone a feminist one. I was absolutely delighted, but I know that at the same time I thought, “This is too good, something is bound to go wrong.”

My younger son Patrick, aged eighteen, had been living in Sydney for a year. On 22 October, he died in an accident there. It is difficult to think and write about the impact his death had on every aspect of my life, including my writing. As well as sheer grief, “losing” my son – failing to protect him – gave rise to feelings of guilt, powerlessness and utter inadequacy, rapidly undermining what had been my slowly growing sense of self-belief and ability to attain what Robin Hyde called “a home in this world”.³⁰⁰ Mothers are not supposed to lose their children.

For me, as for all those transferred to a new family soon after birth through what is technically known as a “closed” adoption by “strangers”, that is, people who are not biologically related to them, my children were the only people who embodied what is usually meant by “family” (apart from one’s own partner): they were both genetically related to me, and known intimately over a long period of time. Despite having had what is often called a “reunion” with my birth mother, she and other birth family members did not and could never fit the second criterion; my adoptive parents and other adoptive family members did not and could never fit the first. The breakdown of my first marriage had acutely sharpened my sense of what has been called the “psychic homelessness” of being adopted.³⁰¹ With Patrick’s death, that sense intensified.

²⁹⁹ Jonathan Hunt gave me permission to read the large number of Parliamentary submissions on the proposed legislation, and Keith Griffith allowed me to use the multi-volume archive of adoption-related primary source documents, statistics and press clippings which he had assembled.

³⁰⁰ Robin Hyde, *A Home in This World* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1984). This memoir was written in the 1930s, but because it dealt frankly, in what now reads as a startlingly contemporary style, with what were then unspeakable subjects such as a single woman having relationships outside marriage which resulted in two illegitimate children, it was not published until 45 years after the author’s suicide in 1939.

³⁰¹ Rene A.C. Hoksbergen, “The Adoption Field Is Full of Pitfalls for Professionals” (paper presented at the International Conference on Adoption and Healing, Victoria University of Wellington, 1997), p.24.

I was working for the Royal Commission on Social Policy³⁰² when Patrick died, and my friends and colleagues there were immensely supportive right through until I left in January 1988 to take up my fellowship. Working full-time on a substantial writing project concerned with mothers, children, separation and loss was a crucial factor in being able to survive the agony of experiencing his death. By then Harvey had a full-time job on David Lange's staff,³⁰³ often working long hours, and this helped me get into my own working routine at my host institution, the Stout Research Centre. I had congenial people to talk to, and I could shut the door and weep when I needed to. If I had been working in an ordinary job, or on a different topic, or in less supportive circumstances, I might not have been able to cope with everyday life, let alone finish a book.

Being able to work full-time on the book made an enormous difference to its quality and coherence. It meant that even when I was not actively researching or writing, my mind was free to work on the material and come up with solutions to the problems involved. On 3 October, the day after hearing about the McCarthy Fellowship, I had woken very early with a complete outline of how to structure the book. This gave me something to hang on to from what had now become "before" – the time before Patrick died. I went on to use it with very little modification.

Part Two: A question of adoption

I did not write directly about my own story in *A Question of Adoption*.³⁰⁴ I gave my reasons for excluding it in the preface:

As for my own story, like all adoption stories it does not belong only to me, and as the author I cannot remain anonymous. That is why I have not told it here, nor have I, unlike some adoption analysts, included any details of it in third-person disguise.³⁰⁵

³⁰² See Chapter 9.

³⁰³ Prime Minister Lange took on the education portfolio after the August 1987 election. In October Harvey was invited to join his education staff.

³⁰⁴ Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p.ix. I was referring here to, in particular, H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate: A Survey of Adoption and Mental Health* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

My sense of this multiple ownership also prevented me from explaining my most pressing reason for not including my own story, either in the book or in anything that I published or presented in New Zealand. I could not do so without revealing that I had found and met my birth mother; but I had not told my (by then elderly) adoptive parents that I had done this, judging – I believe correctly – that it would be too upsetting for them to cope with; and I did not want there to be any chance of them finding out by reading about it. Family secrets associated with adoption tend to proliferate down the generations in this way.

The introduction to “The Perfect Solution”³⁰⁶ had set out as much of my own story as I then felt able to tell. I judged that I could safely do this because it was so unlikely that anyone else who was closely involved, especially any of my parents, would read the journal where it appeared. It is appropriate to write about it in more depth here not only because it is relevant to this thesis, but also because both my adoptive parents have died, and my birth mother is now comfortable with our relationship being publicly known.

I had known about my own adoption from the beginning. The way my parents told me indicates that in 1945 they received the kind of advice on “telling”, intended to protect children’s self-esteem and sense of belonging in their adoptive family, that did not become standard until at least the mid-1950s. As I came to “the age of reason”, I realised that in order to be available to be chosen by my adoptive parents, I must in some way have become separated from my original parents. I then needed to make sense of this puzzling event. It did not occur to me to ask my parents about it; adoption researchers have commented on how adopted children seem to sense that this is an area fraught with difficulties, and therefore refrain from asking their parents such questions.³⁰⁷ Instead I found what I was looking for in a book given to me by my mother, perhaps with its relevance for me in mind:

I was ... adopted when I was two weeks old. I grew up knowing by heart the reassuring bedtime story of how my parents had gone to the hospital and chosen me from all the other babies. From about the age of nine, I merged this

³⁰⁶ Else, “The Perfect Solution: Adoption Law and Practice in New Zealand.” This essay preceded *A Question of Adoption*.

³⁰⁷ See, for example, Kirk, *Shared Fate: A Survey of Adoption and Mental Health*, John Triseliotis, *In Search of Origins* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

with the story of another Anne, *Anne of Green Gables*,³⁰⁸ which gave me an explanation for my adoption. I believed that, like hers, it must have been due to the death of both my natural parents: my mother, in some vague way, as a result of my birth, and my father, equally vaguely, “in the war”.³⁰⁹

This cobbled-together knowledge of my adoption provided the kind of “early encountered information” which, says Morwenna Griffiths, “serves as the raw material for inferences about what the subject (in this case, oneself) is like”.³¹⁰ The central feature of such knowledge is acceptance and rejection:

The experience of acceptance and rejection, and the reaction to them, cannot be understood without reference to the structures of power in the society in which the self finds itself... political structures are part of all aspects of our emotions.³¹¹

The kind of knowledge available to adopted children left them facing a dilemma centring on the duality of rejection and acceptance at the heart of their existence: “how to reconcile two apparently conflicting ideas – that they were chosen as ‘best baby’ by one set of parents, yet not wanted by another?”³¹² The crucial point of the explanation that I constructed for myself as a child was that it made sense of my adoption in a way that enabled me to avoid believing and feeling my original parents had not wanted me, and had therefore chosen to give me away. It was both emotionally plausible and logically reasonable, in terms of the information available to me at the time. By drawing on the story of my adoption which my mother told me, together with the story of that other Anne’s adoption which she gave me, I was able to supply for myself the kind of missing knowledge about my own past which I needed to build a functioning historical narrative of self.³¹³ In both my need for this narrative and my construction of it, reason and emotion, the present and the past, fact and fiction, the personal and the political were all inseparably intertwined.

I understood that being adopted meant I was different from other children. If anything,

³⁰⁸ Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*. The most popular of Montgomery’s many books, it has remained almost continuously in print; the L.M. Montgomery Institute website (<http://www2.lmmontgomery.ca/>) lists 16 editions in English, as well as translations into French, Czech, and Japanese.

³⁰⁹ Else, “The Perfect Solution: Adoption Law and Practice in New Zealand,” p.237.

³¹⁰ Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity*, p.96.

³¹¹ Ibid., p.93.

³¹² Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*, p.147.

³¹³ See Worthington, *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Continuity in Contemporary Fiction*.

I was proud of this difference. Around the time that I read *Anne of Green Gables*, I ignored my mother's warnings and told some children at school. It was from their reactions that I first learnt there was something bad about being adopted. I don't think they knew why it was bad, though they may have been reflecting something said by their parents. It was simply that *any* revealed difference from some never explicitly defined norm demanded to be stigmatised.

Adoption stories do not remain fixed, but change over time, as I explained in "The Perfect Solution":

At some time I was given [by my mother] scraps of information, all of it positive, about my background; my [birth mother's] family had been well-to-do, and my grandmother had been a clever woman who had her writing published. It was not until I was about sixteen that I realised I had probably been adopted because I was illegitimate, but I found that new idea only briefly disturbing.³¹⁴

Although this realisation meant that my story of being orphaned was likely to be wrong, for many years I did nothing more to try to find out "the truth" about myself and my adoption. I took such an unproblematic, common-sense view of adoption in general that when a friend who was considering adopting a child asked me for my views, I unhesitatingly recommended that she go ahead.

It was not until after the end of my first marriage, in 1979, that I began to think about tracing my birth mother. This was consistent with the finding³¹⁵ that such a search is frequently begun soon after a crisis or important event in the adopted person's life...

Then a strange chain of coincidences took place. Without my asking, my parents gave me the adoption order containing my original surname,³¹⁶ and I saw a television documentary about a woman's search for her birth parents. After moving house [in 1981], I found that she was a near neighbour, and another neighbour revealed that she had been searching for her birth mother for some years. I renewed contact with an old friend, who turned out to be working professionally with adopted families and birth mothers, and I read an impassioned New Zealand book, *Death by Adoption*³¹⁷...

³¹⁴ Else, "The Perfect Solution: Adoption Law and Practice in New Zealand," pp.237-8.

³¹⁵ See, for example, John Triseliotis, *In Search of Origins*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973.

³¹⁶ This piece of information is essential to any adopted person's search for their birth relatives. Today it can be obtained by getting one's original birth certificate, under the Adult Adoption Information Act (unless there is a veto in place).

³¹⁷ Else, "The Perfect Solution: Adoption Law and Practice in New Zealand," p.238. I was referring to Joss Shawyer, *Death by Adoption*. (Auckland: Cicada Press, 1979).

My motivations for searching were complex, and included a very strong sense of having been rejected by the man I had loved and trusted. I needed to muster as much reassurance as I could that a search was unlikely to result in a final and definitive rejection by my birthmother:

From the accounts [*Death by Adoption*] gave, and from everyone I talked to, it seemed that the majority of birth mothers very much wanted to know what had become of their children, and that contact was therefore likely to be welcomed.³¹⁸

Although I did not and could not write about it then, for two years I was intensely engaged, even obsessed for a time, by the complex and difficult but totally absorbing process of tracing a possible current name and address for my birth mother. This was in fact the first project requiring intensive and detailed research that I had undertaken since university. It was particularly charged not only because of its personal significance for me, but because at that time, while not expressly illegal, it had to be undertaken without any overt official assistance, and without revealing its true purpose to those in charge of the records. At times, this meant telling lies to them. I succeeded only because of the information I obtained by such subterfuges, the scraps of knowledge I already had about my grandmother, and the help I received from a wide network of women friends.³¹⁹

Part Three: Knowledge and power

In *A Question of Adoption*, I quoted British author Claire Marcus asking, as an adopted person, "For whom are the records being maintained if not for us?"³²⁰ Succeeding in finding what I was looking for, despite the barriers which the law had put in place, was an assertion of my right to a form of knowledge about myself which appeared to be so

³¹⁸ Else, "The Perfect Solution: Adoption Law and Practice in New Zealand," p.238.

³¹⁹ My mother's first name and surname were relatively common, and it was only because I also managed to obtain her middle initial from a helpful official (who was, I believe, probably aware of the real purpose of my enquiries) that I was eventually able to identify her, and confirm through my grandmother's published work that I had the right person. Assuming she had been single and had subsequently married, I then searched for a marriage certificate, to get her married name. This name was uncommon, and she had lived continuously in the same area before and after marriage, so her current address was relatively easy to find from the electoral rolls.

³²⁰ Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*, p.150.

elementary an aspect of existence as a conscious human subject that in almost all other cases, it was taken completely for granted.

Knowledge emerges in the book, and in subsequent papers, as the central issue of adoption. I began it with this quote from David Lowenthal:

Historical narrative is not a portrait of what happened but a story about what happened ... Just as we are products of the past, so is the known past an artefact of ours.³²¹

The emphasis on written history being “a story about what happened” seemed particularly appropriate for adoption. Both my own experience and the available evidence convinced me that just as those on all three sides of the “triangle” necessarily develop their own adoption narratives, and change these narratives over time in response to their changing understandings and experiences, so “expert” knowledge on adoption and its history changes too, as the metanarratives underpinning it shift and realign. I was therefore seeking to challenge the whole notion of the detached “view from nowhere” as the only valid basis for knowledge creation, by stressing the contingent, partial and political nature of knowledge, including historical knowledge.

Susan Bordo³²² has neatly summed up the Enlightenment thinking underpinning the “view from nowhere”. The master concept of “rational objectivity” (as distinct from “emotional subjectivity”) is seen as the essential condition of valid knowledge production. In order to bring rational objectivity to bear, the “particulars of human locatedness” must be constructed as merely “so much obscuring (and ultimately irrelevant) detritus that must be shaken loose from the mirror of mind if it is to attain impartial moral judgement or clear and distinct insight into the nature of things”.³²³

I was well aware that my position as an adopted person, and moreover one who had experienced the death of a child, could be construed as inevitably and fatally biasing my work on adoption, making it impossible for me to be sufficiently detached to produce valid knowledge that went beyond “raw material”. This was like a special case

³²¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.215.

³²² Bordo, "Feminist Scepticism and the 'Maleness' of Philosophy."

³²³ Ibid., p.155.

of the accusation that women were incapable of thinking with sufficient objectivity about themselves and their relations with men to produce valid knowledge on such topics. I dealt explicitly with such objections in the preface to the book, making a connection between historical knowledge and the individual, and setting up a perspective which allowed for both discursive operations and individual agency:

It is partly because I was adopted in 1945 that I wrote this book. It is the kind of book about adoption I would have liked to read but which did not exist. It focuses on “what happened”, in order to examine how the post-war system of adoption “worked”, in theory and in practice, for those who created and controlled it, used and were used by it, reacted to it and resisted it.

I do not believe that having been personally involved in adoption disqualifies me from writing about it – indeed, just the opposite. Adoption is an extraordinary experience which, like other experiences of “difference”, can best be studied from the inside. And even then, it may be only those who have played all three of the major roles in the adoption “triangle” – and in the course of my research, I came across a surprising number of women who had done so – who can claim to have comprehensive experience of it.³²⁴

In terms of gender and power, it is shifts in conceptions of knowledge that most clearly mark off the three decades after the second world war from the next three decades. An accurate working knowledge of sex, conception, and contraception, let alone abortion, was officially denied to young men and women alike. In theory, men were forbidden to have “carnal knowledge” of women they were not married to; in practice, only those women who did not or could not keep secret the fact that they had allowed men to “know” them in this way, and had acquired such forbidden knowledge themselves, were faced with social opprobrium. In terms of post-war adoption discourse, innocence was strongly associated with ignorance.³²⁵ A woman who became pregnant had obviously “had sex”; but she was evidently more ignorant, and therefore innocent, than one who was “knowing” enough to take precautions and avoid pregnancy. Innocence, proved by ignorance, justified the offer of redemption (for both mother and baby) through adoption.

³²⁴ Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*, p.vii.

³²⁵ My 1964 edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary gives these meanings for *innocent* as an adjective, showing precisely the trajectory applying in the case of young, single pregnant women in the post-war years: “Free from moral wrong, sinless; ignorant of evil (without implication of virtue); not guilty (of crime etc.).” Concise Oxford Dictionary (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.628.

I saw “what happened next” as offering important insights into the way power was then exercised in New Zealand and similar societies, and how it was organised around constructions of difference. In a 1989 conference paper,³²⁶ I explored how knowledge was both imparted to and withheld from a single pregnant woman who sought help, and how this process worked toward ensuring that giving up her baby for adoption by strangers and having no further knowledge of it would appear to be her own freely made decision, the result of her own agency (just as the pregnancy had supposedly been).

I identified five related aspects of knowledge as power, all related to time and to prevailing metanarratives of family, sex and gender. First, *defining the woman as deviant* constructed her past in a way that pointed firmly toward adoption. Secondly, *surrounding her* in an institution or a private household “reduced her to the dependent status of a [helpless] minor”, constructing her present “so that no matter how capable she may have believed herself to be before...her belief in herself and her own powers was effectively undermined”.³²⁷

Thirdly, *keeping her in the dark*, as well as, in many cases, denying her empowering knowledge of pregnancy and birth, effectively closed off other avenues of action and assistance because she knew nothing about them. There was little or no attempt, in most cases, to ensure that women understood the legal situation, or knew what kinds of assistance, other than adoption, were available; their official consent was therefore almost wholly uninformed. Fourthly, *predicting the future* constructed what lay ahead, using the twin concepts of *frozen time* (assuming that adoption was both necessary and beneficial, because the situation at the child’s birth would remain in place forever) and *restoration* (assuming adoption would enable both mother and child to “move on” out of an abnormal situation and into a normal life).

Finally, because “all those who actually dealt with single pregnant women [with the possible exception of the lawyers] recognised that giving up a child involved grief and

³²⁶ Anne Else, "Counting for Nothing: Some Aspects of Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand, 1944-1972" (paper presented at the Women's Studies Association Conference, Christchurch, 1989).

³²⁷ Ibid., p.275.

suffering *at the time*” [my later emphasis],³²⁸ the woman was offered the powerful promise of *redemption through sacrifice*: her suffering, which would, she was typically assured, be shortlived, would prove her unselfish love for her child and redeem her transgression.

The logical outcome of this complex process was the widely held conviction that the less a woman knew of the child she had so sensibly decided to give up, the easier it would be for both of them to forget the whole experience and get on with their lives. My research showed that women were almost always told the child’s sex, indicating that this knowledge was seen as too important to withhold from them; but from the 1940s until the 1970s, the practice of preventing women from holding or even seeing their baby was widespread.³²⁹ My birth mother saw me only once, and did not hold me. Fathers were also denied knowledge, not only of the child itself, but in some cases (including my own) of even the existence of a child. This might or might not be the mother’s decision: having nothing more to do with the father could be made a condition of receiving help.

In the course of the adoption process, one more piece of knowledge was routinely instilled: the birth mother and adopted child had no right or need to know anything more of each other. The various officials and professionals involved based their authority and expertise on their superior knowledge, both of adoption in general and of individual “cases”. They were the only people who both knew and had a right to know birth mothers, children, and adoptive parents, and the connections between them. As the least stigmatised group, adoptive parents were the most likely to be given some knowledge of the other two, including the birth mother’s name (which appeared in the

³²⁸ Ibid., p.276.

³²⁹ For example, the Motherhood of Man Movement in Auckland, the major private, non-denominational agency offering assistance to unmarried mothers and placing children for adoption in the largest New Zealand city, Auckland, after the second world war, ensured that the mother did not see the baby when an adoption was planned, and advertised this fact to prospective adopters. See Anne Else, “The Need Is Ever Present: The Motherhood of Man Movement and Stranger Adoption in New Zealand,” in *Women in History Volume 2*, ed. Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald, and Margaret Tennant (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993).

adoption papers);³³⁰ but they had no official right to such knowledge, before or after the adoption.

Knowledge relating to a particular child officially began afresh from the moment of adoption, wiping out everything that had gone before. In law, the making of an adoption order created a “legal fiction” which erased all the child’s previous relationships, replacing them with those of the adoptive family. It was this feature of Pakeha adoption which most obviously ignored and over-rode the fundamental tenets of Maori cultural identity. In the chapter of my book headed “Aureretanga – The Outcry of the People”, I aimed to turn the discursive tables and consider Pakeha adoption from a Maori perspective, as well as from the feminist and social justice perspectives operating in other chapters. I made way for Maori voices to convey the complex impact of this particular form of oppression, and the length and depth of Maori concern over it. Again, knowledge was the key. A Maori woman who had been adopted by Pakeha, and brought up not even knowing that she was Maori, explained exactly how serious the deprivation of knowledge about lines of descent was for her and for all other Maori who had been placed in this position:

In Maori terms your whakapapa [genealogy] gives you everything – it places you in the context of the world, and of your own culture...you know exactly who you are and what your position is. You then have a whole infrastructure, you’re on the map of your own country...Other Maori people can relate to you because they can *place* you. It’s the network or grid of your existence, both physically and spiritually.³³¹

As long as such knowledge is preserved, members of a kin group other than the birth parents can and often do raise a related child. By contrast, Pakeha adoption law and practice ignored the grid of identity based on kinship and place, instead operating on the basis of a functional modernist discourse which made possible the exertion of what Michel Foucault described as a form of “biopower”, “distributing the living in the domain of value and utility”.³³² For me this quotation has become one of those “phrases and formulations” which, as Denise Riley puts it:

³³⁰ From 1962, the applicants – that is, the adoptive parents – could choose to have the child’s original surname left out of the application to adopt if they wished to do so. See Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*, p.120 ff.

³³¹ Ibid., p.194.

³³² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, p.144.

...take on a talismanic quality, rattle at the back of one's brain for years. Perhaps, or even probably, they are not deployed, not formally worked up and digested into a coherent theory; none the less they keep a powerful presence on top of which later "influences" lie only lightly... It is these formulations, these talismanic memories, which possess a powerful and continuing presence in the work done perhaps a decade or fifteen years later, even where they are not consciously remembered, or are refined, or indeed are repudiated.³³³

It proved particularly pertinent to the way Maori children were positioned by Pakeha adoption. Although no money was involved:

Children available for adoption were immediately exposed to market forces, because they had to compete with each other to find a home, whereas children who remained with their birth parents did not. When homes were in short supply, this competition became intense.³³⁴

Even when demand outstripped supply, children were "graded" according to criteria derived from rigid hierarchies of difference. "Race" (which often meant racial appearance or "colour", since in many cases the child's ethnicity was not established³³⁵) was of major importance, so that "a child's 'Maoriness' usually became its dominant characteristic...But it was a 'Maoriness' defined entirely in Pakeha terms – physical appearance and 'degree of Maori blood'."³³⁶ My research confirmed that a principle of "matching for marginality" operated, so that the apparently least desirable children were likely to be placed with the apparently least desirable adopters.

The book, the 1989 paper and another paper I wrote in 1995³³⁷ each employ different textual strategies, reflecting the different contexts and purposes for which they were written. In writing the book, I was determined to get away from the "Irony, wit, the arch, instead of directness", which Tillie Olsen had deplored as characteristic of

³³³ Denise Riley, "A Short History of Some Preoccupations," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.123-5. For me, such formulations have largely come from literature and the kinds of feminist writing which border on literature, as well as from Simone de Beauvoir, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Tillie Olsen.

³³⁴ Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*, p.107.

³³⁵ In some cases the Pakeha mother herself did not have this information; in others it was not recorded or was recorded wrongly. For example, children who were of Pacific Island or Greek descent might all be recorded as "part-Maori". Details such as iwi or hapu (tribe or sub-tribe) were apparently never recorded by Pakeha social workers, although in some cases adopted people have been able to establish these later through Maori networks.

³³⁶ Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*, p.190.

³³⁷ Anne Else, "Legal Fictions: Women and New Zealand Law on Adoption and Assisted Reproductive Technologies," *The Australian Feminist Law Journal* 5 (1995). An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Australia and New Zealand Law and History Society Conference, Wellington, 1-3 July 1994. I was encouraged to take part in this conference by historian Bronwyn Dalley.

women's writing,³³⁸ stemming from fear and lack of confidence. In both the book and the 1989 paper, I wanted the text to convey the way in which, despite a master discourse reinforcing maternal love, care and responsibility, material logic came to be deployed in conjunction with emotional logic and arrangements of time and space in a form of "brainwashing" which led, almost inexorably, to the intended outcome of adoption.

Throughout, as the book sets out, knowledge focused on the women and children. The men were virtually ignored. Yet underpinning the whole phenomenon of adoption was the significance of legal fatherhood. I explored this aspect in the 1995 paper. While it took a longer historical and broader international perspective, it was more narrowly focussed on the construction and working of the law, which centres on legal fatherhood. In this case I wanted the text to convey the way in which the apparently neutral logic of New Zealand law on adoption and assisted reproductive technology (ART) is thoroughly (though inconsistently) gendered. This involved beating the law at the game of logical argument which it claimed as its own.

Drawing on the work of Carol Smart³³⁹ and Carole Pateman,³⁴⁰ I examined both adoption and uses of ART as examples of "how the law has continued to play a vital part in what Michel Foucault describes as the central function of the modern state's exercise of power: 'distributing the living in the domain of value and utility'."³⁴¹ I used Foucault's phrase again, because it seemed to me to provide a precise description of ART as well as adoption: both "involve the literal distribution of living children to those whom the law defines as their parents".³⁴² However, in emphasising the power of the state, exercised through the creation of knowledge, Foucault goes too far in eclipsing agency. I discussed this later in the paper, in relation to motherhood and "nature".

³³⁸ Olsen, *Silences*, p.252.

³³⁹ Carol Smart, *Feminism and the Power of Law* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

³⁴⁰ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

³⁴¹ Else, "Legal Fictions: Women and New Zealand Law on Adoption and Assisted Reproductive Technologies," p.65.

³⁴² Ibid.

In particular, adoption and ART “demonstrate how judicial patriarchy operates”.³⁴³ Once again, this particular exercise of power involves definition, and therefore knowledge. In the paper I was able to reconstruct, in more detail than had been possible in the book, how adoption law, embodying official knowledge of women and men, came to take its current shape, using extant records of the legal profession’s discussions, common practice, lobbying of legislators, and judicial decisions.

The main focus of the paper is the continuing difference between the legal status of fatherhood, and that of motherhood. The law “confers the status of legal parenthood” on some people, and “definitively excludes others from that status, including some or all of those biologically connected with the child. But in making these judgements, the law deals with men and women differently”, although it is “inconsistent and even contradictory in its approach to new areas such as ART”.³⁴⁴

The legal father of a child is not simply the biological father, but the man who recognises that child as his own, either because he has married (or later marries) the mother, or because he comes forward to say he is the father. The illegitimate child used to be defined in law as “filius nullius” – the child of no one, with no legal parent. In the case of artificial insemination by donor, New Zealand law immediately installs the husband of the woman giving birth as the child’s legal father.

Both adoption and ART involve two different and conflicting constructions of women who give birth to children. On the one hand they are regarded as “merely natural” mothers, doing what comes naturally to women. Gestation and birth have no male parallel, and therefore no legal significance, unless no legal father is present, in which case the mother becomes responsible for the child by default. On the other, women who give birth are the sexless, genderless, freely contracting individuals of classical liberal theory, and therefore contracting to gestate and give birth to a child should be regarded as no different from contracting to supply any other kind of labour.

³⁴³ Ibid., p.66.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

I argued that the second and much more recent perspective, which treats gestation and birth as “nothing”, is currently becoming the dominant perspective, as “judicial patriarchy increasingly gives way to the contractual free market where everything, including reproductive powers and babies, can be bought and sold”.³⁴⁵ I saw this more recent perspective as “arguably even more detrimental for women”, particularly given the intrinsically inferior legal status of motherhood; and I concluded that:

It may be time at last to rethink the whole of the law on parenthood, and to consider the merits of conferring appropriate statutory parental rights and responsibilities on women as well as men ... A new approach is urgently required – not only, as Pateman suggests, a new story about freedom – but also, a new story about relationships.³⁴⁶

In the past, both adoption and ART had been opposed by conservative moralists, who saw them as destructive of the patriarchal family. By the time this paper was written, both were supported and even advocated by neo-liberals. Adoption was seen as the logical alternative to state support for sole parents, which was the most reprehensible form of what by then had come to be known as “welfare”. ART was seen as offering a range of acceptable solutions to what were essentially private problems (intensified by misguided state policies which had led to a reduction in the numbers of babies available for adoption), with no need for state intervention or regulation beyond the law of contract.³⁴⁷

The emphasis on contractualism in this 1995 paper reflects the general growth and importance of neo-liberal theories and policies in New Zealand from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s. After completing *A Question of Adoption*, I turned my attention, as did many other New Zealand feminist theorists, to critical analysis of neo-liberalism and its social and cultural depredations. This also formed the basis of the group of publications considered in Chapters 9 and 10 of this thesis.

When *A Question of Adoption* appeared in 1991, adoption had an anomalous position in public consciousness. Thanks to the high incidence of adoption in the post-war

³⁴⁵ Ibid. p.79.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ The clearest New Zealand example is C.J. O'Neill, "Alternatives to Adoption: Social and Legal Implications of Alternative Reproduction Modes," (Hamilton: Department of Sociology, University of Waikato, 1983).

period, relatively large numbers of people in New Zealand are closely involved with adoption in some way. The seven-year campaign for the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 had made way for a number of sympathetic media stories and books about searches and reunions. There had been a recent surge in adoptions from overseas countries, notably Romania, and this too gave rise to sympathetic stories about the joy of providing love and a new home for “abandoned” children.

However, the publisher’s low-key publicity focused mainly on the academic market, rather than, as I had envisaged, promoting the book in a way calculated to appeal to a general readership, and sales were slow. I had accepted this publisher’s offer partly because the firm was run by a woman who had shown commitment to publishing work related to feminism, and partly because at that time it was linked with the Australian firm of Allen and Unwin, so I believed this would provide an opportunity for international promotion. By the time the book came out, this link had been broken. Three years after publication, *A Question of Adoption* was gaining recognition among interest groups and in feminist studies courses as a valuable standard history, but by then it was out of print.

Section Two

Chapter 7: Gender politics: Before 1984

Introduction

Chapters 7 and 8 turn back to cover the historical context preceding my third major group of publications, which centre on the interdependence of the “private/social” and the “public/economic” in general, and of paid and unpaid work in particular. They were written between 1987 and 1999, in response to the dramatic shift – perhaps more dramatic than in any other comparable Western country – which was then under way in New Zealand’s dominant political discourse. This shift involved the ascendancy of the mainly Anglo-American movement, combining neo-conservative and neo-libertarian political philosophies, which came to be known internationally as the “New Right”.³⁴⁸

Chapter 7 focuses on the intellectual and material context of second wave feminism in New Zealand, in the period leading up to 1984. Part One outlines elements of feminist thinking which would later provide the grounds for a discourse countering the New Right. These centred on the concepts of “public” men versus “private” women, and in particular the significance of the insight that “the personal is political” – that public and private are inseparable and interdependent. New attention to women’s unpaid work, and how it was linked to paid work, was a key feature in the development of theories related to this insight. Doing and thinking about paid and unpaid work were both central to my own early contributions to *Broadsheet*, and formed the basis for later work contesting New Right discourse.

Part Two argues that while feminism did quickly build its own tradition of critical inquiry, distinctive historical factors made it remarkably difficult for New Zealand feminists even to comprehend the possibility of a New Right shift, let alone recognise

³⁴⁸ The origins of this term are unclear, but the *New York Times* used it, without capitals, in 1965: “Just as Reagan began his meteoric political career, the incipient neoconservative core coalesced around *Public Interest* under the editorial leadership of Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell in 1965. The *New York Times* described the journal as ‘expressing a trend in social thought’ called the ‘new right’, presciently heralding the significance of the new journal.” Dolores Janiewski and Paul Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005), pp.68-9.

its onset. These factors included a conviction that social justice had become the unshakeable philosophical foundation of New Zealand society, in the context of progressivism; an assumption that achieving social justice required state action; and a lack of awareness of the extent to which the gendered division of labour underpinned the economic and social policy consensus which had dominated New Zealand politics since the first Labour government took office in 1935.

Part Three discusses how, by the early 1970s, the old consensus was already unravelling on every side. As well as women's increasing participation in higher education (discussed in Chapter 2), two marked but contradictory changes showed how frayed the gendered structure had become, in both social and economic terms. The first and most obvious change was married women's increasing involvement in paid employment. The second was the advent of the Domestic Purposes Benefit for sole parents in 1973.

Part Four focuses on the assumption that state involvement would be essential to achieving social justice for women, a view borne out by the remarkably feminist 1975 report of the Select Committee on the status of women. By the early 1980s, growing opposition to Prime Minister Robert Muldoon's autocratic reign at the head of the National government³⁴⁹ had combined with new analyses of state activities to throw the nature of state involvement into question.

Part One: The politics of housework

The first of the four major interlinked feminist demands in the early 1970s was genuine equal pay, both for equal work and for work of equal value, combined with equal opportunity. Next came free, adequate childcare; control by women of their own bodies, including access to safe contraception and abortion; and an end to sex stereotyping and commercial "sexploitation".³⁵⁰ Together, these demands embodied two of the most profound insights of the second wave. First, the only way to make

³⁴⁹ Robert Muldoon became Leader of the National party following its defeat by Labour in 1972. He was Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for nine years, from 1975 until National's defeat in the snap election called by him in July 1984.

³⁵⁰ See Dann, *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand, 1970-1985*, p.10.

sense of women's lives was to understand that the personal was political, meaning primarily that the public and private spheres, apparently distinct, were completely interwoven and interdependent. Secondly, perceiving the world from this standpoint meant that philosophical and political theories based on the overt or tacit assumption of separate spheres, where women were adjunct to and dependent on men, no longer made sense. In the nineteenth century, regardless of the extent to which women were actually involved in the public sphere as wage workers:

The dominant conception of liberties ...was in fact the attribution of rights to heads of households. These rights functioned to enshrine the home as private and inviolable, and the champions of these rights were naturally adult men, particularly those with the privilege and wealth to maintain independent households.³⁵¹

First wave feminist movements struggled long and hard to have women accorded even basic formal rights in the public sphere, such as voting, standing for public office, and earning enough from paid employment to live independently. But they also struggled to win basic rights in the private sphere, insisting that what appeared to be merely personal issues between adults and within families – from “domestic” physical and sexual violence to women's inability to control their fertility or retain their children, property and earnings – were in fact public issues. So important was this struggle that in Linda Gordon's view, “the whole welfare state, including particularly its regulatory organizations, derived to a significant degree from the feminist agenda of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”³⁵²

Second wave feminists drew on their own experience and insights to prove that the two spheres were not naturally or divinely ordained, but humanly constructed. They were equally significant, equally political, and above all intertwined and inseparable. Women's subordinate status in the private world both reflected and reinforced their subordinate status in the public world. “The personal” included the whole of this supposedly separate and inherently non-political private world to which women had in theory, and to a large extent in practice, been relegated. The gendered structure of adult female dependence prevailing in both public and private worlds was seen not simply as

³⁵¹ Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston 1880-1960* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), p.294.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p.297.

entrenched and inequitable, but as unjust, oppressive and therefore damaging for women, regardless of where they were positioned within it. But this perception was not blind to other axes of oppression. From the outset, it was recognised that discourses of gender, race and class intersected and interacted with each other.

Broadsheet's second editorial was on equal pay;³⁵³ but predictably, given the preponderance of young mothers and students in the early years of the second wave movement, and of “housewives” among New Zealand women generally, unpaid work, including reproduction, at first featured much more prominently than paid work. In its first year of publication (July 1972 to June 1973), *Broadsheet* carried seven articles on paid work, and seventeen articles and reviews on unpaid work, including marriage, child-rearing, sole motherhood, and alternative living arrangements, as well as another ten articles on reproductive issues, including abortion.

The strong focus on unpaid work was not due solely to the demographics of the fledgling feminist movement, the dominance of the male breadwinner/female housewife pattern, or women’s apparent ignorance and disregard of economics. It also had political significance. As Ann Oakley noted in *Housewife* (first published in 1974):

A vast number of books have been written about men and their work; by contrast, the work of women has received very little serious sociological or historical attention. Their unpaid work in the home has scarcely been studied at all.³⁵⁴

I can chart a clear shift in my own thinking and writing about unpaid work around that time. In Chapter 3, I set out how and why, as a 20-year-old wife and mother, I at first focused on the relatively simplistic and limited idea, following Friedan,³⁵⁵ that women had as much right and as much need as men did to “fulfil their potential” through paid employment in the public world. At the same time, as Chapter 2 shows, I was acutely aware of the complex demands, burdens, rewards and emotions of unpaid work. Friedan had much more to say about work in the home than work anywhere else; but her argument did not extend to asking why it was unpaid, or very low paid, why women were solely responsible for it, or why it had so little status, let alone how it

³⁵³ *Broadsheet*, no.2 (1972), p.1. The author was Kitty Wishart.

³⁵⁴ Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p.ix.

³⁵⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

related to the structure of female and male participation in paid work. The terms in which she discussed it showed that she accepted and endorsed both its low status and its lack of political significance.

Friedan specifically contrasted two groups of women. The first group got through the necessary housework and childcare quickly and efficiently (often with the paid help of other women), despite – or in her view, because of – being committed to demanding paid work of their own. The second group saw housework and childcare as their main job, often chose to do it themselves “full time, even when they could well afford two servants”,³⁵⁶ yet never got through it, and sometimes had the deplorable habit of requiring frequent and extensive help from their hard-working husbands. She explained this apparent paradox as a special case of the principle that work expands to fill the time available. It was part of the “double deception” of the feminine mystique, which she clearly set out for readers:

1. The more a woman is deprived of function in society at the level of her own ability, the more her housework, mother-work, wife-work, will expand – and the more she will resist finishing her housework or mother-work, and being without any function at all...
2. The time required to do the housework for any given woman varies inversely with the challenge of the other work to which she is committed. Without any outside interests [which could include voluntary work, though Friedan made it clear that “routine community work” did not count, only “leadership”], a woman is virtually forced to devote her every moment to the trivia of keeping house.³⁵⁷

For women themselves, the damaging results of excessive attention to unpaid work were said to include obesity, alcoholism, chronic fatigue, neurotic “sex-seeking”, and, worst of all, female domination of the family. In Friedan’s view, it was this misdirection of women’s “aggressive energies”, stemming from their misguided devotion to home and family, that was currently driving men to a variety of hostile responses, from extra-marital affairs to a flood of plays and novels obsessed “with images of the predatory female”. All this justified “male outrage” was “the result, surely, of an implacable hatred for the parasitic women who keep their husbands and sons from growing up”. She went on to make explicitly Freudian links between “what

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p.210.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

is happening to the women in America” and “the homosexuality spreading like a murky smog over the American scene”, as well as premature sexual activity in general.³⁵⁸

In short, the feminine mystique keeping women in the home was to blame for every deviation from the unquestioned pattern of normal, healthy relations between women and men, which included women’s responsibility for (necessary) housework and childcare. While capable women could, even should, hire other women’s labour to free them for more important work, they should not expect men to help much, if at all, let alone take any responsibility. Nor should they expect the world of paid work to change to accommodate unpaid work. It was up to them to work out how to combine their two roles, and Friedan implied that this was not particularly difficult.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, very different views of unpaid work began to circulate among feminists. One of the originating and best-known expressions of this shift, reaching New Zealand soon after it was published in 1970, came in Pat Mainardi’s short article, “The Politics of Housework”.³⁵⁹ The first publication put out by the Auckland Organisation for Women, formed in April 1972, was a reprint of this article.³⁶⁰ Mainardi argued that the dull, dirty but essential tasks of housework should be shared equally between partners, especially now that women shared the earning. Since this meant that men would lose the freedom from housework they had so long enjoyed, they had a clever and determined range of strategies to resist it, which she gave instructions for overcoming. She did not discuss children and childcare, nor did she link paid and unpaid work – except to note that, burdened as they were at home, it was small wonder so few women had made their mark on history.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.237-9. Friedan cites Kinsey’s statistic that at the age of 55, one in every two American men was engaging in extra-marital sex.

³⁵⁹ Pat Mainardi, “The Politics of Housework,” in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970). This article, which appears in many collections of the classic writings of the second wave, has remained one of the most widely read, remembered and quoted pieces of writing from that era. A web search undertaken on 11 February 2005 indicates that 35 years after it first appeared, it continues to feature as a set text in a wide range of women’s studies courses. Its continuing popularity may also indicate the persistence of the problem it deals with.

³⁶⁰ *Broadsheet*, no. 1 (1972), p.3. The Auckland Organisation for Women was one of four women’s liberation movement groups active in Auckland in the early 1970s. The others were Auckland Women’s Liberation (publishers of *Broadsheet*), Women for Equality, and a university student group.

Mainardi's way of writing appealed to me as strongly as her argument, although I did not yet have the confidence to use it as a model. At once personal and theoretical, satirical and earnest, funny and serious, it was an explicit, overtly feminist version of the "housewife humour" of post-war writers such as Betty Macdonald,³⁶¹ in which muted protest by women against carrying sole responsibility for housework and childcare, while being subject to men's domestic and financial power, had been surfacing for at least thirty years.

By the time I read Mainardi's article, I had paid work and was actively involved in feminism. I had enough first- or second-hand experience of typical female shop, office and factory jobs to know how different they were from Friedan's visions of desirable employment. Yet after my own difficult and demoralising experience of higher-status work, teaching teenage girls and lecturing at university and teachers' college, I had retreated with relief to minding an office, selling sheets and towels, and going back to university. By then I was living with my husband, one son at school, and the other attending daycare, in our own house in suburban Auckland. Chris had a work car, and I had my own car, so everything and everyone I needed was within easy reach. With improved skills, a higher household income, better housing, short hours "at work", school holidays off, and an after-school caregiver who also did some housework, unpaid work no longer seemed such a major practical issue for me, nor was it such a powerful source of low self-esteem, as it had been when I was first married.

Yet the less personally beset by unpaid work I felt, the more its significance grew in terms of my feminist thinking and writing. I knew perfectly well that it was only because of my own relatively fortunate situation that I had the time, energy and other resources to devote to feminism, and especially to *Broadsheet*. The consciousness-raising sessions I went to revolved around the contradictions of "women's role", which assumed that they would be financially and sexually dependent on men, but also totally responsible for men's and children's physical and emotional welfare. There and with friends, I spent a lot of time discussing the difficulties of living with male partners,

³⁶¹ This is an enormous genre, which continues to be extremely popular among women. The best known example is Betty Macdonald, *The Egg and I* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1942).

including how to persuade men to do their fair share of housework, and what a workably egalitarian marriage might look like.

Before I left New Zealand in January 1973, I contributed three relevant articles to *Broadsheet*: on how unpaid work affected paid work, on sex education, and on unpaid work. The serious, formal style of my first article, "Home Thoughts From A Broad" (July 1972),³⁶² derived more from Germaine Greer and from the sociology texts I was then reading than from Mainardi:

[T]here is evidence to suggest that [the male breadwinner/female housewife family pattern] works well enough for married men. According to a recent American study, they are far less neurotic and in better physical shape than unmarried men. But for married women the opposite is true: *they* are worse off, mentally and physically, than their unmarried sisters, and the rate of attempted suicide among housewives is nine times as high as that for any other occupational group.³⁶³

The main reason for the housewife's plight was, I suggested, lack of status, based on her position outside the income-earning labour force:

In a society where adults are ranked not by birth but by income and occupation, the "unemployed" housewife is naturally at the bottom of the ladder, along with children and old-age pensioners. Her household duties and child rearing are unpaid and do not count as "work". So she has no status at all, and this shows in the state of her mental and physical health.³⁶⁴

The focus on status could be seen as stemming both from my sociology studies and from my own relatively advantaged position at that time. I had not suffered physical or mental abuse by my partner, I had not been deprived of control over my body or money, and I had not had to contend with anything like real poverty. But that was part of the point. Second wave feminism was intent on making explicit and overturning the taken-for-granted economic, social and cultural structure which defined so many women's lives, not just on revealing and addressing its worst consequences. This structure, and the inherently low status of women within it, was seen as responsible for making the most extreme forms of personal harm to women possible, and then ensuring that even when women were harmed in these ways, they struggled to have such problems taken seriously in public.

³⁶² Anne Else, "Home Thoughts from a Broad," *Broadsheet*, no. 1 (1972).

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

The gendered structure which made women so vulnerable centred on “the family”. The dominant meaning of “family” (and the dominant type then) was a male “breadwinner” married to and living with a female “housewife” or “homemaker”, and their children. The desirability and normality of living in this kind of family was ceaselessly inculcated. In 1972, my explanation for the continuing dominance of this type of family was a functional one, based on the essential role it played in post-war consumption-based Western capitalist economies:

The family provides the spur to get a man to work and keep him there. It then uses his earnings to buy the products of his and others’ labour.... Since the wife probably consumes better in a state of chronic dissatisfaction with her life it is in the economy’s interest to keep her like this...³⁶⁵

One problem with this functional, economy-based explanation was that it left out subjectivity. It could not account for women’s emotional commitment to “taking care of” their families, so that doing so was bound up with their sense of who they were. Nor could it account for the contradictory emotions commonly associated with this role. It was this interweaving for women of subjectivity and caring work, and its consequences, that I focused on five years later, in “Holding Up Half the Sky”.³⁶⁶ Perhaps because I was writing about myself, I wrote less formally, in a more conversational voice. Many women later told me that this article had made a strong impression on them, remembered for many years, because it seemed to express their own situation so clearly:

Even when the actual physical work of running a household is divided with reasonable equity (and I realise very well that this is still an impossible dream for most women) why do women tend to feel fussy, bitchy and put upon – and guilty as well? After all, surely he *is* helping, doing his fair share – what more do we want? It’s difficult to explain and probably impossible to achieve, but what we want is a genuine division not of actual work but of *responsibility*. Women “fuss” not because they are inherently concerned with a mass of trivia, but because they are expected to keep a vast accumulation of tiny details on file in their brains and constantly check back like computers to find the appropriate information and act on it...

We cannot sit down or stay still for long, we are constantly jumping up – “I’ll just feed the cat/make the lunches/get in the washing” – in a desperate attempt to cross one more thing off the interminable mental checklist endlessly

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Anne Else, “Holding up Half the Sky,” *Broadsheet*, no. 50 (1977).

revolving in our brains. Then we are accused of niggling, of not being able to concentrate, of having second-class minds. It requires exceptional determination to resist the pressures exerted by trivia, by all the minutiae of daily life, and bring all your mental powers to bear on your work or your main interest...even for part of the day. Men can do great things and still not deny themselves a wife, a home, children. Women usually have to set aside all this, in order to achieve anything out of the average – unless of course they can afford to use other women to take over their other responsibilities...

Not until we can set our minds free from their constant preoccupation with everyday detail, or at least confine this concern to certain areas only, will we be able to realise our full creative potential.³⁶⁷

Even in the early 1970s, I did not suggest that the gendered structure could be fundamentally altered simply by “changing attitudes”, or setting up vanguard alternatives (although *Broadsheet* did later devote considerable attention to a range of attempts to live differently, such as communes). In 1972 I had predicted that overturning the gendered structure posed so profound a challenge to dominant constructions of meaning that it would require moving far beyond issues of gender:

We are [so] thoroughly conditioned into the system...that we are almost incapable of seriously attempting alternatives...So long as our merry-go-round economy is so firmly linked to the family as we know it, change is not likely; and women will continue to find themselves at the bottom of the social heap. Perhaps we must finally deal not only with male chauvinism but also with the whole crazy system itself.³⁶⁸

Part Two: “Participation and belonging”

Other commentators have argued that New Right discourse could advance so rapidly partly because it filled an existing intellectual vacuum. Colin James, writing in 1986, saw New Zealand politics as based on “[s]ecurity-seeking individualism”, which had “not left much scope for high-flown idealism and theories...except in periods of big change”.³⁶⁹ Analysing the post-war period up to 1984, Jane Kelsey highlighted “the weak development of a national intellectual tradition, or even a strong contest of

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Else, “Home Thoughts from a Broad,” p.8.

³⁶⁹ Colin James, *The Quiet Revolution: Turbulence and Transition in Contemporary New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1986), p.23.

ideas”.³⁷⁰ Bruce Jesson was more explicit: “There wasn’t a politically conscious union movement... an intellectual tradition of critical enquiry...even an intelligent conservatism.” He did not except the “women’s movement” that arose in the 1970s, seeing it as simply one expression of a broad-based, liberal, socially concerned “emotional moralism”.³⁷¹

As the previous chapters and the opening section of this chapter show, one of feminism’s greatest achievements was that it did quickly begin building its own tradition of intellectual critical enquiry, drawing on whatever it could unearth of the buried feminist history of oppositional imagining (as documented by, for example, Dale Spender).³⁷² The breadth and depth of this tradition went (and generally still goes) unrecognised, partly because it focused on a whole range of ostensibly “private” issues connected with gender relations, which the existing intellectual and political traditions did not (and largely still do not) consider fit subjects for serious enquiry.

The development of feminist theory in New Zealand, as elsewhere, took place in a specific historical context. Shelagh Cox and Bev James, in their introduction to the first New Zealand feminist book focusing on the division of public and private spheres, noted that: “As feminists, we are shaped by the very world we struggle to transcend.”³⁷³ Three factors, in particular, made it difficult for second wave feminists in New Zealand to recognise the onset and significance of New Right discourse, and help to explain why I did not begin writing in response to it until 1987, when I started working for the Royal Commission on Social Policy.

First, there was a widely shared belief that in the second half of the twentieth century, the social justice model had become fundamental to modern Western societies in general, and New Zealand in particular – so fundamental that it was rarely articulated,

³⁷⁰ Jane Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment: A World Model for Structural Adjustment?* (Auckland: Auckland University Press/Bridget Williams Books, 1995), p.20.

³⁷¹ Bruce Jesson, *Behind the Mirror Glass* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987), pp.8-9.

³⁷² Spender, *Women of Ideas (and What Men Have Done to Them)*, Spender, ed., *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions*.

³⁷³ Shelagh Cox, ed., *Public and Private Worlds: Women in Contemporary New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1987), p.14.

let alone questioned or debated. In 1993, looking back over the first twenty years of the second wave, Rosslyn Noonan and I stressed that:

In all our struggles we have relied upon the concepts of justice, fairness and equality to support our case. We have assumed these are still values upon which we wish to organise our society. We have also acknowledged that formal expression to these principles can come only through the intervention of the state through the enactment of legislation.³⁷⁴

It was generally taken for granted among feminists that the case for this model had already been made and won. The opposing case, best summed up as “survival of the fittest”, was a barely comprehended dusty historical relic, and history did not run backwards.

The history of Maori-Pakeha relations meant that many Maori did not share this historically naïve belief, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains. She identifies a “set of interconnected ideas” around which “History as a modernist project is assembled”. These include:

the idea that History is about development. Implicit in the notion of development is the notion of progress. This assumes that societies move forward in stages of development much as an infant grows into a fully developed adult human being.³⁷⁵

Most Pakeha “baby-boomers”, the generation born in the twenty years after World War II, received an education that left them as ignorant of the history of colonisation and race/culture relations in New Zealand as they were of the history of gender relations. They implicitly understood “our nation’s story” to be one of uneven but repeatedly renewed progress towards prosperity, coupled with a developing local form of social justice. In my work on the 1950s, I suggested that what the baby-boomers did learn, as well as what they did not learn, promoted this faith in progress. In education, for example:

...primary classrooms were transformed by the approaches derided by critics as “the play way”. Secondary schooling changed too...In 1944 the school leaving

³⁷⁴ Margaret Wilson, “Women and Power: Law, Economics, Politics and Decision-Making,” *Women’s Studies Journal* 3, no. 1 (1987): p.35. Wilson, who headed the Law School at the University of Waikato, was President of the Labour party 1984-1987, then chief political adviser and head of the Prime Minister’s Office 1987-1989. Entering Parliament in 1999, she became Attorney-General and Minister of Justice and of Labour. She became Parliament’s first female Speaker in 2005.

³⁷⁵ Mead, “Nga Aho O Te Kakahu Matauranga: The Multiple Layers of Struggle by Maori in Education”, pp.36-7. This author is now identified as Linda Tuhiwai Smith.

age was raised to fifteen...And all these reforms were being put in place at a time when school rolls were soaring...The driving force behind all the innovations was equality of opportunity – the right of every citizen to an equal chance in life.³⁷⁶

These state endeavours, limited as they were by prevailing discourses of gender, race and class, nevertheless assumed a “social citizenship or rights-based model”³⁷⁷ of the welfare state. This model required the state to strive towards much more than mere subsistence for all its citizens, at the same time avoiding an unduly wide gap between the highest and the lowest incomes and standards of living. Twenty-five years later, Robert Muldoon himself indicated just how consistent and broad-based the cross-party political reliance on these precepts had remained, when he stated that the Gross National Product measure was “faulty because it does not measure the spread of wealth inside a country, or comparative price levels between, say, food and luxuries”.³⁷⁸

The 1972 Royal Commission on Social Security provided the best summary of the contemporary New Zealand version of social justice, when it defined the “good society” as based on “a sense of participation and belonging to the community”.³⁷⁹ Political debate was not about whether this was a valid goal, or what “community” might mean in practice, but about the practicalities of how to make the aspiration a reality. Feminists joined the debate on these implicitly understood terms, as did some Maori activists and Pakeha anti-racists. Their starting point was not, as Colin James has reductively suggested for both feminism and Maori activism, “denial of real access to the spoils and fruits of society”.³⁸⁰ It was the full extension of social justice to all women in their own right as female human beings and citizens, rather than as men’s dependents or even identical equivalents. The ridicule and hostility brought out by feminist protest and the depth of the resistance to feminist demands showed how wide the gap between the rhetoric and the reality was, and how thoroughly women had been excluded, but did not refute the social justice model itself.

³⁷⁶ Else, “Up the Garden Path: *Janet and John* Revisited,” pp.231-2. This essay was based on work done in the mid-1980s.

³⁷⁷ Jonathan Boston and Paul Dalziel, eds., *The Decent Society? Essays in Response to National's Economic and Social Policies* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.2.

³⁷⁸ Robert Muldoon, *The Rise and Fall of a Young Turk* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1974), p.121.

³⁷⁹ Royal Commission on Social Security, “Report on Social Security in New Zealand,” (Wellington: Government Printer, 1972), p.55.

³⁸⁰ James, *The Quiet Revolution: Turbulence and Transition in Contemporary New Zealand*, p.49.

The second factor was that in New Zealand, state activism across a wide range of fields had long been seen as a normal and indeed essential aspect of progress towards the social justice model.³⁸¹ As I concluded in my work on the 1950s, this was reinforced for those born since 1945.³⁸² By 1954, they were taller, heavier and better fed than children had been twenty years earlier, providing living proof that, “the welfare state programme and the focus on families worked for children at the most basic level.”³⁸³ For the baby-boomers, the new classrooms and the bright new *Janet and John* reading books, along with “the Bertie Germ posters and the polio vaccines, or even the revolting school milk and the dental nurses in their feared ‘murder house’,” sent “a consistent message which can perhaps best be summed up by the word ‘entitlement’.”³⁸⁴ This generational experience supported the widespread assumption that, as later sections of this chapter explain, more and different state involvement, rather than less, would be crucial to achieving feminist goals. The possibility of a shift in political discourse powerful enough to undermine and even reverse the role of the state in promoting social justice, let alone overturn the case for social justice itself, was unthinkable.

The third factor was the general lack of understanding, which feminists shared, of the remarkable extent to which the whole interlocked edifice of avowedly egalitarian economic and social policy in New Zealand, based on the premises outlined above, *depended* on the maintenance of a rigidly gendered structure centred on the nuclear family – and vice versa. Support for this kind of family had been a key plank in the policy platform of successive governments since the first Labour government had

³⁸¹ In this respect, New Zealand contrasted strongly with the USA, where strong opposition to President Roosevelt’s innovative use of the state to provide jobs and boost economic activity during the Great Depression of the 1930s, through his New Deal policies, became an important driver in the postwar construction of the US-based New Right movement. See Janiewski and Morris, forthcoming; for a list of New Deal state initiatives, see <http://www.bergen.org/AAST/Projects/depression/successes.html> (accessed 22 April 2005).

³⁸² Strictly speaking, I was not a baby-boomer, as I was born in May 1945, and my conception was partly due to the circumstances of wartime. Yet in terms of childhood experience, I was part of the baby-boom generation.

³⁸³ Else, “Up the Garden Path: *Janet and John* Revisited,” p.231. I went on to note that by 1954, “the average 15-year-old boy was 100 mm taller and 12 kg heavier than in 1934. Though girls made less dramatic gains, they were taller by 40 mm and heavier by 7.5 kg. School medical inspections showed that malnutrition had fallen from 9.49 per cent to 2.4 per cent for Pakeha children, and from 7.94 to 3.27 percent for Maori children.”

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

instituted the norm of the “family wage”, meaning a male wage rate sufficient to support a man, his wife and three children. Economist Deborah Mabbett, writing for the 1987-88 Royal Commission on Social Policy, described this as “the establishment of a structure of dependency, whereby those in employment had a duty of support to certain designated individuals who were not in employment”.³⁸⁵

Policies based on this structure were just as integral a part of the complex system of controls designed to maintain economic stability and equity (at least in the form of a relatively narrow spread of living standards among Pakeha nuclear family households) as import licensing and farm price supports. It was a package deal, able to hold together only so long as there was no major change in any part, and it involved structures of race and class as well as gender. “Full employment” paying a “family wage” was conceived of in terms of Pakeha men only, backed up by supports such as cheap housing, public education and health care, family benefit, and subsidies on “basic necessities” (as distinct from “luxuries”, on which a range of duties, taxes and import restrictions were imposed). It was later envisaged that women, together with rural Maori and Pacific migrants, could conveniently provide a restricted and/or reserve supply of urban labour as the controlled economy required it. But this limited involvement would not undermine the structure itself; indeed, it could be used as evidence of the structure’s natural, biological and therefore immutable basis.³⁸⁶

The gendered structure of dependency also assumed both “static real wages” and “stability in the organisation of households and activities undertaken within them”.³⁸⁷ In other words, it assumed that the major features of the gendered division of labour would stay in place indefinitely. This stasis would in turn keep social welfare viable,

³⁸⁵ Deborah Mabbett, “Labour Market Policy and New Zealand’s Welfare State,” in *The April Report: Report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy, Vol. II*, ed. Royal Commission on Social Policy (Wellington: Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988), p.567.

³⁸⁶ For example, the first issue of *Broadsheet* quoted, without comment, this (unsourced) recent statement by Dr A.M. Rutherford, MB, ChB (NZ), FROG, a prominent obstetrician and gynaecologist: “There are important emotional differences between men and women. Man is the dominant partner, the hunter, the lover. Woman is better at repetitive tasks, e.g. knitting, which explains her particular aptitude for mass production lines in factories, or in occupation that calls for continuous repeated small tasks. On the other hand, a man is better at policy making, the making of long range plans, at seeing an objective undeterred by side issues. Woman tends to stay with the minutiae and therefore not to see the wood for the trees. Strong words? Perhaps, and there are exceptions of course, but these too tend to have manly characteristics. Joan of Arc for instance was more man than woman.” *Broadsheet*, no. 1 (1972), p.3.

³⁸⁷ Mabbett, “Labour Market Policy and New Zealand’s Welfare State,” p.566.

by “ensuring that most [working age] people did not require the support of the state except for short periods of their lives”.³⁸⁸ As Brian Easton told a small radical feminist conference in 1973, the concept of a gendered structure of dependence – where “a woman receives economic support in return for looking after a man” – was “built into the structure of our Welfare State”.³⁸⁹ Leading male politicians’ frank reactions to early feminist protests showed just how embedded the gendered structure was – for example when Robert Muldoon stated, opposing equal pay: “Could we contemplate the situation where a woman getting equal pay is the breadwinner, and the husband stays home and looks after the children? I don’t think we could.”³⁹⁰

Part Three: The unravelling consensus

In the “long boom” of the post-war years, the gendered structure seemed to work well enough for those who fitted the mould and followed the rules. Between 1960 and 1974, although the labour force grew each year by between 2 and 2.5 percent, registered unemployment stayed below 0.5 percent.³⁹¹ Equally significantly, the post-war baby boom in New Zealand “was longer, more intense and [had fertility levels] higher than in any comparable country”.³⁹² By the start of the 1970s (as Chapter 3 noted), early marriage, followed by rapid childbearing, had become a pervasive norm. In demographic terms, these “middle or late baby-boom parents” were in fact “the most aberrant [parenting generation] in Pakeha history since about the 1880s”; they achieved peak rates of teenage fertility, had high levels of pre-marital conception, and often jumped precipitately into marriage at very young ages”.³⁹³

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ *Broadsheet* no.9 (1973), p.11. This report of Easton’s talk contained the first reference in *Broadsheet* to the 1972 Royal Commission on Social Security.

³⁹⁰ Robert Muldoon, interview on Feminine Viewpoint, 2YA, 9 June 1971; quoted in *Broadsheet*, no. 4 (1972), p.1. Elsewhere, Easton makes the valid point that while “It is usual to blame the failure to respond effectively [to both economic and social change] on...Muldoon...that overplays the importance of the individual, and underplays the institutional rigidity that was inherent in the detailed interventionist political process which had developed.” Brian Easton, “A Permanent Revolution? Zealots and Common Sense,” *New Zealand Studies* 7, no. 2 (1997): p.31. Muldoon powerfully symbolised that rigidity.

³⁹¹ Royal Commission on Social Policy, “Vol II: Future Directions,” (Wellington: Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988), pp.492-3.

³⁹² Ian Pool and Richard Bedford, *Population Change: From Dynamics and Structures to Policies* (Hamilton: Population Studies Centre, University of Waikato, 1997), p.11.

³⁹³ Ian Pool and Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby, “Fathers, Families, Futures: A Population Perspective,” in *Perspectives on Fathering: Issue Paper No. 4*, eds. Stuart Birks and Paul Callister, (Palmerston North: Centre for Policy Evaluation, Massey University, 1998), pp.12-22.

To those who joined what was then called the women's liberation movement at the start of the 1970s, the structure looked all too permanent. But the advent of second wave feminism was not the only indication that it was no longer viable. Just as it was already too late to rely on the old forms of economic control, as the New Zealand economy went through "external diversification...in an increasingly globalised world",³⁹⁴ so it was too late to rely on the old forms of policing gender boundaries. Both were unravelling together.

Apart from women's increasing participation in higher education,³⁹⁵ the most obvious patch of fraying was that women, particularly married women, were doggedly becoming a larger and more visible part of the paid labour force. This involvement was fuelled not only by the quest for a higher standard of living (particularly in terms of lightening the physical burden of housework), but also by the expansion of rank-and-file service and light industry jobs in occupations where women predominated. In the quarter century after World War II, there was a slow but steady rise in the proportion of all married women aged 15-64 who were in paid employment for 20 hours or more a week. From less than 8 percent in 1945 (when Maori women were not included in the statistics), it had risen to 26 percent by 1971. By then, married women made up half the female labour force.³⁹⁶

Change came slowly, and on strictly gendered terms. The ranks of employed women were heavily swelled by the baby boomers, and the youngest women remained the most likely to be in paid employment. In 1966, labour force activity was highest among women aged 15-19, at 62 percent, and barely rose above half that for any other age group. Ten years later, only among women under 25 were more than 50 percent active in the labour force. Job advertisements specified whether a male or a female was required. Outside the public service, industrial awards specified either lower female

³⁹⁴ Easton, "A Permanent Revolution? Zealots and Common Sense," p.31. This article gives a useful summary of the economic changes taking place from the mid-1960s.

³⁹⁵ See Chapter 2.

³⁹⁶ See Rosemary Du Plessis, "Stating the Contradictions: The Case of Women's Employment," in *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary Du Plessis, et al. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), and Horsfield, *Women in the Economy: A Research Report on the Economic Position of Women in New Zealand*.

wage rates, or no rate for females at all, confidently assuming there would be none in that occupation.³⁹⁷ Just as New Zealand's "product and destination concentration ratio[s] were among the most extreme among the OECD [countries]",³⁹⁸ so the concentration of women in a narrow range of jobs, levels, and pay rates appeared to be extreme too.³⁹⁹ Nevertheless, more and more women were becoming involved in some kind of paid work after marriage, as well as before it.

Another significant area of fraying in the structure was the politically embarrassing growth in the number of "solo mothers", both previously married and never married.⁴⁰⁰ Their most pressing practical dilemma was obvious: how to earn a living and at the same time care for a child, particularly in the preschool years. In the 1950s and 1960s the definition of the "good mother" as a woman who cared for her children at home, supported financially by her husband, became so entrenched, and so few feasible childcare alternatives were available for sole mothers, that even separated and divorced mothers were sometimes encouraged to offer their young children for adoption.⁴⁰¹

The plight of sole mothers had been one reason for setting up the 1972 Royal Commission. Clearly, these women and their children were finding it extremely difficult to participate in and belong to the community. In 1973 the new Labour government decided to follow the Commission's recommendation and make a statutory Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) available to all sole parents, regardless of why they

³⁹⁷ In 1968, more than 400 of the 737 awards and agreements studied in a 1970 Department of Labour survey did not envisage the employment of women, and set male wage rates only. Of the 362 registered unions, 121 were male-only. Mabbett, "Labour Market Policy and New Zealand's Welfare State," p.575.

³⁹⁸ Brian Easton, "From Rogernomics to Ruthanasia," in *Beyond the Market: Alternatives to Economic Rationalism*, ed. S. Rees, G. Rodley, and F. Stilwell (Marrickville NSW: Pluto Press, 1993), p.152.

³⁹⁹ On occupational segregation, both vertical and horizontal, in the 1970s, see Chapter 3.

⁴⁰⁰ Melanie Nolan notes that this increase was indeed significant: "The number of unmarried mothers keeping their children in a sole-parent situation rose from 18.5 per cent in 1962 to 35 per cent in 1974." Melanie Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press/Historical Branch, Internal Affairs, 2000), p.270. This increase was evident well before and was not primarily due to the DPB becoming statutory. In a 1977 survey of sole mothers, a quarter had been told nothing about the benefits available. See Society for Research on Women in New Zealand, "What Shall I Do? The Unmarried Mother's Decision," (Auckland: SROW, 1977).

⁴⁰¹ A private charitable organisation in Auckland, the Motherhood of Man, provided one of the very few forms of assistance available to all mothers who needed paid work, including single mothers: a day nursery, set up in 1946 with the purpose of "aiding those Mothers who MUST work and who do so to raise their living standards to a decent and worthy level". The same organisation also found homes for single pregnant women, and provided adoption services. By the 1950s, although the nursery continued to operate, its literature no longer carried any references to helping single (as distinct from formerly married) mothers to work and keep their babies. See Else, "The Need Is Ever Present: The Motherhood of Man Movement and Stranger Adoption in New Zealand."

were parenting alone. Melanie Nolan notes that the National party “welcomed the measure – indeed, it had brought its own unsuccessful Domestic Purposes Benefit Bill before the House earlier in the year, but it did not accept the statutory principle”.⁴⁰² Rather than trying to turn sole mothers into breadwinners, the DPB kept the gendered structure intact by providing a state substitute for the absent male breadwinner’s contribution. From the start, it was far from generous. The rate for a mother and one child was initially set at well under half the average male wage, and not much more than half the average female wage.⁴⁰³

Part Four: Rethinking the state

Both the “working mother” and the “solo mother” contradicted the logic of the gendered structure, which had not been designed to fit either of them. As the pathologising label of “suburban neurosis” and the upsurge of (often conflicting) protest suggested, the “ordinary woman”, characterised as the housewife and mother at home, was finding it increasingly ill-fitting too.⁴⁰⁴ In 1973, the Labour government actioned its campaign promise “to look seriously at the status of women, with a view to introducing anti-discrimination legislation” by setting up a Select Committee on Women’s Rights.⁴⁰⁵ Its report, *The Role of Women in New Zealand Society*, was released in June 1975 (International Women’s Year).⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰² Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*, p.267.

⁴⁰³ In December 1973, the average ordinary time wage was \$55.60 for women and \$80.35 for men. That year, the DPB for a woman and one dependent child was \$36.50. See Ann Beaglehole, *Benefiting Women: Income Support for Women, 1893-1993* (Wellington: Social Policy Agency, 1993).

⁴⁰⁴ Medical doctor Stephen Taylor first used the term “suburban neurosis” as far back as 1938, but it came into common use only after World War II in Britain. Stephen Taylor, “The Suburban Neurosis,” *The Lancet*, no. 1 (1938), Stephen Taylor, “Suburban Neurosis up to Date,” *The Lancet*, no. 1 (1958). It was not widely used in New Zealand public debate until the 1970s. Journalist Cherry Raymond used the much more accurate term “house arrest” to describe the situation of women isolated in suburban areas with “few community centres, almost no day-care centres, few parks, few daytime cultural activities and little opportunity for casual social contact”, and suggested that “planners look forward on behalf of women, as a step towards a much needed consideration of women as individuals rather than as mere instruments of social and economic policy”. *Broadsheet* no.36 (1976).

⁴⁰⁵ Dann, *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand, 1970-1985*, p.42. Dann notes that eight women’s liberation groups made submissions; the Auckland Women’s Liberation submission alone ran to 40 pages.

⁴⁰⁶ Select Committee on Women’s Rights, “The Role of Women in New Zealand Society: Report of the Select Committee on Women’s Rights, June 1975,” (Wellington: Government Printer, 1975).

Analysing the report for *Broadsheet*, Phillida Bunkle described it as “the first official document to adopt basic feminist premises...it does not blame women for their oppression. There are no apologies or suggestions that this is what women ‘really’ want.”⁴⁰⁷ Julie Thompson agreed, saying that while it was “not the visionary document idealists might have wished for, it is a liberal document almost un hoped for by realists”. However, the report “embodies little real encouragement for role sharing and several times gives explicit endorsement to a continuation of women’s traditional motherhood role”.⁴⁰⁸ Bunkle pointed out that there was a “crucial ambiguity” in the report, centring on women’s unpaid work and place within the family:

Ultimately the Committee avoided the issue of the relationship between the traditional sacred family unit and the liberation of women...They stress throughout the Report that moves toward equal opportunity are not intended to threaten the primacy of the family or women’s place within it...The Report tries to avoid the conflict between reinforcing the traditional family role and the promotion of economic and social equality by putting the choice ONTO US.⁴⁰⁹

To bring about equal rights for women, the Committee recommended that the government’s first priority “should be the enactment of a statute proscribing discrimination against any person on grounds of sex alone”.⁴¹⁰ Such discrimination was then perfectly legal. The response came with the passing of the Human Rights Commission Act in 1977. But merely outlawing discrimination was not sufficient. Positive state action was also required. Legislation to extend a limited form of equal pay for equal work from the public sector to the rest of the labour force had been passed in 1972. Now the Committee urged that not only must “the principle of equal opportunity...be established in law”, but “there is an obvious need for active policies in other areas to ensure the removal of all areas of disadvantage to women”.⁴¹¹

The most obvious need was for more childcare services, not only for employed mothers, but also for those at home. The Select Committee concluded that, “the Government has the key role. It should be not only the largest single source of

⁴⁰⁷ Phillida Bunkle, "The Yellow Paper?," *Broadsheet*, no. 32 (1975): p.25.

⁴⁰⁸ Julie Thompson, "Everything Remains the Same," *Broadsheet*, no. 32 (1975): p.27.

⁴⁰⁹ Bunkle, "The Yellow Paper?," p.27.

⁴¹⁰ Select Committee on Women's Rights, "The Role of Women in New Zealand Society: Report of the Select Committee on Women's Rights, June 1975," p.97. The committee was chaired by Norman Douglas, MP, Roger Douglas’s father.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.19, 21.

assistance...but also the overseer of future growth in this area.”⁴¹² Moreover, paid maternity leave should be introduced for employed women, with “the main cost ... borne by the social security system”.⁴¹³ As Bunkle and Thompson pointed out, women’s responsibility for the care of children lay at the centre of the gendered structure, and the Committee’s recommendations on childcare and maternity leave were ignored. Until at least the mid-1980s, New Zealand remained:

...conspicuous internationally for its lack of paid parental leave and the meagre support it provided for preschool [and out-of-school] childcare...the government would not encourage mothers of young children to go out to work “merely to augment an already adequate family income”...The state was prepared to provide the DPB for solo parents and family assistance for two-parent families, but not to introduce measures such as adequate childcare that could have reconciled women’s wage work and domesticity.⁴¹⁴

The Select Committee’s report had concluded with a clear and unquestioning commitment to the role of the state:

The role of the Government will obviously be critical to the elimination of discrimination against women...and [to the] establishment of equal rights, both in the sense of setting up the machinery for implementation and also for providing examples for the rest of the community to follow.⁴¹⁵

Five months after the report appeared, the National party regained power, led by Robert Muldoon. Jane Kelsey links the development of opposition to state intervention with opposition to Muldoon’s rule: “Given that Muldoon was deeply identified with the strong, interventionist central state, it was not surprising that anti-Muldoon sentiments were often also anti-state.”⁴¹⁶ This was particularly the case for Maori activists; they knew only too well how malign state intervention could be.

For feminists, the issue of the state’s role was more complex. At first it made sense to see the absence of women in general, and feminists in particular, from state decision-making positions as the major problem. Up until the 1981 elections, there were never more than four women Members of Parliament, and very few women held senior

⁴¹² Ibid., p.91.

⁴¹³ Ibid., p.24.

⁴¹⁴ Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*, p.272. Paid parental leave was not introduced until 2002.

⁴¹⁵ Select Committee on Women's Rights, "The Role of Women in New Zealand Society: Report of the Select Committee on Women's Rights, June 1975," p.104.

⁴¹⁶ Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment: A World Model for Structural Adjustment?* , p.26.

positions of any kind in the public service and judiciary. Commenting in 1985 on the introduction in the 1970s and 1980s of “several acts of Parliament designed to improve the status of women”, Christine Dann concluded that it was “debatable whether these reforms, restricted as they are, would have been introduced without the preceding years of feminist agitation. Governments consisting mainly of men do not spontaneously generate such ideas – they respond to pressure from without.”⁴¹⁷

By the later 1970s, large amounts of feminist intellectual and practical energy were going into opposing state interventions targeted specifically at women. An attack on “bludging” sole mothers, including benefit cuts and intrusive searches for signs of cohabitation, was followed by regressive, demeaning abortion legislation. The far right anti-abortion movement turned to violence, with two arson attacks on Auckland services.⁴¹⁸ Like many other feminist issues, a woman’s right to choose does not fit easily into the traditional left/right divisions, and anti-choice politics were not the preserve of the right alone. While Labour certainly seemed more receptive to feminist concerns and proposals than National,⁴¹⁹ and from the 1970s, consistently had more women MPs, key feminist issues continued to be met with entrenched resistance. It also became clear that Labour women who did make it into Parliament could not be relied on for support.

In May 1980, hard work by feminist unionists and Labour activists resulted in the Working Women’s Charter⁴²⁰ being accepted by both the Federation of Labour and the Labour Party. In June, Labour repudiated the clause on abortion and instead called for a referendum. In *Broadsheet*, Rosslyn Noonan attacked the “long history of treachery by the party on this issue”, pointing out that the 1977 legislation had been drafted in

⁴¹⁷ Dann, *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand, 1970-1985*, p.44.

⁴¹⁸ The first arson attack was in 1976. The perpetrators were never found. The Sisters Overseas Service, which helped women go to Australia for abortions, was also hit by arson in 1978.

⁴¹⁹ Until 1996, New Zealand had a “first past the post” electoral system. This ensured that Parliament was dominated by the two major parties, Labour and National, even when neither could muster even 50 percent of the overall votes cast. To become MPs, women therefore had to be selected by one of these parties for winnable seats.

⁴²⁰ The Charter was drafted in 1977. Item No. 15 calls for: “Sex education and birth control advice to be freely available to all people. Legal, financial, social and medical impediments to safe abortion, contraception and sterilisation to be removed.” I was responsible for the insertion of the word “safe”, arguing that this covered all genuine concerns about possible dangers to women’s health, while leaving no room for inappropriate medical gate-keeping. For the text of the Charter, see Dann, *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand, 1970-1985*, p.75.

accordance with the report of a reactionary Royal Commission appointed by a Labour government. Noting that two prominent Labour women, one a new MP and one seeking nomination as a candidate, had supported the “latest sorry episode”, she concluded that, “strong personal political ambition” to succeed within the existing party structures “precludes a principled commitment to feminist goals”:

It is certainly true that the male system will seek to divide women – and will in many cases most successfully co-opt women to its own ends. Yet it is also true that we must have women working within the system in positions sufficiently powerful to prevent the full resources of the state from being used against us.

At present, radical feminist women are creating the climate which provides the opportunity for conservative women [among whom she included some Labour MPs] to move into positions previously denied all women.

We need to develop strategies to ensure that those women who owe their success at least in part to our movement’s activities recognise their debt and repay it by active support for the issues we regard as important.⁴²¹

Five years after the Select Committee report, the assumption that the role of the government was “critical to the elimination of discrimination against women” had been proven correct. But instead of positive state interventions on behalf of women, the aim had become “to prevent the full resources of the state from being used against us”.

Despite these concerns, most feminists continued to see the state as the only institution capable of ensuring that all women’s rights would (or would not) be effectively protected and that safe, accessible services and appropriate forms of support would (or would not) be available for all women to use as needed, in a context of formal equality and social justice. The problem was not how to stop the state intervening, but how to ensure that it did so in ways that would benefit all women. While getting rid of Muldoon would certainly help, it was not the solution. And while it was obviously important to get more women who were supportive of feminism into positions of power within state institutions, their ability to make a difference was by no means assured.

⁴²¹ Rosslyn Noonan, “Comment,” *Broadsheet*, no. 81 (1980): p.5.

Chapter 8: Women under Labour, 1984-1987

Introduction

This chapter covers the first term of the fourth Labour government, before I began to write in response to the New Right. Part One discusses the cautious feminist reaction to Labour's victory, and suggests that this initial caution was dispelled as the resurgent religious right, rather than the drivers and supporters of neo-liberalism, came to be perceived as the major problem. Part Two explores the interaction between these currents and my own writing. It raises the issue of the growth of critical theory focused on the role of the state from the left as well as the right, so that this role was "in contention across the political spectrum". The development of local Maori and feminist critiques, it suggests, were used by the proponents of neo-liberalism to distort and co-opt the points being made, in the interests of "reforms" which were intent on shrinking rather than improving welfare state interventions.

Part Three moves beyond pragmatic materialist explanations for Labour's rapid introduction of New Right economic policies to explore the intellectual appeal of New Right philosophy, focusing on its positioning as a value-free, "scientific" description of reality, and the way in which it "appeared to provide an authoritative, comprehensive set of 'first principles' for understanding the world". It concludes by looking at how the battle for control of policy and direction, fought out within the Labour party itself, seemed in 1987 to have been effectively won by the New Right, although outside the party and some sectors of the union movement, most feminists remained unaware of what was at stake.

Part One: Seeing the enemy?

By 1984, New Zealand's economy was under severe strain. Registered unemployment had risen from 3000 in 1975 to nearly 21,000 in 1980, and to 50,000 in 1984. Men were less affected than women, and Pakeha less than Maori or Pacific peoples. The

1981 Census showed that, “almost half of all Maori women – 47 percent – were entirely financially dependent on a benefit, and a quarter of all Pakeha women were in the same situation.”⁴²² A 1982 *Broadsheet* comment on the news asked, “Is the fact that 60 percent of young women of colour between the ages of 16 and 20 are unemployed a feminist or a racial issue? Surely both.”⁴²³ Robert Muldoon had clung to the old package deal, doing his utmost both to retain rigid economic controls and to preserve “traditional” New Zealand society, in the face of increasingly insistent calls for new policies to take account of both social and economic change. In the snap election of July 1984, Labour was elected to power “to govern a country which had been under an economic and social revolution for almost two decades, but where political and policy adaptation had not kept pace.”⁴²⁴

Yet Labour’s victory was only very cautiously welcomed by feminists. Mary O’Regan’s comment on the election for *Broadsheet* summed up the majority feminist response:

On the face of it, New Zealand women stand to fare better from this government. We have more women [12] in the House...two in cabinet...I think it’s safe to say that we have a government which is, at least, not anti-women, and at best will make it possible to move an inch or two further towards equity....Issues affecting women are always more prominent in pre-election rhetoric than in post-election practice...I’m pinning my hopes on the affirmative action promises.⁴²⁵

On election night, Rosslyn Noonan felt “an enormous sense of relief. But there was no euphoria, no excitement...instead of being joyful at the end of a successful battle, I felt we were just at the beginning of a long hard struggle”. Although “the presence of an increased number of women in Parliament would have a real impact”, the campaign had seemed “designed to reassure the finance houses, the big companies, the newspaper owners.” Yet “the Labour government comes to power with a far stronger commitment to women than any previously...We must work with those within the

⁴²² Else, “To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right,” p.239. These percentages included women who were dependent on a share of their partner’s benefit, where that was the household’s main income.

⁴²³ *Broadsheet* no.104 (1982), p.6.

⁴²⁴ Easton, “A Permanent Revolution? Zealots and Common Sense,” p.31.

⁴²⁵ Sonja Davies et al., “What Now? [Comment on the 1984 Election],” *Broadsheet*, no. 122 (1984).

Labour government who support our goals to create a climate where our priorities become the nation's priorities, where change is possible.”⁴²⁶

Support from the top was unlikely. Sandra Coney pointed out that Prime Minister David Lange, Richard Prebble and Mike Moore had all been named as preferred candidates by the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child. Roger Douglas, the new Minister of Finance, was the architect of a “baby bonus” scheme that, “against the advice of women in the party...offered a pitiful pittance to women who would stay out of the workforce”, and he had also written a paper attacking feminists in the party.⁴²⁷ Charmaine Pountney was the only one of the seven women commenting in *Broadsheet* to mention the threat of “a very powerful backlash from the ‘right right’” if feminists did not “get ourselves sufficiently organised to provide a working base for continuing change within and through the Labour party”.⁴²⁸

Her prophecy proved all too accurate. Instead of a Women's Summit (to parallel the Economic Summit and Maori Economic Summit), Ann Hercus, Minister for Women's Affairs, opted for a series of forums open to all women. Held in late 1984, these forums were inundated by busloads of women whose “presence and arguments were organised by an interlocking network”⁴²⁹ of fundamentalist religious and extreme right groups. Their immediate targets were Labour's proposals to set up a Ministry of Women's Affairs and ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). At the forums, it became clear that they also opposed any and every measure to enlarge women's equality and choices, including the entire Labour health policy. They called for lesbianism to be made illegal and for lesbian mothers to lose custody of their children. They also opposed any attempt to recognise the status of Maori as tangata whenua (host people of the land). In Auckland they shocked all other women present by interrupting the opening Maori powhiri (ceremony of welcome) with concerted singing of the National Anthem and calls to “speak

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p.14.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p.16.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Sandra Coney, “Forum Fever,” *Broadsheet*, no. 126 (1985): p.15.

English". That night, unknown persons set fire to Auckland's Ranfurly Road abortion clinic for the second time.⁴³⁰

At the forums, both Labour Party women and feminist movement women were taken completely by surprise, as were other interested women attending. Up until then, few had any idea of the power and tactics of the religious right, or the lengths to which it would go to attack any change or policy that could be labelled "feminist". Most of the relevant reports and articles published in *Broadsheet* before 1984 had focused on the most immediate concern: the strategies and actions of those who opposed access to safe abortion services. But from time to time there had been more wide-ranging discussions about what was happening on the right of the political spectrum. In 1977, Christine Dann wrote an editorial about a general "masculinist backlash", ranging from individual attacks by men and "sell-out sisters" to the actions of what she called the "dirty tricks brigade" and the "rabid right", including "conservative church groups".⁴³¹ She warned that feminists "should not underestimate the power which many of these people can wield, especially when they get organised", and urged the importance of reclaiming history.⁴³² In 1981, she titled another article "The New Right", defining this term as "the name being given to the vociferous and ultra-conservative groups, alliances and individuals who are clamouring for attention worldwide...The New Right believes in militarism, racism, nuclear warheads and nuclear power, the death penalty and God...It is anti-abortion and sexual freedom, against gay rights, opposes the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] in America, and is outspoken against all progress made by women in the last ten years."⁴³³

In the tenth anniversary issue (July/August 1982), Jane Kelsey again raised concerns about "the New Right", this time meaning the extreme right rather than fundamentalist religious groups.⁴³⁴ A recent, externally led reinvigoration of the New Zealand League of Rights had enabled it to serve as a highly organised, well-funded umbrella group

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Christine Dann, "The Anti-Feminist Anti-Woman Backlash," *Broadsheet*, no. 50 (1977).

⁴³² Ibid. Dann noted that at that time, a quarter of all MPs were members of the most prominent neo-conservative non-party organisation, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child.

⁴³³ Christine Dann, "The New Right," *Broadsheet*, no. 89 (1981). This appears to be the first use in a New Zealand journal or magazine article of the term "New Right". The promised second part of this article did not appear.

⁴³⁴ Jane Kelsey, "Eyes Right," *Broadsheet*, no. 101 (1982).

supporting and encouraging a wide range of right-wing local groups, from the Concerned Parents Association to the ultra-right New Force. The source of its funding was unclear, but it had links with extreme right organisations overseas. Claiming to stand for family, individual freedom, property rights and tradition, and against communism, its literature showed that it was antagonistic to blacks (including, in New Zealand, Maori and Pacific peoples), Jews, and the World Council of Churches. As for feminism, while the League had “not channelled much of its own energy directly against the feminist movement”:

it has provided active and ideological support for those who have been in the forefront of such attacks...much more is actually going on behind the scenes than is apparent at first glance...By working invisibly and taking a low-profile co-ordinating role the League is able to downplay its part in propagandizing its views, whilst ensuring that they get the fullest possible airing. Indeed, its fundamental importance lies in its ability to provide a stable, efficient and financially independent power base for the extreme right without alerting the public to its action. The success...is to be measured in the way that those affiliated groups and individuals spread the message. Their ability to achieve credibility and impact rests in their appearance as independent individuals and interest groups representing part of a spontaneous groundswell of concern over specific issues...⁴³⁵

The anti-CEDAW campaign bore out Kelsey’s and Dann’s concerns. A recent analysis of the 1980s notes that it:

featured a visit from an Australian representative of Women Who Want to Be Women, an anti-feminist group connected to the New Zealand and Australian League of Rights, and the US anti-feminist Eagle Forum. These groups combined Cold War fears about Communism and the UN with anti-leftist worries that dated back to the origins of feminism and sexual reform.⁴³⁶

Noting instances of support within Muldoon’s government for the far right, Kelsey believed that the timing of this “revival of the Right” was “no accident”. It came, she wrote:

...at a time when New Zealand’s carefully cultured image of the perfected welfare state is being replaced by that of a demoralised and divided society, fraught with economic strife and racial [and gender] tension. It is a time when people feel threatened and fearful of the future, and demand safe and easy explanations for the things which make them so uncomfortable. At the same time those in power, responsible for the whole mess, are looking for someone else to blame to get themselves off the hook. Scapegoats are indispensable at

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p.70.

⁴³⁶ Janiewski and Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets*, p.122.

times like this. Who better to lay the blame on than blacks, feminists, communists, gays or any others who can be easily discredited, and who have little legitimate power with which to fight back? If they do react in any way they merely fulfil the stereotype of the criminal troublemaker and justify even more repressive action by the State. Through all this, those in power can sit back and reap the benefits.⁴³⁷

Kelsey did not specifically include or discuss the religious right, but by 1984 its growth was much more obvious than that of the extreme right. A prescient analysis by Ivanica Vodanovich in the third issue of the *Women's Studies Journal* pointed out that following the early successes of pressure groups under Muldoon, notably over abortion, and a vigorous programme of expansion in the early 1980s, fundamentalist church leaders in New Zealand took a "radical change of direction", openly "intervening in political 'secular' issues".⁴³⁸ They justified their actions "in terms of the rapid increase in the past decade of legislative measures which affect the family, the status of women, the rights of parents and sexual morality" – in other words, state interference into those "areas of life previously regarded as private and sacrosanct", where women formerly had few or no avenues of redress for injustice and oppression.⁴³⁹ (Rape in marriage, for example, became a criminal offence only in 1985.) They argued that by legislating in these areas, the state had "blurred the boundary between religion and politics".⁴⁴⁰

Fundamentalists who backed this shift of direction were seen to be reacting "to what they interpret as a deliberate attempt to change the nature of New Zealand society and to limit their rights as Christians living in a Christian society". The role of women was the key factor:

The way in which the cosmology of the [fundamentalist] movement inter-relates the role of women, control of sexual activity, the family and national social order explains their opposition to recent measures...Changes in the role and status of women...slowly occurring over the past decade carry a double threat. They challenge the basis of social order and also reverse the God given pattern of authority...Women are the weak link in the pattern of divine order and their "insubordination" threatens the boundaries of the group.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ Kelsey, "Eyes Right," p.69.

⁴³⁸ Ivanica Vodanovich, "Woman's Place in God's World," *Women's Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (1985): p.76.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., p.77.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

Any policy designed to promote more equality, autonomy or choice for women was seen as undermining the “traditional family” and therefore “the nation”. Anti-nuclear and “pro-Maori” policies were similarly opposed.

Unlike the extreme right, these groups’ religious affiliations enabled them to operate openly and in concert. The rapid rise in their public political profile was unexpected and disconcerting in New Zealand, which has long rated internationally as being much more secular than most other Western countries, particularly the United States. Although social and economic conditions did provide fertile ground for this rise, as they did for the rise of the neo-liberal right, it did not occur spontaneously in response to change, as Vodanovich’s explanation might seem to suggest. As in the case of the extreme right, it was associated with developments offshore. Fundamentalist religion-based organisations that had already built a large and effective political lobby overseas, notably in the USA and Australia, played a catalysing, outreach role in New Zealand. This became clear in 1985, when Fran Wilde introduced a Private Member’s Bill to decriminalise male homosexuality and include “sexual orientation” as a prohibited ground for discrimination in the Human Rights Act:⁴⁴²

Moral missionaries from the US and Australia exhorted us to prevent the passage of this pernicious legislation...We found ourselves enlisted in a moral battle in which the military leaders often spoke with American accents, and at least one spoke Australian. Inspired by [Rev. Lou] Sheldon’s Traditional Values Coalition, and [Jerry] Falwell’s Moral Majority, the Coalition of Concerned Citizens...carried on the moral campaign after their American visitors departed our shores.⁴⁴³

The majority of New Zealanders did not take kindly to such tactics, nor to the evident involvement of far right overseas organisations. Moreover, the activities of their New Zealand counterparts made local feminists look moderate, reasonable and progressive. As one woman at the forums put it, “I’ve never called myself a super-feminist, but I’m not neanderthal.”⁴⁴⁴ Reflecting on the forums, Sandra Coney deplored the feminist movement’s recent history of internal conflict and division, and its failure to get

⁴⁴² The Homosexual Law Reform Act was passed on 9 July 1986, by a conscience vote of 49 for, 44 against, but the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Human Rights Act was delayed until 1993. For a detailed account of the battle over homosexual law reform, see Janiewski and Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets*.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., p.124.

⁴⁴⁴ Coney, “Forum Fever,” p.15.

involved in “mainstream politics” or support those women who had got involved. But she also stressed the “unifying impetus” of the forum experience: “We have seen the enemy and it is not us!”⁴⁴⁵

Despite feminist reservations, Labour was apparently not the enemy either. The religious and far right’s hard-line attacks on even the least controversial policy related to social justice served to generate warmer support for the Labour government among many politically aware women, from feminists to mainstream Christians. Achievements such as the establishment of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in 1985,⁴⁴⁶ the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, homosexual law reform in July 1986, the extension of the powers of the Waitangi Tribunal, and the 1987 anti-nuclear legislation⁴⁴⁷ all strengthened this feeling, and again increased support for Labour among most groups working for social justice. In contrast to the religious and far right, current shortcomings in Labour’s policies on women or its commitment to them seemed relatively minor. The pressure coming from the conservative/moralist right throughout the first term of the Labour government thus became an important factor obscuring the significance for women of the neo-liberal agenda simultaneously being driven through Cabinet.

Part Two: Questioning the state

For me, as Chapters 4 and 5 showed, the years from 1984 to 1987 were important in terms of developing confidence in my own powers as a writer. With Muldoon and

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ At the time, “No such department existed anywhere else in the world. While Australia had an Office for the Status of Women, it was part of the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and responsible to the head of that department.” Mary O’Regan and Mary Varnham, “Daring or Deluded? A Case Study in Feminist Management,” in *Feminist Voices: Women’s Studies Texts for Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary du Plessis et al. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.197.

⁴⁴⁷ According to former party president Margaret Wilson, the anti-nuclear issue, unlike economic policy, “united the [Labour] Party [outside Parliament] and had considerable support from Caucus as well...The fact that the government decided to pursue a policy consistent with that of the Party’s resolution was due to the fact the executive did not want a major confrontation over an issue that at the end of the day was not as important as the rest of the economic reform programme. There was also a serious question as to whether the Cabinet had the votes in caucus. It was also understood that this policy had the support of the majority of New Zealanders and not only the Labour Party members.” Margaret Wilson, “The Role of the Labour Party During the Lange Years” (paper presented at the conference on The First Term of the Fourth Labour Government 30 April - 1 May, Parliament Buildings, 2004).

National gone, I shared the widespread sense of a weight being lifted, and at first felt an increased sense of freedom to pursue my own writing, following my work on Mansfield in the first half of 1984.⁴⁴⁸

By late 1984, I too believed that I had “seen the enemy” clearly. The rise of the moralist right became a strong motivation for my own work on the 1950s, because it seemed to be dedicated to “turning back the clock” to those years. I saw it as drawing much of its strength from nostalgia for a mythical version of the 1950s, where the reality matched the bright new Happy Family advertisements, and women stayed safely in their proper nuclear family place. A lively new feminist reading of that decade would, I hoped, help to dispel such myths. Instead of relying on simplistic concepts of “stereotyping” and “false consciousness”, I aimed to tease out how the complex operations of discourse (though I did not use that term) worked to maintain women’s acquiescence in a profoundly unequal gendered structure. The key factor, as I saw it, was a modernised culture of domesticity, constructing “women’s role” as creative, empowering, satisfying self-actualisation through caring consumption, rather than as self-sacrificing duty and drudgery for the good of others.⁴⁴⁹

I first used the term “New Right” in my notebooks in June 1986, to refer broadly to the upsurge of combined fundamentalist Christian and (less obviously) extreme right activism which occurred in the early 1980s. In the context of thinking about children and education, and attending a 1986 Stout Centre conference on “The American Connection,” I concluded that what was seen as “normal” appeared to be value-free, whereas whatever could be made to seem “abnormal” (such as feminism) appeared to be actively inculcating (the wrong) values. Unlike the general public, I wrote:

...the New Right understand this. They abhor a moral vacuum. They understand that the school curriculum is never value-free [and] want explicitly authoritarian, traditional ideology taught – trad sex roles, creation science, no questioning. Methods are ideological too.⁴⁵⁰ Whereas [the]

⁴⁴⁸ See Chapter 4.

⁴⁴⁹ See Chapter 5.

⁴⁵⁰ The Christian right objected to teaching methods which, in their view, encouraged school pupils to question authority. See, for example, Allanah Ryan, "For God, Country, and Family: Populist Moralism and the New Zealand Moral Right," *New Zealand Sociology* 1, no. 2 (1986).

general public just doesn't want feminism or homosexuality taught. [The moralist right education campaign slogan] "back to basics" assumes [that the] basics are value-free and teach only skills and basic useful content...Normality [is] the aim.

The focus on "normality", however, was not the preserve of the moralist right. Its opposition to state intervention in the "private" sphere was increasingly being paralleled by opposition from the left, including feminism.

By the mid-1980s, the role of the state was in contention across the political spectrum. On the left, critiques commonly took the form of historical analyses. In their simplest form, they proposed that:

The State is popularly presented as primarily an administrative body designed to protect individual rights and freedoms and dedicated to ensuring the social and economic well-being of all its citizens...However, far from being a neutral entity, the State has strong conservative tendencies and frequently acts to maintain the social and economic power of dominant elite groups...⁴⁵¹

But there was a growing trend to move away from this type of Marxist-derived analysis towards a focus on the modern state's exercise of power to "normalise" its citizens, particularly the use of middle class professionals (including bureaucrats, teachers, social workers, doctors, and defenders of high culture) to regulate and mould the lives of the poor and the colonised. At the 1986 Stout Centre conference, for example, I took notes on a presentation by Roy Shuker and Roger Openshaw on "moral panics". It included an explanation of state intervention in culture, based on Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. My notes read:

Growth of middle class...professional section attempted to stake out areas of expertise, authority...middle class hegemony - desired forms of social life...imposed on areas such as medicalisation of childbirth, mothercraft, eugenics, compulsory education, concern about popular culture.

Two aspects of state activity, in particular, were critiqued in ways which called into question their motives and effects. First, critiques based in anti-imperialist theory and

⁴⁵¹Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture and Power: Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.96.

Maori activism highlighted the state's responsibility for the dispossession and attempted assimilation of the Maori. Some of this criticism came from historians and other academics, both Maori and Pakeha; some arose out of the battles over the 1981 Springbok tour;⁴⁵² and some came from Maori activist women associated with feminism, such as Donna Awatere and Ripeka Evans. Awatere's 1984 critique, *Maori Sovereignty*,⁴⁵³ published by *Broadsheet* first as articles, then in book form, was the most forthright. Also citing Gramsci, Awatere saw "white people" and "the state" as one and the same, aligned in hegemonic consciousness to defeat Maori sovereignty, then to benefit from that defeat:

This country as it is now was *founded* [original italics] on a division on racial lines...The Waitangi agreement...represents the end of Maori sovereignty. It signals the swift rise to power of white people who would rule first by the gun, then by the police and prisons and then by their education, church and media. The name of this game is cultural imperialism and it means the total exclusion of Maoritanga from the physical, economic, political and philosophical development of this country...The philosophies of democracy and liberalism are used to justify white supremacy and separate development...⁴⁵⁴

In Awatere's view, when white groups protested, they did so "within the boundary of the western capitalist culture which is their heritage", whereas Maori people protested "from inside a cage within and against that very culture which has denied us *our* [original italics] heritage and our rights".⁴⁵⁵ The hidden agenda of white culture was "that things are more important than people and that oneself is more important than the whole".⁴⁵⁶ As for feminism, "individual" feminist issues such as employment, rape, cancer or sexuality were meaningless, she said, "without the survival of the Maori as a Nation".⁴⁵⁷ She concluded with an appeal to a concept of social justice based on the collective right to cultural self-determination:

It is the right of all peoples to dream dreams for themselves, believe in them and make them a reality. This is the right we reclaim in reinforcing the separate

⁴⁵² In 1981 the New Zealand Rugby Union invited the national rugby team of apartheid-ruled South Africa, known as the Springboks, to tour New Zealand. This resulted in massive protests all over the country, particularly in connection with the games themselves. The police response to the protests was often brutal.

⁴⁵³ Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty* (Auckland: Broadsheet Magazine, 1984).

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.35.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.107.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

reality of our tipuna [ancestors] and making it our own. To do this is to take the first step toward Maori sovereignty.⁴⁵⁸

The second form of scrutiny, based in feminist theory and activism, re-examined state interventions specifically focused on women and children, from marriage and prostitution to education and health care. As with anti-imperialist theory, much of this scrutiny dealt with New Zealand's past, as feminist historians rewrote "our nation's story" in terms of gender relations. Far from opposing state intervention on principle, they supported the concept of a state that "lived up to its promise of security and opportunity and equality for all its citizens, not one that supported the privilege and power of men".⁴⁵⁹ As I was doing in my work on the 1950s, they sought to move away from concepts of "stereotyping", "conditioning" and "false consciousness", and instead find ways to explain the puzzle of women's subjective commitment to gendered structures that were inherently unjust and oppressive. Like my work on adoption, their analyses drew on post-modern theories positioning the state as a major part of a complex, diffuse web of discursive power which, as well as "distributing the living in the domain of value and utility",⁴⁶⁰ shaped the very identity of its subjects, in this case as "masculine" and "feminine".

The most important feminist critique of the 1984-87 period focused on the very recent past and the present. It was concerned not with the power of the state *per se*, but with the power of the medical profession working under the auspices of the state.

In 1984, Sandra Coney and Phillida Bunkle had their attention drawn to a paper about an extraordinary research programme at National Women's Hospital (NWH) in Auckland, which came to be known as "the unfortunate experiment". It had been run by Professor Herbert Green from 1955, and approved by the hospital's ethics committee. The story became public in New Zealand, Coney wrote later, "not because a medical doctor broke ranks, but because a researcher at the medical school who was

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Phillida Bunkle, "Of Conformity and Rebellion," *Broadsheet*, no. 214 (1997): p.29. (Originally delivered for the Winter Lecture Series, "Still Fretful Sleepers? The Intellectual in New Zealand", University of Auckland, 1996).

⁴⁶⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, p.144.

not a doctor was concerned enough to tell us”.⁴⁶¹ After lengthy and painstaking investigations, the two women wrote a detailed article for a national magazine.⁴⁶² A Royal Commission of Inquiry followed, headed by Silvia Cartwright, then one of New Zealand’s few women judges.⁴⁶³

To prove his belief that observable abnormalities in cervical cells (known as carcinoma in situ, or CIS) was a totally different disease from invasive cervical cancer, and did not proceed to it, Green repeatedly examined a group of women with such abnormalities, without explaining what he was doing, or offering them the conventional treatment. He did not inform them that they were part of a research programme, nor did he obtain their consent. Some women with continuing and, in many cases, worsening abnormalities were recalled repeatedly for up to twenty-five years. Over time, the untreated women “developed the maiming and potentially fatal invasive cervical cancer at an appalling twenty-five times the rate of women treated conventionally”. In a similar “experiment” with the much rarer disease of CIS of the vulva, all five of the women left untreated developed invasive cancer, and four died of it.

Green’s approach to CIS was completely at odds with accepted international practice. It later emerged that for years, his study had been “the subject of comment and criticism in Canadian, American, British and Australian medical circles, but not a single one of the women concerned knew...the collective silence continued up to 1987, even though the legacy of Green’s experiment was still coming into the cancer wards.”⁴⁶⁴ Within New Zealand as a whole, “Green’s views had exercised a profound influence on attitudes to cervical cancer”:⁴⁶⁵ there had been no review of the treatment of CIS at NWH since 1966, and there was no national cervical screening programme, mainly because NWH teaching was firmly opposed to screening, and doctors who trained there also opposed it. The reduction in deaths from cervical cancer achieved

⁴⁶¹ Sandra Coney, *The Unfortunate Experiment* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1988), p.253.

⁴⁶² Sandra Coney and Phillida Bunkle, "An 'Unfortunate Experiment' at National Women's," *Metro* 7, no. 72 (1987).

⁴⁶³ The inquiry became known as the Cartwright Inquiry. Silvia Cartwright subsequently received a damehood, and was appointed Governor-General of New Zealand in 2001.

⁴⁶⁴ Coney, *The Unfortunate Experiment*, pp.251-3.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.75.

overseas after such programmes had been introduced had not occurred in New Zealand.

As the Inquiry hearings and report made clear, the issues went far beyond what had happened to the women involved, and even beyond the screening and treatment of cervical cancer in New Zealand. Vitally important though these were, they were not the central issue:

It became clear during the inquiry that most of the professionals had only the dimmest view of what informed consent meant...The cancer inquiry was all about power; the power of the medical profession and the patients' lack of it. The profession had been used to unilateral decision-making across the whole area of health care, including patients' rights...

The profession saw "the unfortunate experiment" as, at worst, a series of mistakes...The events under scrutiny had spanned thirty years – far, far too long to be only a "mistake", or even a series of them. The real problem was medical power and its exercise.⁴⁶⁶

The inquiry showed that Green had been able to carry out his experiment thanks to a pervasive, highly sexist culture of medical arrogance and unquestioned power, where ensuring patients' understanding and consent was of minimal concern or importance. The result of the inquiry findings was a profound and immensely significant shift in health care culture which has benefited all "consumers", particularly women. This necessary shift was achieved only after great and persistent collective effort, and is still precarious.⁴⁶⁷

Coney and Bunkle never attacked public health care provision in principle, and have since vigorously defended it. They were well aware that the lack of comprehensive public provision, or its fragmentation into competing units set up on commercial models, does not make such abuses less likely to occur; on the contrary, it makes it more difficult to detect them or to hold those responsible to account.⁴⁶⁸ But the high-

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.242, 72-73.

⁴⁶⁷ A sharp anti-feminist backlash followed the original article and the enquiry; ironically, it characterised Green as the victim of a "witch-hunt", a term much more appropriate for the backlash itself. Nevertheless, there have been lasting gains. For example, New Zealand is the only country to have a Code of Rights for patients. See Sandra Coney, ed., *Unfinished Business: What Happened to the Cartwright Report?* (Auckland: Women's Health Action, 1993).

⁴⁶⁸ One major reason for this is that privatisation increases secrecy: "A by-product of the push to privatise health services and operate them on a commercial basis was the development of a 'culture of

profile scandal of the unfortunate experiment may have unintentionally helped later attacks on the public health care system to gain credibility, as concepts such as “choice” and “accountability” were pressed into service in the campaign *against* state provision of health care and other social services.

The whole saga of the “unfortunate experiment” demonstrated, with striking clarity, how and why understanding the complex modern forms of women’s oppression was essential to feminist endeavours. Feminist critiques were intent on working out how the discursive power of the welfare state and its institutions operated, not in order to do away with such interventions – an impossible goal in any modern society – but to empower women to ensure that they worked to enhance social justice for women as well as men, rather than erode or deny it. Although such critiques had little in common with later critiques of the state generated by the New Right, their searching examinations of various forms of apparently benign state intervention did contribute to a general scrutiny of state operations and state power which later proved able to be co-opted and distorted in the service of the New Right agenda. Treasury’s 1984 brief to the incoming government⁴⁶⁹ summed up the general argument, as Penny Fenwick pointed out four years later:

[A]t the same time as there had been major increases in spending on welfare, there had been increased dissatisfaction with the services provided. The conclusion drawn from this was that greater state spending does not necessarily provide better welfare outcomes, nor does it necessarily achieve equity goals. Exposing the social sector to a far greater degree to market forces was therefore likely to lead to greater efficiency and enhanced equity. Allowing the strength of the market processes to allocate resources would...make welfare provision more responsive to consumer preferences and involve least cost.⁴⁷⁰

Treasury’s 1987 brief to the incoming government contained more detailed examples of the co-option of feminist and anti-racist critiques. It cited “public criticism of the

secrecy’ in which information about the operation of publicly funded services is withheld from evaluators and policy analysts on the grounds that it is “commercially sensitive.” David R. Thomas, “Policy under the Microscope: Research Strategies for Investigating Policy Processes,” in *Health and Public Policy in New Zealand*, ed. Peter Davis and Toni Ashton (Sydney: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.82.

⁴⁶⁹ The Treasury, “Economic Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1984,” (Wellington: The Treasury, 1984).

⁴⁷⁰ Penny Fenwick, “Royal Commissions Can Be Good for Women,” *Women's Studies Journal* 3, no. 2 (1988): p.86. Fenwick, the first Deputy Secretary of Women’s Affairs, was seconded in 1986 to become manager of the Royal Commission on Social Policy.

Housing Corporation” for being “mono-cultural and therefore ineffective in addressing Maori housing needs” to support its contention that “There appear to be fundamental problems in the social institutions and policies that have been set up to promote a good society. The generalised belief that the welfare state is a robust and successful concept is now increasingly questioned.”⁴⁷¹ It argued against provision in kind (such as housing, health care and education), rather than in cash, by claiming that: “The real question is whether it is likely that Pakeha middle class social workers and other professionals will be better able to determine the services that should be consumed by their clients, many of who are Maori low income people.”⁴⁷² But until 1987, the New Right agenda for both economic and social policy was still far from clear to most outside and even to many inside the corridors of power.

Part Three: Shifting right

In 1984, New Zealand threw itself into a process of radical change. A pioneer of the welfare state, it has metamorphosed into an experimental centre for the market society – so much so that the world's “decision-makers” are singing its praises and urging “backward” European countries to follow its example. This dramatic change was set in motion by a small group of senior officials who won over a party of the left.⁴⁷³

Like the discourse of second wave feminism itself, the New Right discourse and its supporting movements originated overseas. Dolores Janiewski and Paul Morris have traced its long gestation and growth in the United States and Britain, and its transmission and dissemination in Australia and New Zealand:

Evangelists crisscrossed the Atlantic or followed their own complex itineraries to Britain or within the United States seeking to convince their listeners to join their faith. These oracles and emissaries warned about a bleak future unless their policies were implemented. “Madmen” like [John Maynard] Keynes and

⁴⁷¹ The Treasury, “Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. I,” (Wellington: The Treasury, 1987), pp.397-8.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p.456.

⁴⁷³ Serge Halimi, New Zealand, from Welfare State to Market Society: Test Tube Miracle of Total Capitalism (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1997 [cited 29 May, 2005]), available from <http://www.casi.org.nz/politiceconomy/wstoms.html>.

his interventionist disciplines had deluded government officials and clouded the minds of the people. Motivated by righteous anger, these right-thinking evangelists preached about the need for national renewal. Declaring their intentions to march on Washington and Westminster to drive the evildoers out of the government, they urged New Zealanders and Australians to follow their example. When the New Right came to power in Britain in 1979 and Washington in 1981, these triumphs became testimonials to the correctness of their vision and the need for antipodeans to undertake a similar process of market reformation.⁴⁷⁴

As Part One explained, the religious/far right strand was at first the only aspect of the revival of the right recognised by most New Zealanders, including most feminists. In New Zealand's secular society, this strand did not play a major role in the New Right policy revolution of the 1980s and 1990s. The extent to which the New Zealand New Right needed to combine neo-liberalism and what might be called "secular neo-conservatism" became apparent only after the National party regained power in 1990.⁴⁷⁵

Bruce Jesson, writing in July 1987, argued that there was a compelling material reason for the success of the New Right in New Zealand: it met the needs of a different kind of international capital. In the 1980s, thanks to the development of the global money market, money became available "in enormous volumes, and relatively cheaply". After 1984, these funds "poured into the New Zealand economy in search of cheaper companies and assets", fuelling:

a merger and takeover mania and a share market bubble...A convulsion...occurred in the corporate economy, with a small number of corporate raiders and established businessmen seizing control of a large proportion of the nation's assets. The same sort of people – and sometimes exactly the same people...seized control of political policy.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ Janiewski and Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets*, pp.59-60.

⁴⁷⁵ I followed Bruce Jesson's use of the terms "libertarian" and "authoritarian" to distinguish the two strands in some of my writing, notably "To Market and Home Again", because I believed these terms conveyed a better sense of the active approach to policy favoured by each strand. I have used "neo-liberal" and "neo-conservative" in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis because these terms are now widely used both within and beyond New Zealand.

⁴⁷⁶ Jesson, *Behind the Mirror Glass*, pp.9-11.

In its first term, the fourth Labour government adopted the economic policies required to open the floodgates to this “pool of private unregulated stateless money”.⁴⁷⁷ The three years after the 1984 election were:

...primarily concerned with reducing the role of the government in the functioning of individual markets...[they included] the rapid abandoning of a myriad of controls in financial markets, the almost complete abolition of price controls, a programme to replace import controls by tariffs and the subsequent substantial reduction of tariff levels, the removal of producer subsidies, and the corporatization of government trading activities [as well as] tax reforms...aimed to reduce exemptions and incentives, broaden the tax base, and lower top rates.⁴⁷⁸

Yet as I indicated in Part One, these changes could not have taken place without a major intellectual shift, which was far from unique to New Zealand. Looking back on the 1980s, a pro-New Right commentator concluded that “The defining achievement of the 1980s was not so much material as intellectual: the revival, after decades of neglect, of belief in the market.”⁴⁷⁹ Why did the seeds of this “revival” fall on such receptive ground in New Zealand, where support for the welfare state and for a generally high level of state activity appeared to be so well established?

As feminists had already discovered, formal education in New Zealand does not routinely provide any comparative historical overview of the various systems of thought that make up the Western intellectual tradition, let alone any other. Just as feminism made many women conscious for the first time of the uses and pleasures of theory, so neo-liberalism played a similar role for its adherents. The exciting second

⁴⁷⁷ Lawrence Grossberg, “Cultural Studies, Modern Logics, and Theories of Globalisation,” in *Back to Reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies*, ed. Angela McRobbie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.26.

⁴⁷⁸ Brian Easton, “Economic and Other Ideas Behind the New Zealand Reforms,” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 10, no. 3 (1994): p.4. Labour severely reduced vertical progressivity in the tax system by halving the top personal income tax rate from 66 percent to 33 percent. It also introduced a Goods and Services Tax (GST), a flat-rate, virtually universal, indirect consumption tax (set initially at 10 percent and later raised to 12.5 percent). When I began working freelance in 1985, one of my first jobs was to edit a monograph explaining GST. It did not explain that such taxes are regressive, because they require each taxpayer to pay the same levy on each dollar spent, regardless of income, and take a higher proportion of a low income than a high income.

⁴⁷⁹ Adrian Woolridge, “Create a more enlightened and efficient society”, *National Business Review*, 4 August 1995, p.14. This article’s history indicates the international web of dissemination for New Right views in the 1980s and 1990s described by Janiewski and Morris: reprinted by *NBR* from *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, it had originally been published in longer form by the Social Market Foundation, a right-wing London think-tank. The *NBR* identified Woolridge only as a journalist for *The Economist*.

wave feminist “click”⁴⁸⁰ was paralleled by an equally exciting New Right “click”. In the Fifth Hayek Memorial Lecture which Don Brash,⁴⁸¹ then Governor of the Reserve Bank, gave in 1996, he described it in terms suggestive of a road-to-Damascus conversion experience:

The market reforms that have swept the world over the last two decades largely reflect the intellectual influence of neoclassical economics, in particular the Chicago School variety, which stresses the superiority of the market over central planning as an allocator of resources. New Zealand was influenced by this too...The response to the crisis of 1984...involved a spectacular collapse of the mental defences against the intellectual counter-revolution which Hayek had begun in the 1940s and which since the mid-1970s had been rapidly gaining ground against the collectivist orthodoxy. This was an unusually exciting time, intellectually speaking, in New Zealand.⁴⁸²

The intellectual appeal of neo-classical economic rationalism, unlike that of feminism, flowed from the way it appeared to provide an authoritative, comprehensive set of “first principles” for understanding the world which was compelling for those attracted to it, and extremely difficult for opponents to counter. In David Lange’s view, for example, from 1984 to 1987, “There was an intellectual coherence about the Treasury point of view which other departments could hardly ever match, and all the momentum was with it.”⁴⁸³ Moreover, it was based on the apparently flattering assumption that the understanding mind in question belonged to someone who was himself or herself the embodiment of the kind of person required by those principles: a completely

⁴⁸⁰ The second wave feminist “click” has been succinctly summed up by a third wave feminist as “the moment when a woman suddenly realizes that men generally treat women like crap...This is usually the moment when a woman decides to become a feminist in order to work toward a more just and equal world.” Kim Allen, *The Feminist "Click"*. (3rdwwwave, 2000 [cited 6 June 2005]); available from http://www.3rdwwwave.com/display_article.cgi?138.

⁴⁸¹ Don Brash was working in the banking and finance industry when he became closely involved with Labour’s tax reforms. In 1988 he was appointed Governor of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand. He resigned in 2002 to seek election as a list candidate for National, and in 2003 became leader of the National party, which narrowly failed to defeat Labour in the 2005 election. For a detailed account of his conversion to the New Right, see Janiewski and Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets.*, especially pp.40-1.

⁴⁸² Donald T. Brash, *New Zealand's Remarkable Reforms: The Fifth Hayek Memorial Lecture, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 4 June 1996* (Don Brash, 1996 [cited 15 July 2005]); available from http://www.donbrash.com/Speeches/NZs_remarkable_reform.htm. This speech, which Brash was invited to deliver, was not part of his official duties as Governor of the Reserve Bank. The Institute of Economic Affairs was a private right-wing think-tank, the “home institution” for David Green, who is quoted below. See Janiewski and Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets*, p.24.

⁴⁸³ David Lange, *My Life* (Auckland: Viking, 2005), p.229.

independent, “quintessentially rational” individual who “spends life calculating options, weighting costs against benefits, and making choices that maximise utility”.⁴⁸⁴

Equally importantly, the principles it promulgated were claimed to be not normative, but positive – that is, value-free: “Economics, as a positive science, has no status as ethical or political prescription...scientific economics [is] a collection of value-free generalisations about the way in which economic systems work.”⁴⁸⁵ Feminist economists have argued that its tenets were deliberately positioned as analogous to what appeared to be the most unassailable, value-free scientific truths about nature:

[T]he neoclassical economic model, which intentionally imitates physics, with its “laws” of behaviour and its emphasis on the concept of equilibrium, appeals to the modern desire for scientific specificity. There is something reassuring about human behaviour that obeys well-understood laws and is so orderly that it can be conceptualized as coming to “rest” when various forces have all been accounted for.⁴⁸⁶

Like the laws of physics, the laws of neo-classical economics were held to be timeless as well as value-free. History was pressed into service only to show how the modern welfare state had futilely attempted to flout these laws. Neo-classical economic theory not only seemed to constitute a daringly radical and personally flattering departure from the misguided beliefs about the merits of state intervention that had underpinned the purportedly failing welfare state; it also made working out the correct course of political action look like simply a matter of logic. To maximise wellbeing meant simply to maximise the wellbeing of each individual, by allowing the “invisible hand”

⁴⁸⁴ Myra H. Strober, “The Application of Mainstream Economics Constructs to Education: A Feminist Analysis,” in *Feminist Economics Today: Beyond Economic Man*, ed. Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), p.147. For two different but related discussions of neo-classical assumptions and the kind of individual they predicate, see Paula England, “Separative and Soluble Selves: Dichotomous Thinking in Economics,” in *Feminist Economics Today: Beyond Economic Man*, ed. Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Alison Jaggar, “Feminism in Ethics: Moral Justification,” in *The Cambridge Guide to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁸⁵ Prue Hyman, “The Use of Economic Orthodoxy to Justify Inequality: A Feminist Critique,” in *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary Du Plessis, et al. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.256. quoting Lionel Robbins, “Political Economy: Past and Present” (London: Macmillan 1976), p.2. It was Robbins who brought Hayek to work at the London School of Economics.

⁴⁸⁶ Strober, “The Application of Mainstream Economics Constructs to Education: A Feminist Analysis,” p.147.

of the free market to work for the benefit of all. The government's primary role was to ensure that the market was allowed to work with as little interference as possible.

The positivist scope, coherence and certainty of neo-classical economic rationalism, as well as its apparent radicalism and daring "political incorrectness" in the New Zealand context, appealed strongly to many men and a smaller number of women, as their born-again enthusiasm testified.⁴⁸⁷ Once in power, they saw no need to consider alternatives to the extreme policy framework they espoused, or to evaluate its outcomes. They knew what they were doing, and the right course would inevitably have the right consequences. There was a built-in justification for dismissing any dissent: "It is not because there is an alternative way. Rather dissenters only reflect vested interests."⁴⁸⁸ There were only two choices: back to the discredited and damaging status quo, or forward to the neo-classical solution. As Don Brash recalled:

The economic debate brought together a small but strategically influential team of civil servants, think-tankers, policy-makers and politicians⁴⁸⁹ around Roger Douglas [who became Labour's Minister of Finance in 1984]. This group of quite remarkable people understood clearly what needed to be done and was committed to seeing it through.⁴⁹⁰

What was so striking and also so confusing in New Zealand was that the politicians in this group came initially from the left of the traditional political spectrum. The relatively small group of Labour MPs propounding New Right policies faced strong opposition from their own extra-Parliamentary party. Margaret Wilson, who became the party's first female (and feminist) president in 1984, recalled that before the election, Labour was internally "locked in an ideological struggle as to how to move beyond the excesses of the Muldoon era", with the membership by and large opposed to the neo-classical solution:

⁴⁸⁷ See, for example, a two-part interview with Ruth Richardson and Simon Upton, the leading National party proponents of the New Right, *National Business Review*, 9 and 16 October, 1987.

⁴⁸⁸ Easton, "A Permanent Revolution? Zealots and Common Sense," pp.33-4.

⁴⁸⁹ As well as the fact that leadership came from the left, Brian Easton notes another unusual feature of the history of the New Right in New Zealand: "initially the most prominent advocates of market liberalization were from the public sector. Later they were joined by supporters in the private sector." See Easton, "Economic and Other Ideas Behind the New Zealand Reforms." The only major "think-tank" operating in New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s was the Business Roundtable, which drew its membership from the relatively small number of large businesses representing 77 percent of the New Zealand stock market's value (but employing only 11 percent of New Zealand's workforce).

⁴⁹⁰ Brash, *New Zealand's Remarkable Reforms: The Fifth Hayek Memorial Lecture*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 4 June 1996 ([cited]).

The Party membership was not opposed to change, it knew change was required. It was the nature of the change that was the subject of endless policy debates and political positioning to effect power. And the essence of the difference was how best to protect the interests of those people in our society who had little personal wealth or power. Would a free market approach really do this? What was to be the role of the state? Would greater inequality result and damage the life chances of those we represented?⁴⁹¹

The 1984 election manifesto was the result of a compromise. It promised, “in order of priority, ‘full employment, economic growth, fairness and social justice, maximum possible stability in prices, a more democratic approach to economic management, greater control by New Zealanders over their own economy’”.⁴⁹² Although those opposed to New Right policies, including Wilson, “renewed our efforts to ensure the policies reflected the positions of those we represented”, in the event:

...the early election pre-empted that debate and thus ensured that the policies of structural adjustment prevailed. The financial crisis created by Muldoon provided the opportunity and the necessity to move quickly to set a totally new course in economic policy. The fact that [the Labour party outside Parliament] was to be marginalized from any future contribution to economic policy was apparent from the outset...The lack of a Parliamentary opposition had also made the Party the only effective opposition. This was not a role the Party sought but it was best positioned to articulate the concerns of those most affected by the changes.⁴⁹³

In its first term, the Labour government did in fact increase spending “on education, health, housing, lower-income assistance and welfare”.⁴⁹⁴ But at the same time, “members of Cabinet, in particular the Minister of Labour and Richard Prebble, were determined on the creation of a labour market in which there was no effective collective representation”. Wilson says the party fought hard for concessions, and the Labour Relations Act 1987 was “the result of long negotiation between the Party, Ministers, and officials...an attempt to provide a way to introduce greater flexibility, while preserving for individuals the right to collective representation”.⁴⁹⁵ The reprieve

⁴⁹¹ Wilson, "The Role of the Labour Party During the Lange Years".

⁴⁹² Colin James, "What Made the Revolution: The Context of the 1984-87 Parliament" (paper presented at the conference on The First Term of the Fourth Labour Government 30 April-1 May, Parliament Buildings, 2004). James notes that “Ministers insisted in 1987 they had not abandoned the [traditional Labour] objectives, just changed the choice and priority of the means. With hindsight, we can say, as some argued at the time, that the means far overshadowed the ends and the ends are now necessarily different as a result.”

⁴⁹³ Wilson, "The Role of the Labour Party During the Lange Years".

⁴⁹⁴ James, "What Made the Revolution: The Context of the 1984-87 Parliament".

⁴⁹⁵ Wilson, "The Role of the Labour Party During the Lange Years".

was brief; in the 1990s, it was to be overturned by a National government intent on removing that right.

The extent to which the “Rogernomics” solution chosen for New Zealand was extreme, even in the context of contemporary New Right economic policy, was not generally understood beyond the warring factions within the Labour party, and not even always within them, as David Lange’s memoirs⁴⁹⁶ have recently shown. Its inner circle of supporters apparently did not recognise its application to and impact on women as an issue at all. Wilson tried to convey the risks in a 1986 lecture: “If there is one area that currently impedes women’s struggles towards equality, it is women’s lack of power over the economy...the concerns and interests of women are not a high priority on the economic agenda.”⁴⁹⁷ But rather than directly raising the implications of the government’s economic policy for women, she focused on the need to get more women into “the institutions in which power is exercised”, in order to ensure that “women’s issues” would be recognised and have a better chance of being addressed.⁴⁹⁸ By the end of the 1987 election, she had come to believe that “the divisions in the Party were too deep to heal or to manage”, and that the important thing was simply to ensure its survival as an organisation.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Lange, *My Life*. Lange himself says that “It was only towards the latter part of 1986 that I formed the opinion, confirmed beyond all doubt the following year, that there was an unbending element in the views of Treasury and its minister which was more like religious belief than professional practice.” Lange, *My Life*, pp.92-3.

⁴⁹⁷ Wilson, “Women and Power: Law, Economics, Politics and Decision-Making,” pp.32-4.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Wilson, “The Role of the Labour Party During the Lange Years”.

Chapter 9: To market and home again, 1987-1992

Introduction

From 1984 to 1999, under governments led first by Labour and then by National, the discourse which came to be known as “the New Right” made rapid and in some respects irreversible headway in shaping New Zealand public policy. From 1987, much of my own writing in this period was concerned with critiquing and countering this discursive shift. This chapter charts the development of my own thinking and writing on the New Right from 1987 through to Labour’s defeat in 1990. Part One discusses how the full import of the New Right programme emerged in 1987, and how attempts were made to counter it. Part Two focuses on the development of my own understanding of the New Right. Parts Three and Four focus on two pieces of work: the section on women in the report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy,⁵⁰⁰ and the essay “To Market and Home Again”.⁵⁰¹ These laid the ground for what I wrote on public policy and political economy generally in the 1990s, which is covered in Chapter 10.

Part One: Rolling back the state

My own lack of awareness and understanding of the New Right programme, together with any illusions about the government’s commitment to advancing a feminist agenda, were both forcibly dispelled in 1987. The personal and the political came together with great force for me that year. In August, with the share-market booming, Labour was re-elected with an increased majority. Soon after the election, my husband Harvey McQueen was approached about working for Prime Minister David Lange in his new role as Minister of Education. In September, at Commissioner Rosslyn Noonan’s invitation, I began working full-time for the Royal Commission on Social Policy.

⁵⁰⁰ See “Women and Social Policy” in Royal Commission on Social Policy, “The April Report Vols I-IV,” pp.153-274. While the two parts of this section were written jointly by two teams of women, I had the major responsibility for writing parts of Part II: the Introduction, Women’s Economic Wellbeing, Women’s Personal Wellbeing, and the Summary of Conclusions.

⁵⁰¹ Else, “To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right.”

The Commission had been set up in October 1986, with the expectation that it would fulfil Labour's election promise by providing the foundation for a strong focus on social policy, paralleling the focus on economic policy that dominated Labour's first term. By then, David Lange wrote:

The human consequences of our [economic policy] approach were only too obvious. The export sector was squeezed and there was a rapid decline in manufacturing. The corporatisation of the public sector led to many more job losses...[but there was an] absence of any effective counterweight to the Treasury line, which said that measures to prop up employment while economic adjustment was in progress were palliatives which would hinder achievement of our long term goals.⁵⁰²

From the outset Lange saw the Commission as:

...a defensive measure. I did not want Treasury to take its knife to the social services and the commission was a way of fencing them off. But the case for it was compelling enough. There was a new economy and there would be a new society...I wanted an alternative in the form of an argument with some weight behind it.⁵⁰³

Treasury was "implacably opposed to the idea", and members of the Prime Minister's advisory group "wore themselves out in the bureaucratic struggle behind its establishment...The result was inevitably a compromise."⁵⁰⁴

Like the public in general and most of those working for the Commission, I knew nothing of this struggle, though it was clear that there were differing views among the commissioners. On 2 October, I heard that I had been awarded a Claude McCarthy fellowship. My son Patrick died in Australia on 22 October. The next day, the share market crashed, and the Treasury released "Government Management", its extraordinary two-volume, 766-page brief to the incoming government.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² Lange, *My Life*, pp.227-8. Registered unemployment leapt from 0.9 percent in 1975-79 to between 4.1 and 4.9 percent between 1980 and 1986 (and later rose to 6.4 percent in 1987 and to 7.6 percent in January 1988). This measure excluded large numbers of women seeking employment. The 1986 Census showed unemployment rates of 5.2 percent for all men and 9 percent for all women, but 12 percent for Maori men and 19.1 percent for Maori women. See Royal Commission on Social Policy, "The April Report Vols I-IV," Vol. II, pp.492, 9.

⁵⁰³ Lange, *My Life*, p.230.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Treasury, "Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. I", The Treasury, "Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. II Education Issues," (Wellington: The Treasury, 1987). The embargo on public release was lifted on 23 October 1987.

The Treasury's 1984 brief, "Economic Management",⁵⁰⁶ had "recommended most of the reforms that were to transform the New Zealand economy: deregulation of finance, floating the dollar, abolition of exchange controls, corporatisation, GST, reduced income tax, family care and so on..."⁵⁰⁷ As Chapter 8 noted, it had also laid out the rationale for a "more market" economic philosophy and suggested the implications for social policy. But few feminists read this document when it appeared, or would then have been able to understand its significance.⁵⁰⁸ "Government Management" (discussed in more detail below) was much more widely read. It provided the first unequivocal, comprehensive New Zealand account of New Right philosophical arguments, and the policies that logically followed.

The chapter on "Social Policy" demonstrates what Lange wanted an alternative to. It concludes that "the sweep of elements involved in the overall well-being of society" are "mostly matters which result from private actions by individuals and people in voluntary social networks", and asks, "If social wellbeing is essentially the result of private activities and interactions, what is the role of the state?"⁵⁰⁹ Most of the rest of the briefing is devoted to proving that the correct answer is "the promotion of sound economic management", not the provision of taxpayer-funded goods and services in the form of a "social wage", because it is better for "households" to decide how to spend "their own" income:

The extent of utility that the household may derive from their employment income is affected by the amount of tax ...The greater the tax burden the less the household is able to direct their own resources towards the pursuit of particular goals. Provided the taxes are spent efficiently on services that are of value to the household then this tax burden is balanced by a social wage. However, given the lack of direct control over publicly provided goods it is likely that for many households the value of such goods may be lower than the amount of taxes given up to pay for them.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ Treasury, "Economic Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1984."

⁵⁰⁷ Bruce Jesson, Allanah Ryan, and Paul Spoonley, eds., *Revival of the Right: New Zealand Politics in the 1980s* (Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1988), p.30.

⁵⁰⁸ Fenwick (see Chapter 8) was one partial exception, but her article was primarily a review of other publications, and appeared four years after "Economic Management". As it does not mention the 1987 Treasury briefing, it was probably written before October 1987. Fenwick, "Royal Commissions Can Be Good for Women."

⁵⁰⁹ Treasury, "Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. I," p.122.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

There can be no doubt that Douglas and his supporters backed Treasury's arguments, and if anything, believed that they did not go far enough. Lange records that in April 1987, Douglas presented him with three different budget options, making it clear which one he preferred:

He argued for the sale of almost every government asset, including roads, hospitals, schools and universities. Every social service was to be privatised. We were to have a single rate of income tax at 15c in the dollar, and GST would be raised to 15 percent to match...I could hardly believe what I was reading...I did not want it widely known that Douglas had even considered such schemes, let alone become their advocate.

The reply I sent was as strongly worded as I could make it...What he proposed could not be sustained in a society in which every adult had a vote.⁵¹¹

At an informal meeting of senior ministers, "it was agreed that the radical option would not be pursued", and Douglas "appeared to accept, albeit with some carping, that the course he wished to pursue was forever closed to him". After the share market crash, Douglas simply returned to the charge, arguing that "The marketplace needed a sign from on high...a spectacular gesture was necessary."⁵¹²

In December 1987, the government announced a new reform package centring on one flat rate of tax on all personal incomes.⁵¹³ Not only would this plan again raise taxes on low incomes, and slash them on high incomes; even more significantly, by massively reducing the overall tax take, it would also force drastic cuts in government spending, thus achieving a key neo-liberal aim and severely limiting the range of social policy options available. Cabinet approved the package without understanding its full implications:

Treasury figures, never released to Cabinet in the build-up to the 17 December 1987 package, revealed a \$1.35 billion shortfall. If the package had gone ahead, it could only have worked with huge cuts in government spending and partial

⁵¹¹ Lange, *My Life*, pp.236-8.

⁵¹² Harvey McQueen, *The Ninth Floor: Inside the Prime Minister's Office: A Political Experience* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), p.38. Lange's memoirs confirm this, and show that Douglas's original December proposals closely resembled those of April: "liberalise the labour market, remodel the public sector, further reduce tariffs...sell something like \$14 billion worth of public assets", as well as levying personal income tax at a flat rate of 17c in the dollar and raising GST to 15 percent. "The economic argument...was that our boldness would inspire the country to greater effort, or it may have been that lower taxes were to have that effect. A tent evangelist could hardly have put it better." Lange, *My Life*, pp.246-7.

⁵¹³ The proposed rate was by then around 23 percent, although this was kept out of the December announcement.

privatisation of social services. It was a most radical proposal, the replacement of a tax of vertical equity by one of horizontal equity.⁵¹⁴

The negative impacts of this package would have fallen most heavily on women and the Maori and Pacific communities, where public service employment, low incomes, and reliance on public services and benefits were concentrated. A decade after the introduction of equal pay for equal work, women were still markedly disadvantaged in terms of labour market earnings and opportunities. Their ordinary time average hourly wage had stayed at 78 percent of men's average hourly wage, and half of all employed women worked in just six occupational groups, including teaching and nursing. In December 1986, 34.8 percent of women were defined as low paid, compared with 18.6 percent of men. Two-thirds of female production and agricultural workers, over half of female sales workers and 45 percent of female personal service workers were low paid. Among Maori, 24 percent of men and 55 percent of women were low paid; among Pacific peoples, the proportions were 32 percent of men and 53 percent of women. The occupations sought by the rapidly growing numbers of unemployed, both men and women, were (and still are) "biased towards those with a high incidence of low pay".⁵¹⁵

The flat tax package, following hard on the heels of the Treasury briefing, was clearly a bid to pre-empt the Royal Commission's work.⁵¹⁶ "Rather than have a dialogue about whether the plan would work or was desirable, with the Royal Commission report being part of that process, Cabinet and nation were presented with a blitzkrieg aimed at getting control..."⁵¹⁷ The commissioners were divided over how to respond. The

⁵¹⁴ McQueen, *The Ninth Floor: Inside the Prime Minister's Office: A Political Experience*, p.23.

⁵¹⁵ Royal Commission on Social Policy, "The April Report Vols I-IV," Vol. III, p.554. Registered unemployment rose from 0.9 percent in 1975-79 to between 4.1 and 4.9 percent between 1980 and 1986, then jumped to 6.4 percent in 1987 and to 7.6 percent in January 1988, but this measure excluded large numbers of women seeking employment. The 1986 Census showed unemployment rates of 5.2 percent for all men and 9 percent for all women, but 12 percent for Maori men and 19.1 percent for Maori women. See Royal Commission on Social Policy, Vol. II, p.492.

⁵¹⁶ Treasury had emphasised this by making some explicit suggestions about the kind of detail that the Commission could most usefully concentrate on, such as the issues involved in Treasury's proposed adoption of identification cards, to be used for "carrying out [all] financial transactions with the state" (Treasury, "Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. I," p.447). The National government did later introduce a card entitling the holder to subsidies offsetting higher charges for health care; calling it a "community services card", because the intention was to make it a "smart card" which would cover (and add up to an allowed maximum) all forms of welfare assistance; but the technical and ethical difficulties of doing this proved insurmountable.

⁵¹⁷ McQueen, *The Ninth Floor: Inside the Prime Minister's Office: A Political Experience*, p.40.

chairperson, Sir Ivor Richardson, was in favour of closing down immediately.⁵¹⁸ The other commissioners insisted that an interim report should be issued, in the hope of gaining time to continue. Then on 28 January 1988, at his first press conference of the year, Prime Minister Lange unilaterally announced that the flat tax package would not go ahead after all.⁵¹⁹

The Commission eventually decided to publish what it hoped would be an interim report, calling it "The April Report". Attempting to present a comprehensive response to "Government Management", as well as to recognise the breadth and depth of the public's involvement in the Commission's consultation process, it ran to five thick book-length sections.⁵²⁰ Although a short summary containing the gist of the Commission's findings and recommendations did follow, its late appearance and the length of the full report made it easier for the Commission's work to be unfairly dismissed. Among feminists, however, the report was widely regarded as having successfully "incorporated critical feminist reflection on the neoclassical, pro-market economic policies of the New Right".⁵²¹ As Prue Hyman later pointed out, the relatively large involvement of women may also have played a part in the report's reception:

It is somewhat sad and not coincidental that the input of women in general and Maori women in particular, many of them feminists, to the deliberations of the Commission – as members, staff, and producers of submissions – was proportionately far more substantial than in the past or relative to their power in policy making; that the report admirably reflects that change in perspective; but that it is being neglected.⁵²²

The most significant factor in the report's reception was the internal warfare which was soon to tear the Labour government apart. Lange's repudiation of the flat tax package

⁵¹⁸ In his memoir, David Lange recalls Sir Ivor coming to tell him that "there was no point in the commission continuing its work, given that the flat tax and the GMFI would in themselves determine the nature of social policy. I could only agree." Lange, *My Life*, p.248. Sir Ivor Richardson retired as President of the Court of Appeal in 2002, after 25 years as an appellate judge.

⁵¹⁹ Lange notes that this action broke the Cabinet convention of collective responsibility: "It was not an easy matter for me to set [this] aside but I did, because I could not bear to think of the country we would have if the flat tax went ahead." Ibid., p.249.

⁵²⁰ Royal Commission on Social Policy, "The April Report Vols I-IV." Confusingly, Volume III was published in two separate parts. The entire report ran to 4,074 pages.

⁵²¹ Du Plessis, "Stating the Contradictions: The Case of Women's Employment," p.211.

⁵²² Prue Hyman, "The Impact of Social and Economic Policy on Women: The Royal Commission, Government Policy and Women's Lives," *Women's Studies Journal* 5, no. 1 (1989): p.38. This was the first article in *WSJ* that directly addressed the significance of New Right policy for women.

was followed by its replacement with a two-tier system that preserved at least a vestige of vertical progressivity, so that “On the key issue – the Government’s revenue base and the implications for social services – Rogernomics was beaten off.”⁵²³ Lange paid a high price for his stand: the New Right faction in Cabinet waged an unremitting campaign against him, culminating in his resignation in August 1989. Labour was steadily deserted by its traditional supporters, particularly by women.⁵²⁴ Its share of the vote fell from 48 per cent in 1987 to 35 percent in 1990, when it lost office to National.⁵²⁵

Part Two: A different discourse

In 1987-88, my writing focused on using feminist theory to show how New Right discourse constructed a deeply gendered political economy which was inherently unjust and oppressive, and was therefore both inadequate and unfit as a basis for social and economic policy in a democratic society. Helped by the work and encouragement of other New Zealand feminists, each with their own area of expertise,⁵²⁶ I did a crash course in political philosophy and economy, and developed my own feminist critique. Like the proponents of the New Right, I did not undertake this work as a calm, detached academic inquiry. I was racing to understand what was happening so rapidly in my own society, and to work out how to speak out against the New Right as effectively as possible from a feminist perspective, in ways which could not be either co-opted or dismissed as mere ill-informed, incoherent rant.

⁵²³ McQueen, *The Ninth Floor: Inside the Prime Minister's Office: A Political Experience*, p.216.

⁵²⁴ In the six months to 25 April 1987, Heylen polls reported that women were leaving Labour's voting ranks at more than the average rate, and switching to Labour at less than the average rate; but they were also switching to National at less than the average rate. See Colin James, *The Election Book* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1987), p.70. Phillida Bunkle recalled that after making a speech criticising the New Right in 1988, she was “deluged with invitations to speak “ from a wide range of women’s groups, and “found an amazing amount of agreement” with what she was saying. Phillida Bunkle, “How the Level Playing Field Levelled Women,” in *Heading Nowhere in a Navy Blue Suit and Other Tales from the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Sue Kedgley and Mary Varnham (Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates, 1993), p.86.

⁵²⁵ McQueen points out that “Analysis of the swing revealed it was not so much the electorate switching to National, which got less than 50% of the total vote, but a massive rejection of Labour... The two parties to the left of Labour got approximately 12% of the vote.” McQueen, *The Ninth Floor: Inside the Prime Minister's Office: A Political Experience*, pp.226-9.

⁵²⁶ For example, Phillida Bunkle and Sandra Coney (philosophy, history and health), Moana Herewini, Tania Rei and Kathie Irwin (Maori women and biculturalism), Sue Middleton (education), Prue Hyman, Susan St John and Deborah Mabbett (economics), Nicola Armstrong and Rosemary Du Plessis (work), and Rosslyn Noonan (education, work, and human rights).

In terms of my theoretical understanding, the most influential book I read before 1987 was Susan Moller Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought*.⁵²⁷ This book had a strong personal connection for me, although its author never knew how significant it had been in my intellectual life. I had met Susan Moller at the University of Auckland in 1964. She was only a year younger than me, and we became close friends, although she came from a very different background: her father was a doctor, her uncle was a judge, and her family home was in affluent Remuera. Her subsequent career seemed to me to reflect the confidence and high expectations that she had been able to draw from this context, as well as her outstanding intellect.⁵²⁸ I had just finished a letter to her about her book when Patrick died, but it was never sent, as I could not face rewriting it to tell her about him. Later, although I often thought about contacting her, I felt too diffident. After I enrolled for my PhD, I tried unsuccessfully to email her, and intended to write. Then I heard of her sudden and unexpected death on 3 March 2004. I decided to dedicate this thesis to her while I was writing this chapter.

Women in Western Political Thought, based on Moller Okin's doctoral thesis, was published in 1979, when she was assistant professor of politics at Brandeis University. Described in a memorial tribute as an "agenda-setting text which challenged the sharp division between the public realm of citizenship and [the private realm of] family life",⁵²⁹ it became one of the foundational works both of second wave feminist theory and of political philosophy. In order to understand why Western women, despite having gained formal citizenship, "have in no other respect achieved equality with men",⁵³⁰ Moller Okin asked, "whether the existing tradition of political philosophy can sustain the inclusion of women in its subject matter, and if not, why not?" She concluded that women "cannot simply be added to the subject matter of existing

⁵²⁷ Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁵²⁸ After completing a BA in history in 1967, Susan Moller left New Zealand to take up a scholarship at Oxford, where she earned an MPhil in Politics in 1970, then went on to complete a PhD in Government at Harvard in 1975, and to marry psychiatrist Robert Okin. I saw her twice more when she was visiting New Zealand, but we lost touch while I was overseas. She went on to have a distinguished academic career in the USA, and at the time of her death was Martha Sutton Weeks Professor of Ethics in Society at Stanford University.

⁵²⁹ *Memorial Resolution: Susan Moller Okin* (Stanford Report, 9 March 2005 [cited 13 April 2005]); available from <http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/>.

⁵³⁰ Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, p.4.

political theory, for the works of our philosophical heritage are to a very great extent built on the assumption of the inequality of the sexes". This assumption, she argued, was related to women's role in the family:

Philosophers who, in laying the foundation for their political theories, have asked "What are men like?" "What is man's potential?" have frequently, in turning to the female sex, asked "What are women *for*?" [original italics]. There is...an undeniable connection between assigned "female nature" and social structure, and a functionalist attitude to women pervades the history of political thought...

...the thoroughly equal treatment of women...requires the rethinking of some of the most basic assumptions of political philosophy – having to do with the family and woman's traditionally dependent and subordinate role within it.⁵³¹

I read *Women in Western Political Thought* with great excitement and admiration in the early 1980s. Although I had not formally studied philosophy, I found its argument easy to follow. It provided me with a model of how to analyse political philosophy in terms of gender. It also showed me how to write a serious analytical "story" which, while profound and complex, was clear, accessible, engaging and elegant. Her work gave me the foundation and direction I needed for my own thinking on gender and the New Right. Importantly, it emphasised that so-called "women's issues" were in fact central to freedom, justice, equality, and democracy, and that androcentric, subordinating theories of gender were necessarily at work in the purportedly "universal" discussions constituting the tradition of Western political philosophy.

Being employed by the Commission enabled me, for the first time, to find and read other feminist discussions of political philosophy and economy as part of my paid work. By 1987, many more such discussions were becoming available.⁵³² In most

⁵³¹ Ibid., p.10.

⁵³² In 1989, Moller Okin listed nine books published between 1979 and 1989, including her own, to illustrate that "There is now an abundant literature on the subject of women, their exclusion from nondomestic life, and the reasons given to justify it, in Western political theory." Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p.187. Apart from *Women in Western Political Thought*, the work which was most important for me included Linda J. Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984), Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross, eds., *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986). I bought *Feminist Challenges* in Sydney in April 1987, when I saw Patrick for what would turn out to be the last time.

cases, the feminist philosophy written in the 1980s did not directly address the burgeoning discourse of the New Right.⁵³³ Instead, building on Moller Okin's work, it addressed the political philosophy which formed the roots of that discourse, interpreting it from a different perspective and in various different lights. It concluded that this philosophy arose not from a transcendent, timeless "view from nowhere", but from a thoroughly gendered perspective, both reproducing and relying on the assumption highlighted by Moller Okin: that the "individual" or "citizen" on whom this philosophy focused was implicitly understood to be an adult male living in a society where a gendered division of labour and of public and private spheres already existed. Relations between this individual and other human beings were of two distinct and separate kinds, depending on whether they occurred in the public world of the market and the state, or in the private world of the family and the household. In the public world, the individual stood alone and independent, already fully formed, free of prior connections or responsibilities to others. In the private world, he subsumed in his own person all those less-than-individual members of his family and household, including adult women, who depended on him for their sustenance, and his relations with them lay beyond political scrutiny or concern. The implication was that while men⁵³⁴ were able to be individuals and citizens in both worlds, women were always already excluded from being full individuals or citizens in either.

Contrary to the claims of Western democracy, the supposedly universal principles of freedom, justice, and equality therefore did not and could not apply fully or straightforwardly to the one in every two human beings who were women. While pieces of this massive yet submerged political problem have continually resurfaced in modern democracies, for example in debates over "working women" or "sole parent families", it had not begun to be directly addressed by democratically elected governments until second wave feminists insisted that it belonged on the political agenda.

⁵³³ One exception was Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*.

⁵³⁴ Particular categories of men have of course also been and continue to be excluded, on grounds such as race, class, sexuality and disability (all of which are inflected by gender in various ways); but even today, universal male suffrage and other forms of democratic participation are more widely accepted as the ideal than forms which include participation by women.

Part Three: Women and social policy

The gist of the report by the Royal Commission on Social Policy was contained in Volume II, "Future Directions".⁵³⁵ The section on women and social policy came second, directly after that on the Treaty of Waitangi. It took up 100 of that volume's 900 pages, and the issues it raised surfaced repeatedly throughout the report, for example in the various introductory and summary sections, the section on work (which begins with a discussion of unpaid work), and the section on the inter-relationship of economic and social policy. The prominence of the section on women and social policy was fully justified by public responses: "In a preliminary analysis of over 3000 submissions, references to the position of women and the constraints on their ability to choose freely from amongst alternatives outnumbered those relating to any other group by almost two to one."⁵³⁶ This insistence on the constraints on women contrasted strongly with the presumption of freedom of choice that formed the basis of neo-liberalism.

The Commission's terms of reference listed the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as one of the foundations of New Zealand's society and economy, and the Commission identified three principles that should guide policy development: partnership, protection and participation. The section on women and social policy therefore had two parts, produced by two teams working in partnership, one led by Moana Herewini, the other by me.

Part I, on Maori women and social policy, outlined how "New Zealand fails to meet the standards of a fair society from the perspective of Maori women", and concluded that a more just society would be achieved "only by significant improvements in the social and economic wellbeing of the Maori people as a whole". But this would take place:

only when the perspective of Maori women is heard and the implications of that perspective for policy development [are] fully understood. This requires full

⁵³⁵ Royal Commission on Social Policy, "Vol II: Future Directions."

⁵³⁶ Ibid., p.192.

participation of Maori women at all levels of decision-making in local and central government as well as within Maori tribal and other organisations.⁵³⁷

In contrast to the timeless universalism of the neo-liberal framework, the “framework for action” that emerged from the Commission’s work with Maori women was both historically and culturally situated. It moved from “full recognition and comprehensive development of the partnership inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi” and “early resolution of the land issues which affect almost every tribe” to “acknowledgement of the need to allow for the spiritual dimension in all social policy”, “strengthening and development of whanau, hapu and iwi structures”, and “resourcing of Maori women’s initiatives based on kaupapa Maori”. Then came “concerted effort to promote the economic development and self-determination of Maori women”.⁵³⁸

Part I concluded by focusing on how, since colonisation, Maori gender discourse had not simply been supplanted by Western gender discourse. Rather, particular Maori concepts about women and men had been conveniently reconstructed, to the specific detriment of Maori women. It stressed the complementarity of “the concepts of tapu [restricted, sacred] and noa [unrestricted, ordinary, everyday] in Maori social organisation”, and endorsed “the view that respect for these concepts does not require that women be deemed inferior to men. There are no grounds therefore for government and other agencies to treat Maori women as if they occupy a secondary status within the Maori community.”⁵³⁹

In Part II, as in Part I, the discussion began with the past, a practice commonly referred to by Maori as “walking backwards into the future”, to make the point that the issues being raised there were not new:

For the last century women have repeatedly called for equality in education, training, and employment; for financial independence; for legal equality; and for value to be given to their child-bearing and unpaid work...in general, the available evidence reveals large and persisting gaps between men and women in terms of wellbeing – gaps which in some areas are widening.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ Ibid., pp.183-4.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p.193.

Part II did not put forward detailed policy recommendations for particular areas of social policy. Instead it aimed:

to highlight the major issues which, in the Commission's view, must be fully considered in every area of policy, in order to improve rather than worsen women's position. This also applies to the Commission's own work as a whole. The aim has been first, to ensure that no matter what aspect of social policy the Commission is examining, it does so fully aware of the implications for women; and secondly, that the assumptions about women and about gender in general on which it has based its work are always transparent and explicit.⁵⁴¹

It was not until I began work for the Commission that I realised how much knowledge I had built up over the previous fifteen years, particularly about the twists and turns of decades of discourse which had collectively served to reproduce the invisibility, inferiority and subordination of "woman/women", as well as about the Western post-war gendered political economy. As a feminist, I had already begun to understand how the productive power of discourse worked, and how complex its operations were. I also understood that feminist discourse could produce such a radically different view of the world that it was all but incomprehensible to those more comfortably positioned by the familiar "common sense" discourse of sex and gender. I came up against this incomprehension within the Commission itself, most memorably when Sir Ivor Richardson, the chair, dismissed the initial position papers on women by stating that his wife didn't think that way.

It was partly to break through such conventional understandings that I was determined Part II would focus strongly on the issue of women's unpaid work in the home and community. This focus was entirely justified, because this issue had been by far the most prominent issue in the many submissions to the Commission relating to women and social policy. The major concerns they raised were the lack of recognition and of financial independence associated with unpaid work; the high cost of caring work for those doing it; the extreme difficulty of combining it with paid work; and the sense of powerlessness and lack of choice in women's lives.

The very term of "unpaid work" embodies the difficulties of focusing on this vast field of human endeavour within the available discourses. The unqualified term "work" is

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p.189.

not generally understood to refer to or even include unpaid work at all, even though the tasks involved may be the same (such as preparing meals). As Marilyn Waring was soon to highlight so effectively, in an era of economic, social and political systems dominated by quantification, the vital unpaid work of women the world over is not counted, and therefore ends up “counting for nothing”.⁵⁴² Within neo-classical economics, paid market work has no intrinsic or inherent value; it is only a means to the end of satisfying preferences through consumption. Work which appears not to operate in this way therefore cannot be work at all. The only possible human alternative to this purely functional work is non-work – that is, leisure. The concept of work has become so firmly attached to what people do to earn money that it can be applied to other kinds of work only through the negative label “unpaid”, highlighting only what they lack: they are not exchanged for money. They might equally well be labelled “profitless”, because in economic terms, they do not produce profits either.

By placing unpaid work, or, more accurately, unwaged work, at the centre of the Commission report’s section on women, I aimed to alter its usual subordinate position. I also saw it as the issue on which neo-liberal discourse was most vulnerable to challenge in easily understandable terms. Like its predecessor philosophical discourses, neo-liberalism simultaneously submerges and relies on the interdependence and interaction of the “private/social” and the “public/economic”, and in particular on women continuing to carry out the necessary unwaged work within the family, the community, and even the market. Seen from the perspective of women’s caring work in the family and community, neo-liberalism ceases to make any kind of sense that is compatible with equality and justice. The statement opening the discussion of women’s economic wellbeing in the Commission’s report went to the heart of the matter:

The Commission’s work shows that women’s disadvantaged position seems to stem not from their refusal to work, nor their inability to work, but from the kinds of work they do and the lack of choices and options their work involves...

⁵⁴² Marilyn Waring, *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women Are Worth* (1988). This book has become probably the most internationally recognised work by a New Zealand-based feminist. It is not referenced in the Commission report’s section on women because it appeared after the text was completed.

...unwaged work is not an “optional extra”. It must be done in order for all other human activities to take place. In particular, the next generation must be born and raised so that society can continue.

All too often the cost for women of unwaged work, especially caring for others, is long-term financial dependency, hardship and vulnerability...

Waged and unwaged work are interdependent, and neither can take place without the other. This interdependence is of vital concern in the formulation of social policy...⁵⁴³

The three critical questions for policy in relation to women’s economic wellbeing were:

1. How can the relationship between waged and unwaged work be shaped and controlled in ways that promote equity, efficiency, consistency and fairness? In particular, what can be done:
 - to ensure that responsibility for unwaged caring work is fairly shared, not only between family members, but between families, other groups and the state?
 - to ensure that the conditions under which waged work is undertaken take full account of individual and social responsibility for unwaged caring work?
 - to ensure a fair distribution of paid work?
 - to broaden the narrow range of occupations where women are still concentrated?
 - to ensure women's skills and responsibilities are fairly rewarded in terms of training, pay and status?
 - to give women genuine equal opportunity?
2. How can both economic and social policies take account of family functions while remaining neutral to family form?
3. What policies will allow both women and men to make genuine choices which:
 - enable the necessary unwaged work to be done
 - develop and use all their capabilities
 - provide maximum personal independence
 - allow them to participate fully in society?⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴³ Royal Commission on Social Policy, "Vol II: Future Directions," pp.195-6.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

In terms of women's personal wellbeing,⁵⁴⁵ the major concerns in the submissions to the Commission were summed up as "voice, choice, safe prospect". In other words, every person needed to have, "as far as possible, genuine autonomy, equality of status, and a reasonable measure of control over how they are treated". This need was "felt acutely in areas such as health, sexuality, and personal safety". Women still had "little autonomy, equality or control in these areas", and there was a "major problem of sexual abuse and other physical and psychological harm of women by men...Partly because of the strong belief in family privacy, the true nature and extent of this violence...has only recently begun to be publicly acknowledged and investigated." The problem of violence against women was expressly linked with "women's disadvantaged economic position in general and their financial dependence on a male partner in particular".⁵⁴⁶

The critical policy concerns in relation to women's personal wellbeing centred around how to enhance access to information; how to ensure women's equal participation in decisions which concerned them; and what could be done to alter patterns of male behaviour which denied women self-determination and safety, damaged them, and harmed society as a whole. To promote women's full participation in society did not simply mean enabling women to work full-time in the labour force. "Full participation" meant that women shared "equally with men in community life, in decision-making and other political processes, as well as in part-time and full-time employment...In particular, a person's unpaid caring responsibilities in the home should not exclude him or her from participation in public decision-making and other community activities."⁵⁴⁷

The sections on the interdependence of waged and unwaged work and the role of the state took issue directly with neo-liberal assumptions. Again, the discussion was historically situated. Past policies, both social and economic, had tended:

to be based on the assumption that there was only one major connection between the two kinds of [waged and unwaged] work. This connection was

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.196-7. The report noted that economic and personal wellbeing could not in practice be separated, but that a separation had been made for easier analysis.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid. It was not suggested that women's financial dependence and disadvantage was the major cause of such violence (otherwise violence would be much more common than it is); but they did appear at least partly to explain women's apparent toleration of severe violence, particularly when they had young children.

⁵⁴⁷ Royal Commission on Social Policy, "Vol II: Future Directions," p.209.

within the household, where women's unwaged work could be supported by men's earnings...this model cannot be relied on today. Nor can policies be based on the assumption that it is either the most prevalent or most desirable pattern.⁵⁴⁸

Policies which distinguished between "working families" and "beneficiaries", or which proposed "a flat tax on individuals, combined with a 'top-up' for families means tested according to household rather than individual income", made further assumptions about work, caring for dependants, and the distribution of income and of paid and unpaid work among members of households. For example, they assumed that "income is 'pooled' and equitably shared within households", or that "the choice is between full-time work and being completely dependent on a benefit". Yet there were "clear indications that none of these assumptions are valid, and that policies designed in accordance with them will not improve (and may well harm) women's position with regard to both waged and unwaged work".⁵⁴⁹

The discussion on the role of the state used caring work to contrast the "minimal" state and the "supportive" state, by comparing different answers to four questions: who benefits from care, who is responsible for care, what the costs are, who should be assisted and how. The minimal state's position was based on the pejorative New Right theory about the perils of state assistance known as "the woodwork effect".⁵⁵⁰ If the state offers help with caring responsibilities which properly belong to the family, scores of people who previously managed to provide care without state help will come "crawling out of the woodwork" to take what they can get. But if they are left alone to

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p.212.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., p.213.

⁵⁵⁰ Belief in and fear of "the woodwork effect" continues to play a major part in social policy, as a recent discussion of home health care explains: "Policy analysts and politicians have always feared that if government pays for more home health care, families and friends will provide less informal care. Conventional wisdom...holds that public funding for home care will 'erode' or 'crowd out' informal care. If government subsidizes the cost of formal care, families will 'withdraw' some of their free labor and rely more on paid services, driving up public expenditures; this has been called 'the substitution effect'. Similarly, analysts worry that if government pays family caregivers for their services, people who are currently providing care for free will come forward to demand payment, again causing public expenditures to rise; this has been dubbed 'the woodwork effect'. These seemingly neutral, scientific-sounding terms cast doubt on the moral motivations of informal caregivers, and many researchers have noted that this fear is one of the main barriers to expanding public programs for home health care. Numerous studies have addressed this question, and almost all have found that the expected displacement simply does not happen. A review of 53 studies conducted between 1960 and 1988 found that only four showed a statistically significant decrease in informal care when formal care was made available." Deborah Stone, "Reframing Home Health-Care Policy," (Cambridge, Mass.: Radcliffe Public Policy Center, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2000), pp.19-20.

cope, they will manage to go on providing “free” care, and save taxpayers’ money. So the state’s main responsibility is not to interfere with family care, and it should step in only as a last resort, and to the least extent possible, after family care has broken down. As Treasury expressed this either/or reasoning in 1987, “The cost of interrupting voluntary interactions is the loss of the welfare that would otherwise have been created.”⁵⁵¹

By contrast, the supportive state recognises that family care benefits both society and individuals; that all forms of care incur costs, including the caregiver’s forgone earnings and labour market productivity; and that supportive help to both caregivers and dependants ensures that families do not break down and are able to provide as much care as they can. The state’s main responsibility is to support families in providing care. The supportive state is more efficient in the long term, because it values and keeps viable the caring work done within the family. It also recognises interdependency: the state and the economy are as “dependent” on family caregiving as the caregiving family is “dependent” on them.⁵⁵²

Finally, the section on women concluded that:

Significant improvements for women in the past would not have been achieved without active state involvement. The necessary changes outlined above require the continuation of state action on behalf of women.⁵⁵³

Part Four: Gender and the New Right

My aim for my own subsequent work was to analyse New Right discourse in terms of gender at a level beyond its immediate manifestations in policy, focusing more directly on it and going further down to its philosophical underpinnings than I had been able to do in the Commission report. After I left the Commission early in 1988 to take up my McCarthy fellowship, I put together a series of lectures for a women’s studies course on feminist theory. With Phillida Bunkle’s encouragement, I condensed and developed these into a contribution to the collection published in 1992 as *Feminist Voices*:

⁵⁵¹ Treasury, "Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. I," p.404.

⁵⁵² Royal Commission on Social Policy, "Vol II: Future Directions," p.214.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., p.270.

Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa New Zealand,⁵⁵⁴ giving it a title from a nursery rhyme: "To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right".⁵⁵⁵

In this essay, I applied feminist post-modernist theory to the operations of New Right discourse, as it constructed the social and economic world through an account that was explicitly presented "not as a culturally and historically contingent model of how society ought to function, or could be made to function, but as a value-free, unarguable, universalised description of how it actually does function". In other words, it produced a naturalised account of the social and economic world, akin to the accounts of the "natural world" produced by "objective" scientific enquiry, and laying claim to a similar status as knowledge which revealed "the truth".

Producing such knowledge involved setting up a model of human existence based on "mutually exclusive oppositions". In another essay in *Feminist Voices*, Phillida Bunkle outlined how such models worked:

The Modern model of the natural world...incorporates a series of dualisms, the most basic of which is the separation of mind and matter...This model...sees the material universe as a machine, and nothing but a machine...Everything in the material world could be explained in terms of the arrangement and movement of its parts...The mechanistic model of the natural world assumes that cause and effect form regular and predictable sequences...To discover how something works, it is taken apart and examined, because understanding the function of each part will explain the working of the whole...⁵⁵⁶

This was precisely the kind of deceptively simple model on which New Right discourse was based, as "Government Management" had made clear:

It is not possible to simply adopt a policy response to an apparent problem without having some implicit expectation of the way the world and the individuals in it will respond to the policy...The nearest we can get to understanding how human interactions proceed is to construct theoretical models of parts of social interaction...very often it is the most unreal models which are the easiest to comprehend and therefore the most effective for revealing insights into some aspects of behaviour...The relevant question...is

⁵⁵⁴ Rosemary Du Plessis with et al., eds., *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa New Zealand* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁵⁵⁵ Else, "To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right."

⁵⁵⁶ Phillida Bunkle, "Becoming Knowers: Feminism, Science, and Medicine," in *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Rosemary du Plessis with et al., eds., (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.62.

to check whether the assumptions adopted for the particular exercise are relevant and appropriate to the question under examination.⁵⁵⁷

The most prominent assumption is the opposition of “public” and “private”. Confusingly, this takes two different forms: “public” state versus “private” market/property/household/family; and “the complementary and *natural* opposition of the public sphere of the market to the private sphere of the household/family, with the state relegated to a merely residual role...” Drawing again on Culler’s proposal that “what matters is not the differences between things, but the relations between them”,⁵⁵⁸ rather than considering each of these terms separately, I focused first on “the crucial matter of how the two ‘natural channels’ of the market and the family interact”. This is the “missing link” in New Right discourse. Each strand avoids the difficulty of explaining this link by paying more attention to one of these “channels”: “the libertarian [neo-liberal] right concentrates on the ‘free’ market, and takes the family largely for granted, whereas the authoritarian [non-conservative] right focuses on the ‘traditional’ family, giving less emphasis to the market.”⁵⁵⁹

I drew on the work of philosopher Ross Poole⁵⁶⁰ for the idea that the ways in which the market and the family are purported to function “require those who inhabit them to exhibit two very different *kinds* of human nature”. Market individuals are “naturally self-interested, self-directed, rational, and independent”, with an identity which is therefore necessarily “independent of, and distinct from, any particular kind of market work – or any particular set of essentially short-term market relations”. Altruism makes no sense to them, because others are merely means or impediments to furthering their own interests. Yet these individuals “must themselves somehow be produced and reproduced”. This takes place not in the market, but in the family. Its members must be “essentially other-directed”; their identity is “formed and embedded in altruistic, emotional, long-term relations with unique ‘significant others’”.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁷ Treasury, "Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. I," pp.428-9.

⁵⁵⁸ Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*, p.10.

⁵⁵⁹ Else, "To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right," pp.240-1.

⁵⁶⁰ Ross Poole, "Morality, Masculinity and the Market," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 39 (1985): pp.16-23.

⁵⁶¹ Else, "To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right," p.241.

This necessary difference between market individuals and family members, and the relations within each group, offers an obvious solution to the problem of the “missing link”. Both strands of the New Right, neo-liberal and neo-conservative, can simply assume that:

the two “natures” involved conveniently correspond with the two naturally distinct kinds of human beings – men and women. The taken-for-granted connection between the sexes – reproductive heterosexual relations – then becomes the foundation for the necessary bridge between the two spheres.⁵⁶²

The next part of the essay dealt with the covert operations of gender in a key section of “Government Management”, the annex on “The Role and Goals of Social Policy”. Using this pre-eminent New Zealand expression of New Right discourse, I charted the major ways in which this discourse implicitly relies on a traditionally gendered division of labour, and of human nature, to construct an account of human economic and social behaviour that appears to make sense.

“Despite its carefully gender-neutral language and its frequent references to ‘freedom’ and ‘well-being’”, the Treasury account, like all such accounts, “depends on assuming that not only the free market, but also its necessary complement, the traditional family, is functioning through the familiar male/female division of both natures and roles”.⁵⁶³ In other words, it relies on that “bridge” of unproblematic co-operation between “market men” and “family women”. It never becomes clear whether those who do unpaid work in the family and community are perceived to be motivated by rational self-interest (because the personal benefits of doing this work, including having children, offset the obvious costs), or by irrational altruism (because the costs outweigh the benefits).⁵⁶⁴ My point here was similar to one later highlighted by Genevieve

⁵⁶² Ibid., p.242. I did not intend to imply that this is an essential, ahistorical distinction. I pointed out that “Government Management” makes frequent use of the term “natural” in connection with “families”, as in “the natural cohesion of families”. See discussion of this passage in Chapter 10.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p.243.

⁵⁶⁴ Treasury asserted that the assumption made by the argument for state support to ensure equitable access to childcare for “working mothers” was “not just that the [private] benefits of childrearing [to the parents] do not compensate for the [private] disadvantages in terms of loss of external work and educational opportunities [and hence of income], but that the public has an obligation to compensate for that net disadvantage from what would be (without the compensation) the result of an irrational desire to have children. Or, in the case of unplanned children, that the public should compensate parents for the unexpected net loss. The validity of the assumptions will not be self-evident to all, and depends largely on conclusions reached about the degree of community responsibility for raising children.” Treasury consistently concluded that there can be little, if any, such responsibility. The private benefits of having

Lloyd, when she says that feminist history of philosophy can be seen as “directing [its] gaze on the philosophical tradition itself...focused on the interface between philosophical inquiry and its cultural context, where the philosophical imagination chooses its ‘validating examples’.” The point of this “critique of past operations of the philosophical imagination” is “to make visible the operations of the imagination which have sought in the ‘feminine’ examples of the non-rational”.⁵⁶⁵ Ostensibly gender-neutral neo-liberal discourse does not openly seek such examples, but is forced by its own logic to produce them.

As for the proper role of the state, the underlying assumption is that both the market and the family are “threatened chiefly by the state itself”. Like the market, the state consists of a collection of individuals all trying to maximise their own self-interest; but it lacks both ““the usual incentives of market relations”” and the family’s ““long-term caring understandings””.⁵⁶⁶ It also possesses unique ““coercive powers”” to tax and to borrow against future tax income. The services and benefits it provides with this money therefore represent inefficient spending, and produce perverse effects. “Market individuals respond to the resulting loss (or as extreme libertarians term it, ‘theft’) of earnings in two ways: they ‘either reduce their work or alter it to reduce their tax burden’. The unpaid work of families is affected too: ‘The cost of interrupting voluntary interactions is the loss of welfare that would otherwise have been created.’” Who creates that welfare, why, and under what conditions, is again left unclear. But the conclusion is obvious: government “must leave both the carers and their financial supporters alone, in order to ensure that all needed goods and services not supplied by the market will be supplied by the family”.⁵⁶⁷

children must logically outweigh the costs, otherwise parents would not be so irrational as to have them, and therefore the benefits must also be privately captured by parents (and presumably children), rather than the public. On the other hand, if parents (or at any rate, women) do act irrationally, allowing their interests to be over-ridden by their children’s interests, that is not the state’s concern. Treasury, “Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. II Education Issues,” p.57.

⁵⁶⁵ Genevieve Lloyd, “Feminism in History of Philosophy: Appropriating the Past,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.254.

⁵⁶⁶ The enclosed quotation marks indicate that within the essay, I was quoting directly from “Government Management”.

⁵⁶⁷ Else, “To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right,” pp.244-5.

However, this does not mean that the state should simply leave individuals and families alone. Although both the neo-liberal and the neo-conservative right “stress the importance of individual freedom” and “make much of the need to eliminate and discourage dependence...on the state”:

Paradoxically...the price of forcing the family, the market, and the individuals who people them to be naturally free and independent is a strong state...The libertarian right focuses on market freedom, presented as the absence of restraint and regulation – but only in certain narrowly defined forms...[such as] fewer rules to restrain employers, but more to restrain unions...[The neo-conservative right explicitly] regards the financial dependence of family women on market men as both natural and essential...It is up to women to control men, and to protect themselves and their children, by insisting that sex take place only within marriage, and that men work to support their families.⁵⁶⁸

Neo-conservative calls for “the state to stay out of family life” (which in New Zealand, in contrast to Britain, were at that point publicly associated more with the religious right than the New Right) also “turn out to require more rather than less regulation of certain groups and activities”:

In general, the state is required to exercise the authority of a parent [or rather a husband and father] whenever “natural” family roles require reinforcing. It should proscribe and punish the unnatural acts of homosexual relations and abortion even among adults. It should forbid anyone to offer sex education, contraception, or abortion to minors without their parents' consent. And it should promote and provide for the adoption of unmarried women's children by married couples...

So no matter which strand of the New Right is speaking, the conclusion is the same: the state should not provide a benefit for single mothers and children, thereby forcing them back to the traditional family in some form – getting support from their own parents, marrying [or remarrying], or giving their child up for adoption. Their only alternative is to go it alone on the market...The underlying logic...is the same as that of Herbert Spencer in 1907: “Is it not manifest that there must exist in our midst an immense amount of misery which is a normal result of misconduct, and ought not to be disassociated from it?”⁵⁶⁹

Both strands agree that the state can legitimately offer assistance to families only in those narrow circumstances where “their problems or burdens are seen as beyond their choice, control, and foresight – for example, when a handicapped child is born.” Unlike [normal] children, unemployment, ill-health, or old age, this is something

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., p.246.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.246-7.

“which no one ‘deserves’, or would ‘choose’...or is able to predict and provide for”. But the two strands come into conflict over “which of the two naturally existing but also naturally opposed spheres – the market or the family – is to be defended and reinforced...In theory [the state] should protect both, but in practice this often proves impossible.”⁵⁷⁰ The example I gave was reproductive technology, showing how significant New Right discourse (including its internal conflicts), like feminism, was for every area of human life. I contrasted the approaches taken by Thatcher’s neo-conservative government in Britain with the neo-liberal resort to contract law and market freedom in many US states.⁵⁷¹

There is also conflict between the two strands over “the extent to which the boundaries marking off [assumed] male and female natures and functions, the essential basis for the gendered economy, are to be blurred or emphasized”:

Women who “choose” to enter the labour market are commonly treated as if they embodied selective aspects of both “natures”. They are assumed to lack the incentive of being wholly or even partly responsible financially for the support of family members [the original justification for men’s higher rates of pay and promotion]; but they are also assumed to have actual or potential family care responsibilities...The path to better pay and promotion, when it exists at all, appears to require market women to act and be treated entirely as unconnected individuals with no family – that is, as “not-women” rather than as men, since men are tacitly acknowledged to be attached to families as earners (though not as caregivers). It also requires market women to out-perform any domestically supported man...

Given these harsh terms, the authoritarian right asserts that women are better off trading their individual freedom to enter the market for financial dependence within the family, thus preserving the major “incentives” which [supposedly] keep men hard at work. The libertarian right supports market “equality” for women, as long as they do not also try to claim any “special privileges” (such as time off for bearing and rearing children).⁵⁷²

Because “To Market and Home Again” was completed soon after Labour went out of office in 1990, it does not deal with the turn to neo-conservatism under National. If I had written the essay a little later, it would have been only too easy to discuss New Zealand examples for both strands, as Chapter 10 shows.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid., p.248.

I concluded this essay by arguing that focusing on the “missing link” of how market and family were supposed to interact enables feminists “to understand that family, market, state, the individual, and the boundaries between them do not exist as natural givens but are, like gender, historically constructed and constantly changing.”

But the difficulty of holding on to and using this insight has been immense... In New Zealand, as elsewhere, only a feminism based on the lived experience of many different groups of women, and a thoroughly self-conscious understanding of its own ideology as “historical both in its creation and its content”⁵⁷³ can take apart every version of the New Right’s utterly ahistorical and untenable “economy”, analyse its disastrous effects in practice, and advocate a new kind of political experiment.⁵⁷⁴

This is what I concentrated on doing in the second half of the 1990s, in a book, conference papers and essays, as well as popular articles and broadcast talks.

⁵⁷³ Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family*, p.207.

⁵⁷⁴ Else, "To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right," p.249.

Chapter 10: False economy, 1990-1999

Introduction

This chapter considers my writing on the New Right in the 1990s, in the context of the reshaping of social policy under successive National or National-led governments. After 1987, Labour's internal divisions had hindered neo-liberals from fully reshaping social policy in line with the shift in economic policy. Before the 1990 election, Labour's left even managed to push through legislation for a limited form of pay equity (equal pay for work of equal value), which had the potential to improve pay rates substantially in some occupations where women predominated. After the election, it became clear that National, contrary to its manifesto, intended to carry on where Labour's right had been constrained to leave off, along the lines laid down by Treasury's 1987 brief. The type and extent of available assistance shrank just as the numbers needing help dramatically increased.

Part One gives a summary of National's major social policy "reforms", together with an indication of their effects, in order to "insist... on the concrete materiality of things to do with cultural life".⁵⁷⁵ Part Two discusses the uneasy celebration of the centenary of women's suffrage in 1993, and my associated writing, in the face of a "highly ambivalent and often openly hostile reaction". Part Three covers the genesis, development and reception of my book *False Economy*,⁵⁷⁶ which again centred on unpaid and paid work. Part Four focuses on the changes in my writing which followed, and in particular how I aimed to counter the discourse of dependency, in the context of growing resistance not only to the reforms themselves, but also to the discursive justifications for them which the government and leading bureaucrats increasingly employed over this period. As "the shift from neo-liberal to neo-conservative themes became more prominent", the emphasis moved from the economy and the market to the welfare system and the role and responsibilities of "the family", meaning

⁵⁷⁵ Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*, p.26.

⁵⁷⁶ Anne Else, *False Economy: New Zealanders Face the Conflict between Paid and Unpaid Work* (Auckland: Tandem Press, 1996).

predominantly women. Increasingly, too, the elderly, made up mainly of women, were constructed “as a threat to the young, to the economy, and to New Zealand's future”. Part Five considers why my work focused on this group, and New Right discourse concerning them, at the end of the 1990s.

Part One: Pressing on with the programme

In 1987, Treasury had recommended the restructuring or removal of every form of state social provision and social justice intervention, on neo-liberal grounds. Both individual freedom and the labour market, it argued, were unjustifiably constrained by industry-wide bargaining, national awards, collective contracts, and a “floor” of conditions, such as a minimum wage. On the other hand, taxes and government spending were unduly high because of inefficient state provision of education, health care, housing, and universal family benefits and pensions, which acted as disincentives to private enterprise, market work, and family care. The main form of social assistance should be choice-promoting cash supplements, tightly targeted through means testing, and low enough to keep the work incentive high.⁵⁷⁷

From 1990 to 1999, Treasury's recommendations were put into practice in some form across virtually every area of social policy, as well as areas of economic policy insufficiently attended to by Labour.⁵⁷⁸ As the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Don Brash, explained in 1996:

[T]he National Government elected in 1990 pressed on with the programme that Labour had left incomplete: unburdened by any institutional links with the trade union movement, it deregulated the labour market, made some reductions in welfare benefits, and generally brought public spending under control.⁵⁷⁹

Two high-ranking National women MPs, Ruth Richardson (Minister of Finance 1990-93) and Jenny Shipley (Minister of Health and Social Welfare, and from December

⁵⁷⁷ Treasury, "Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. I", Treasury, "Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987 Vol. II Education Issues."

⁵⁷⁸ For a detailed account of the main changes to social policy in National's first term, see Boston and Dalziel, eds., *The Decent Society? Essays in Response to National's Economic and Social Policies*.

⁵⁷⁹ Brash, *New Zealand's Remarkable Reforms: The Fifth Hayek Memorial Lecture*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 4 June 1996 ([cited]), p.9.

1997 to 1999 New Zealand's first woman Prime Minister) were the most prominent leaders of this programme.

National's first act in office was to repeal the pay equity legislation. Its employment legislation was designed to "place labour contracts on almost the same basis as other commercial contracts".⁵⁸⁰ It abolished national awards, made individual contracts the norm, and successfully restricted employees' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Several unions representing mainly low-paid women workers consequently went out of existence, and overall rates of union membership plummeted. By December 1995, only 17 percent of the workforce was covered by union-negotiated collective contracts. Union resistance was generally ineffectual; the outstanding exception was the primary teachers' union, which not only succeeded (as did the secondary teachers' union) in retaining national collective contracts for most of its predominantly female members, but also won pay parity with secondary teachers for the first time.⁵⁸¹ Women in most other occupations were particularly badly affected by labour market deregulation, especially the imposition of individual contracts, because of three factors related to the gendered division of labour – factors which New Right discourse rationalised out of existence:

The reality is...that women, particularly women with domestic commitments, may not be in as strong a position to negotiate wages, employment conditions and training opportunities of their own choice as men...[Their disadvantage results] from three fundamental factors: the way that women are socialised and perceived; the impact of care commitments on choice; and the effect of present structural inequalities.⁵⁸²

Meanwhile, targeting and means-testing were extended and intensified across the whole field of social provision. The means to be tested were not solely those of individuals, but of variously defined "family" and "household" groupings, and could include assets as well as income. For example, tertiary students were required to pay a

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ As for other mainly state sector unions, membership of the primary teachers' union, the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), has always been voluntary. For an account of the primary teachers' campaign, led by Rosslyn Noonan (then heading NZEI) and Joanna Beresford, see Harvey McQueen and Anne Else, *A Question of Shoe Size: The Campaign for Pay Parity for Primary Teachers 1994-1998* (Wellington: New Zealand Educational Institute, 2001).

⁵⁸² Lisa Davies and Natalie Jackson, "Women's Labour Force Participation in New Zealand: The Past 100 Years," (Wellington: Social Policy Agency, 1993), pp.150-1.

substantial proportion of their fees, and were denied further state assistance unless their parents' combined incomes fell below a low limit (regardless of what either parent, including those long absent from students' homes, actually contributed). A punitive student loan scheme was brought in to fill the gap, putting women at a marked disadvantage in relation to men in terms of repayment. A new asset-stripping regime allowed financial assets, including savings, and in some cases the value of their home, to be taken from people aged over 65 in long-term care.⁵⁸³ In the 1991 budget, the universal old age pension was to be replaced with a niggardly means-tested, couple-based regime, which would have resulted in many women, and some men, receiving no state pension at all. This proposed change caused such outrage that it was not implemented; instead, pension relativity with wages was reduced and the qualifying age was raised incrementally by five years.⁵⁸⁴

There was no such effective protest over the other benefit changes. Don Brash approvingly summed up those changes as follows:

Most benefits other than National Superannuation were cut by between 5 percent and 27 percent, and automatic indexation to the CPI [Consumer Price Index] was abolished. Unemployment benefit was denied to 16 and 17 year olds, youth rates extended to age 24, and the stand-down period extended, up to a maximum of 26 weeks in cases of voluntary resignation. The universal family benefit was abolished and replaced by a selective scheme paid to families with dependent children, means-tested according to parental income.⁵⁸⁵

The overall "savings" to government were estimated at over \$1 billion. Because benefits are transfer payments which are immediately spent in the economy, officials warned that "cuts of this magnitude" could "have a significant depressive effect on the

⁵⁸³ A husband or wife (but no other relative) who remained at home could keep the house and a set amount of savings. An unpartnered person in care could keep only a sum sufficient to cover the cost of a funeral. The wealthy were not affected by these changes. Labour softened this regime, but as of 2005 it remained in place.

⁵⁸⁴ The age of eligibility for pensions was to be progressively increased to 65, the value of the pension for married couples was to be adjusted by the CPI, not the average wage, until it declined to 65 percent of the average after-tax wage, and the surcharge on other income was to be increased to 25 percent. National later lowered and eventually abolished the surcharge, greatly increasing the income of the wealthiest elderly and opening the scheme to charges of gross advantage in comparison with the sharp abatement rules for other benefits. For a detailed discussion of these measures, see Anne Else and Susan St John, *A Super Future? The Price of Growing Older in New Zealand* (Auckland: Tandem Press, 1998).

⁵⁸⁵ Brash, *New Zealand's Remarkable Reforms: The Fifth Hayek Memorial Lecture*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 4 June 1996 ([cited]).

overall level of economic activity, and in particular, the household consumption sector”, which could in turn lead to job losses and off-set the original “savings”.⁵⁸⁶

These warnings proved accurate, particularly as the changes took place at a time of rapidly rising unemployment, fuelled by the restructuring and privatisation of state enterprises begun under Labour. In 1986, 4 percent of the labour force (64,000) were officially unemployed; by 1992, this had risen to 10.3 percent (170,000), one of the worst rates in the OECD. Unemployment among Maori, who were concentrated in the worst hit occupations and industries, was at an all-time high of 25.4 percent.⁵⁸⁷

The stated rationale behind the changes was not merely to save money, but to remove “disincentives” to undertaking or increasing paid work. Yet inevitably, given the rise in official unemployment, and the greater rise in the jobless, the number of working-age people receiving means-tested benefits rose rapidly, reaching around 350,000 in 1996.⁵⁸⁸ Women made up approximately 55 percent of principal recipients of the major benefits (excluding pensions), but they made up over 70 percent of parents receiving benefit assistance. Overall, by 1996 benefits were supporting over 263,000 children under 16 – about 28 percent of all dependent children. The number receiving the domestic purposes benefit (DPB), 90 percent of whom were women, had risen from 17,231 in 1975 to 94,823 in June 1990; despite benefit cuts of between 9 percent and 16 percent, it rose again to 104,027 by June 1995.

⁵⁸⁶ Bob Stephens, “Budgeting with the Benefits Cuts,” in *The Decent Society? Essays in Response to National's Economic and Social Policies*, ed. Jonathan Boston and Paul Dalziel (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.110. This book gives a detailed account of many of National’s 1991 social policies, but only occasionally mentions their impact on women, and does not otherwise deal with gender issues.

⁵⁸⁷ Among Pakeha, unemployment rose from 3.2 percent in 1986 to a peak of 7.9 percent in 1992. Among Maori, it rose much more, off a much higher base, from 10.7 percent in 1986 to 25.4 percent in 1992; for Pacific peoples, it rose from 6.5 percent to 28.0 percent; and for those of “other” ethnicity (mainly Asian), it rose from 3.6 percent in 1986 to 14.7 percent. By 2003, official unemployment remained higher than it had been in 1986 for every group except Maori; however, the Maori rate remained relatively high, at 10.2 percent. While there is little gender difference in the official figures, there is known to be more “hidden” unemployment and under-employment among women than among men. Ministry of Social Development, *The Social Report*. (Ministry of Social Development, 2005 [cited 16 July 2005]). Available from <http://socialreport.msd.govt.nz/paid-work/unemployment.html>.

⁵⁸⁸ Between 1991 and 1996, the number of people (mainly men) on the unemployment benefit fell by 12 percent, but those on the domestic purposes benefit rose by 11 percent, those on sickness benefit rose by 68 percent, and those on invalids benefit rose by 44 percent. Murry Petrie, *Strategic Social Policy Initiatives: From Welfare to Well-Being and Strengthening Families* (Economics and Strategy Group, 1999 [cited 7 August 2005]), p.37, fn. 44; available from <http://www.strengtheningfamilies.govt.nz/publications/PDFs/StrengtheningFamiliesReport.pdf>.

The cuts ensured that despite the greatly increased need, the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) being spent on social welfare in 1995 was lower than it had been in 1990.⁵⁸⁹ Shrinking levels of support were no longer keeping benefit recipients out of poverty, let alone enabling them to “participate and belong” in society. The proportion of those on income-tested benefits counted as being in poverty (that is, with an income of less than 60 percent of the median equivalent household income, after housing costs) rose sharply, from 26 percent in 1987-88 to 74 percent in 1992-93. Poverty was associated not only with benefit income, but simply with having children. Among sole parent families, regardless of income source, the proportion in poverty rose from 17.4 percent in 1987-88 to 62.5 percent in 1992-93. Even among two-parent families, it doubled from 12.4 percent to 25.1 percent.

The major factor in the rapid rise in poverty was the combination of cutting benefits with raising state housing rents to market levels, and selling public sector housing. Housing assistance in New Zealand was already targeted to the least well-off. Following Treasury's prescription for assistance in cash rather than in kind, an inadequate, complexly tested, sharply abated “accommodation supplement” became the only form of assistance with housing costs. In a 1997 speech, the Salvation Army's national director of social services outlined the enormous impact of these changes:

[I]n 1993, housing costs were the single largest contributor to the “poverty gap” – the shortfall between the current income of those experiencing poverty and a minimum adequate income. Of the \$826 million poor people fell short of a minimum adequate income, housing costs contributed \$518 million... rent was the single most frequently mentioned reason for seeking help from foodbanks, with 45.5 percent mentioning it... In 1994, 46.2 percent of [foodbank] clients spent half or more of their income on their housing. By 1996, this figure had risen to 57.6 percent. Foodbank use itself rose 473 percent between 1991 and 1996...

Between 1994 and 1996, the percentage of state house tenants surveyed who were spending half or more of their income on their housing costs increased from 37.5 percent to 58.8 percent... the percentage of private tenants spending

⁵⁸⁹ “In the year to March 1990, the net fiscal impact of social welfare expenditure amounted to \$9,510 million, or 13.6 percent of GDP. In the year to June 1995, the net fiscal impact was still \$10,101 million, or 11.5 percent of GDP, virtually unchanged from the percentage of GDP spent on income support in the year to March 1985 (11.3 percent).” Brash, *New Zealand's Remarkable Reforms: The Fifth Hayek Memorial Lecture, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 4 June 1996* ([cited]). Brash was using this data to highlight the need for further cuts in welfare spending.

half or more of their income on rent increased from 58.9 percent to 62.7 percent...41 percent of those on the Accommodation Supplement were spending over half of their income on their accommodation [and] 19 percent were spending over 70 percent...22 percent ... had \$75 a week or less after paying their housing costs, and 9 percent had \$25 a week or less. Greater parity of assistance may have been achieved, but there is no evidence that assistance has improved the situation of private tenants. The result appears only to have been a spreading of the burden of high housing costs to low income tenants in state housing as well...⁵⁹⁰

From the early 1990s, doctors joined teachers, voluntary agency workers and church spokespeople to point out that the resulting overcrowding, frequent moves, and loss of income for other basic needs were not only impairing poor families' access to education and employment, but also directly damaging their health.⁵⁹¹ The restructured health sector was ill-equipped to deal with such issues. The Public Health Commission was disbanded in 1995 for being too outspoken about the links between social policy and ill-health.⁵⁹² In a drive to separate funding from provision, encourage competition, and enforce a focus on financial efficiency, hospitals were turned into "Crown Health Enterprises", and part-charges were imposed for hospital care (although these were later dropped, after widespread refusal to pay).⁵⁹³

⁵⁹⁰ Campbell Roberts, *Poverty or Dependency? The Defining Question in the Relationship between Government and Community. An Address by Major Campbell Roberts, National Director, Salvation Army Social Services, Delivered at Capital City Forum, Wellington on 29 October 1997* (The Churches' Agency on Social Issues (CASI), 1997 [cited 19 July 2005]); available from <http://www.casi.org.nz/ccf/povordep.html>.

⁵⁹¹ In 1993, for example, eleven churches combined to produce a *Social Justice Statement*, followed by *Making Choices: Social Justice for Our Times*. See Janiewski and Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets*, p.106.

⁵⁹² As Sandra Coney pointed out, the Commission offended liquor, food and tobacco industry interests and the ministers who supported these; but more importantly, it repeatedly drew attention to the social and economic, rather than individual, determinants of ill-health, such as unemployment, notably in its two status reports on public health in New Zealand in 1993 and 1994. "Dumping the PHC served as a warning to others to shut up if they didn't want to go the same way." Sandra Coney, *The Politics of Public Health and Health Promotion: Who Decides and for Whose Good? Address to Ethics of Health Promotion Conference, Research Unit for the Ethical and Legal Analysis of Health Care, Auckland, 27 September 1996* (Women's Health Action, 1996 [cited 7 August 2005]); available from <http://www.womens-health.org.nz/healthsystem/healthgen.htm#politics>.

⁵⁹³ National's reforms broadly followed the recommendations of a report produced for Labour in 1989, "Unshackling the Hospitals" (commonly known as the Gibbs Report after its main author, neo-liberal businessman Alan Gibbs). They set up four Regional Health Authorities, which received government funding and sought tenders for a range of health services from both public and private providers, introducing a funder/provider split into the provision of community health services for the first time. From 1993, the new Crown Health Enterprises were legally required to operate as successful (i.e. profit-making) businesses. After 1999, Labour again restructured health services to put more emphasis on community representation and meeting health needs.

Part Two: Celebrating women's suffrage

During National's first term, I finished *A Question of Adoption*,⁵⁹⁴ then took on paid work related to the centenary of women's suffrage in 1993.⁵⁹⁵ By the time "To Market and Home Again"⁵⁹⁶ appeared in 1992, I was employed full-time at the Historical Branch of Internal Affairs as the chief editor of (and contributor to) a history of New Zealand women's voluntary organisations.⁵⁹⁷ Outside paid work, I continued to speak and write about the New Right, and Rosslyn Noonan and I co-wrote an essay for a collection by feminists looking back over the last twenty years of feminism in New Zealand.⁵⁹⁸ We concluded that the values of successive governments since 1984 had been "the antithesis of those which had motivated and inspired the second wave of feminism", and that feminists were now faced with an unforeseen and ironical situation:

[T]he most serious challenge to feminism has come not from those asserting the inferiority of women, or an inherently different female role, but from those who claim to value the individual and the individual's freedom above all else. In New Zealand, New Right arguments were couched in carefully gender neutral language, and avoided overtly moralistic positions. They reduced men and women alike to "labour units", "consumers", "taxpayers" and "beneficiaries", and they co-opted many key aspects of the feminist critique of the welfare state, such as calls for increased accountability, "flexibility" and "choice".

Although feminists had quite properly spent a lot of time and effort attacking what we saw as the deficiencies of the welfare state for women, we had not questioned its most basic premise – that the state could, and should, use the resources available to it to improve the lives of its citizens. Indeed, much of what we were doing depended utterly on that premise. It is no coincidence that just when we were starting to get real results, and the state was beginning to open up to women, Maori, and other groups, new right policies began shifting major areas out of reach or taking them entirely out of the state's domain...The nineties finally ended any illusions about continuing progress for women in general.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁴ Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*.

⁵⁹⁵ In 1893, New Zealand had become the first country in which all adult women won the right to vote in national elections.

⁵⁹⁶ Else, "To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right."

⁵⁹⁷ Else, ed., *Women Together: A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand/Nga Ropu Wahine O Te Motu*. This 610-page history, to which 121 authors contributed, included 13 general essays, gave detailed histories of 150 organisations, and discussed many more.

⁵⁹⁸ Else and Noonan, "Unfinished Business."

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.200.

We tried hard to take the long view and be as positive as we could, on the grounds that “Pessimism...tends to leave the status quo in place, and works to stabilize the topsy-turvy. It consequently suits men in power, however harshly the powerful might be portrayed.”⁶⁰⁰ Once again, we focused on feminist understandings of unpaid work:

Although feminists did not come to grips with some aspects of economic change, we did thoroughly understand others – and these may prove to be the most important. Even the...OECD has begun to take in what we have been insisting all along: that economies, and societies as a whole, depend as much on their unpaid as on their paid workers. A 1992 OECD report...came to much the same conclusion as the Royal Commission on Social Policy in 1988: that the relationship between paid and unpaid work, who does it and under what conditions, is at the heart of continuing inequalities between men and women, here as elsewhere...We have to shift the focus so that men stop being seen as an unchangeable given, the current male pattern of work stops being defined as the norm, and women are no longer expected to resolve the tension between market and home, between paid and unpaid work...

The heartening thing is that most New Zealanders – and certainly most women...stubbornly refuse to accept that what’s good for the Business Roundtable and the multinationals is good for New Zealand. On the whole, New Zealanders have proved much more willing to accept feminist arguments than New Right arguments...New Zealand is a small community, and many levers of power are still within our reach.⁶⁰¹

The centenary of women’s suffrage which had prompted this essay proved to be a very mixed blessing indeed for feminism. In 1994 I wrote a conference paper analysing the whole episode:

In general the merit of the suffragists⁶⁰² and their cause was not questioned. The central contest was not over suffrage itself, but over who could and could not claim to be the true modern-day counterparts of the suffragists...Was it the women who had “made it” in men’s terms, such as Jenny Shipley and Ruth Richardson? Was it the ordinary women of New Zealand, who heroically carried on through thick and thin? Was it those who wanted to focus on the achievements and progress of the last 100 years, with a major series of events designed to attract as many women as possible? Or was it those who wanted to continue to focus solely on the continuing oppression of women?

The feminists who had originally promoted the concept of suffrage year envisaged a whole series of activities and events which would use the winning of suffrage as the basis for focusing public attention on the suffragists’ wider agenda: how much progress had been achieved towards the full emancipation

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., p.201. The quotation is from Marina Warner, *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 October 1991, p.4.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., pp.201-2.

⁶⁰² The women who campaigned for the vote in New Zealand in the nineteenth century are known as suffragists. The term “suffragettes” properly applies only to those involved in later British campaigns.

of women, and how much remained to be done. Because winning the vote was a major advance encompassing every adult woman, its centenary appeared to offer a unique opportunity to appeal to and involve all New Zealand women regardless of their differences...focusing on [the campaign for suffrage] could give a boost to feminism and a much-needed counter to myths about it, by showing its past and present importance and its relevance to the lives of so-called "ordinary" New Zealand women. It could bridge that awkward gap between "feminism" and "women" which had been so assiduously fostered by anti-feminists throughout the 1970s and 1980s. By contrast, opponents and critics focused on the money, the current political and economic situation, and what they believed was and was not appropriate for "women", or for "feminists", in such circumstances.⁶⁰³

From the outset, a highly ambivalent and often openly hostile reaction to the very idea of celebrations, the modest amount of government funding allocated to them,⁶⁰⁴ and some of the high-profile feminists involved, quickly emerged in and was fuelled by the major media. Every instance of conflict and hostility got the maximum publicity, and many media commentators, both male and female, contributed their own complaints and attacks.⁶⁰⁵ The ambivalence stemmed partly from the National government itself:

The government was understandably nervous about focusing too closely on what was happening to women as a result of its policies, nor did it want to be seen endorsing contemporary feminism. So it tried, with some limited success, to shift the focus away from celebrating suffrage and the progress won since by the women's movement, let alone challenging the present, toward a much vaguer, virtually meaningless concept of "celebrating women's contribution" or simply "celebrating women".⁶⁰⁶

Some conservative women's groups decried the frivolous use of money for celebrations, "when so many people were having trouble surviving".⁶⁰⁷ Some feminists

⁶⁰³ Anne Else, "Never Mind the Quality, Feel the Width: Suffrage Year in Retrospect" (paper presented at the Women's Studies Association Conference, Wellington, August 1994), p.19.

⁶⁰⁴ The total amount was approximately \$5 million, about the same as the National government spent on one public relations campaign about the changes it was making to the health services.

⁶⁰⁵ In my paper I quoted Jocelyn Fish, who chaired the Suffrage Foundation that had first sought public recognition of the centenary, recalling the reaction to the funding announcement: "Talkback callers and hosts, writers of letters to papers and editors...portrayed us as unreasoning radicals seeking our own ends, at the same time as they were applauding requests for money for Expo '92, for the America's Cup [yacht race], and for sports bodies...I got hate mail even from people I had previously considered my friends. My sister and my adult children were lambasted at social functions." When Sandra Coney, the co-instigator of the Cartwright Inquiry, received a suffrage fund grant towards one of the largest projects, a major television series and book on 100 years of New Zealand women's history, she and the project came under sustained and bitter attack by various media personalities. (Despite the substantial cost of my history of women's organisations, there was no similar attack on me or on that project, because it was funded by the Historical Branch, and unlike Sandra, I was not a public figure.)

⁶⁰⁶ Else, "Never Mind the Quality, Feel the Width: Suffrage Year in Retrospect", p.22.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., p.19.

took a similar line, on the grounds that New Right policies had worsened women's situation so much that there was nothing to celebrate. They implied, I wrote, that New Zealand women "fell into just two sharply divided groups: a well-to-do elite, and the victims of man-made poverty, male violence or both. The only feminists worthy of the name were those who worked exclusively for and with the second group."⁶⁰⁸ Women's suffering under New Right policies was even blamed on feminist selfishness:

By the middle of 1993, [government] cuts in funding to women's services or beneficiaries were being directly linked to the greed and complacency of those feminists who had selfishly taken grants and organised frivolous [celebratory] events...Recognising the potential of the year for reinvigorating the women's movement...anti-feminists aimed to alienate the bulk of New Zealand women from the most prominent feminists involved in the year's events and projects, so as to discredit them and their work. Charging them with elitism and self-seeking was intended both to damn them *as* women and to belie their claims to be working *for* women. [original italics]⁶⁰⁹

Although the public expressions of hostility and ambivalence continued right up to the actual centenary on 19 September 1993, the enthusiastic response of "ordinary" women all over the country proved that they were not widely endorsed. A total of 71 volunteer committees organised a vast array of events, many of them on shoestring budgets. The Suffrage Trust fund supported a remarkable 37 audio-visual projects, 84 conferences, 28 exhibitions, 38 performance events, 59 arts events, 78 festivals and celebrations, 7 sports programmes, 8 competitions, 21 memorials and 122 publications. Local councils, agricultural and pastoral societies, unions, churches, women's organisations, museums, libraries, government departments, schools, universities, polytechnics and a few far-sighted corporates joined in with their own initiatives, including 20 ongoing scholarships for women. In terms of the media, however:

[A]ll this activity and the enthusiastic response to it became fully visible only in the smaller local papers and radio stations, which reported the celebrations for what they were – community events run by and for women. For New Zealanders as a whole, particularly those who lived in the bigger cities, the real breadth and impact of the centenary remained the year's best-kept secret. This lack of major media coverage enabled criticisms of the year's events as "boring", "elitist" and "irrelevant to ordinary women" to appear credible.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., p.20.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., p.21.

Part Three: Developing a view from elsewhere

As suffrage year drew to a close, and I returned to short-term contract and freelance work, I began to think about writing another book. I wanted to write something substantial but accessible about unpaid work, the economy, and the New Right. I believed it would find a willing audience, in part because:

...all the ill-judged attacks on suffrage and feminism [linked with the centenary celebrations] had come across as attacks on women in general, and in fact served to revive feminism...despite all the difficulties and misconceptions, women and women's concerns were made visible and legitimated among a broad cross-section of New Zealand women in a way that has rarely occurred before – and may never occur again.⁶¹¹

I also knew that anything labelled “feminist” would be difficult to sell to the gatekeepers – established publishers, the media, and the bookshops. However, a small but well-regarded local publishing company, Tandem Press, owned and run by a couple I had known for many years, gave me a contract after seeing my proposal.

The publishers shared my belief that the book was timely. National's hard-line New Right policies had proved to be highly unpopular with the electorate, especially with women. In the 1993 election, National's fate mirrored Labour's in 1990: its share of the vote fell from 47.8 percent to 35.2 percent, although the first-past-the-post electoral system enabled it to stay in power with a slim majority. More strong evidence of broad voter resistance to the New Right came in the results of the 1992 referendum on changing to a mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system, similar to that in Germany. The proposal “was handsomely passed [with 88 percent in favour], despite being opposed by the great majority of the advocates of the economic reforms. Most electors were clearly aware that the change would make policy radicalism less easy, an implicit verdict on the reforms.”⁶¹² It would also improve the likelihood that more women would be elected to Parliament, thus increasing the chances of feminist views being represented.⁶¹³ After the 1993 election, the Labour party was led by Helen Clark.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p.22.

⁶¹² Easton, “Economic and Other Ideas Behind the New Zealand Reforms,” p.17.

⁶¹³ See Jennifer Curtin, “Advancing Women's Presence in Formal Politics: Proportional Representation in the Antipodes,” in *The Politics of Women's Interests*, ed. L. Chappell and L. Hill (London: Routledge,

She had twelve years' experience as an MP, she had never been an active supporter of Rogernomics, and she had described herself as a feminist.

There was no doubt that a majority of New Zealanders were at least uneasy, and in many cases deeply disturbed, by a political discourse based on shrinking the state to bring about greater "freedom", and redefining virtually all relations between the state and its citizens as market relations. For example, beneficiaries and patients became "customers", with absurd results, as Phillida Bunkle noted: "a near riot in one of the acute wards of Otago Health Care's psychiatric wards was described by the CEO as 'a predictable disturbance among the customers'...It completely miscasts the nature of the relationship and the relation of the players to each other.'" ⁶¹⁴

Despite National's campaign rhetoric, it had brought no fundamental change of direction: as "Government Management" had shown, neo-liberalism demanded precisely the kinds of social policy changes National had proceeded to make. Both Labour and National politicians had repeatedly tried to convince an increasingly sceptical public that this was the right path for New Zealand. Ruth Richardson had neatly summed up the problem New Right advocates faced in a frank 1987 interview, where she contrasted the "truth" of neo-liberalism with the "myths" of "statism":

The status quo [i.e. the welfare state] has attempted to ensure equality of outcome through massive transfer of resources, and has failed miserably...It is highly superficial to assume that the only way to love your fellow man or woman is to accede to the statist arrangements our society has traditionally made...My job, and that of my colleagues, is first of all to debunk myths. We must use language that the public can get hold of, and create new pictures and a new analysis. New Zealanders have to be convinced that the state is not their friend. They have to be convinced of that on the grounds of results and costs...among those who experienced the depression there is a school of thought which does think of the state as being a friend – even though the state has demonstrated time and time again that it can't be trusted. ⁶¹⁵

forthcoming 2005). Under a first-past-the-post electoral system, New Zealand had achieved a peak of 21 percent of MPs being women. Under MMP, the proportion has risen to over 30 percent.

⁶¹⁴ Phillida Bunkle, "How Market Theory Propels Social Inequality: A Theoretical Critique of the Market" (paper presented at the Conference on Beyond Poverty: Citizenship, Welfare and Well-being in the 21st Century, Massey University at Albany, Auckland, March 1997), p.33.

⁶¹⁵ "Richardson and Upton: state-busters", *National Business Review*, 16 October 1987. Many similar accounts of Richardson's policies appeared after she became Minister of Finance, for example, "Captain Richardson and her Starship Enterprise: Ruth Richardson's plans to redesign the welfare state and force New Zealanders to become more enterprising and self reliant", *New Zealand Herald*, 16 January 1991.

By 1994, it was apparent that the “results and costs” of National’s and in particular Richardson’s policies were far from convincing, and that the “new pictures” making the most impression on the public were of closed factories and hospitals, state house evictions, and foodbank queues. That year the government and the Department of Social Welfare, led by Margaret Bazley,⁶¹⁶ combined to instigate a redeployment of neo-conservative discourse which amounted to deliberate scapegoating of beneficiaries. In September, they launched a project called “From Welfare to Well-being”. Its logo, an outstretched hand, was “intended to suggest the offer of a hand-up, not a hand out”, and its stated aim was to find “long-term solutions to long-term welfare dependency”, which had “built up over at least two generations”, and was now threatening “to counter-balance the very substantial economic progress which has been made”. Its “milestones” included developing “the notion of contract responsibilities for customers [i.e. beneficiaries] where they are made aware of their obligations in exchange for their income support”, and increasing “public awareness of benefit crime”.⁶¹⁷ The first step, specifically identified as “consciousness-raising”, was to make “the facts surrounding welfare issues ... known to many people who hold positions of leadership and influence in communities throughout New Zealand”.⁶¹⁸ Controversially, the campaign appeared to have included working behind

⁶¹⁶ For an account of Bazley’s background and career, see Janiewski and Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets*, pp.42-3.

⁶¹⁷ Department of Social Welfare, “From Welfare to Well-Being Second Edition 1995,” (Wellington: Department of Social Welfare, 1995). A 1999 assessment of this initiative says it was triggered by emerging analysis which suggested that even under a favourable macroeconomic scenario of strong growth, the jobs were more likely to go to youth, women at home and the younger retired than to beneficiaries. But this indicates an ongoing shortage of living-wage jobs. It is difficult to see why publicising alarmist and highly questionable information, calculated to set “taxpayers” and “the public” against beneficiaries, was believed to be a useful strategy in these circumstances. See Murray Petrie, *Strategic Social Policy Initiatives: From Welfare to Well-Being and Strengthening Families* (Economics and Strategy Group, 1999 [cited 7 August 2005]); available from <http://www.strengtheningfamilies.govt.nz/publications/PDFs/StrengtheningFamiliesFinalReport.pdf>.

⁶¹⁸ For example, “that \$4.7 million is spent on benefits every working hour; that almost one in four of the working age population are dependent on state support; and that children of beneficiaries are three times as likely to become beneficiaries themselves, compared with children of non-beneficiaries”. Petrie, *Strategic Social Policy Initiatives: From Welfare to Well-Being and Strengthening Families* ([cited]). The meaning of this last piece of data was not defined, and was therefore nonsense, as many commentators pointed out. “At the national level, the Minister of Social Welfare, Peter Gresham, addressed annual Welfare to Well-being breakfasts in the five main centres from 1994 onwards, attended by community and business leaders. Annual Welfare to Well-being publications...set out the department’s objectives, publicised new initiatives around the country, and set down milestones against which the department’s performance could be judged...At the local level, DSW staff went out and spoke to hundreds of community and business groups around the country publicising the national statistics on welfare, and how much was being spent on welfare in their local communities. The belief was that appreciation of the facts about how much taxpayer support was going into their communities would

the scenes with a freelance television production company to make “Timebomb”, an purportedly independent documentary about welfare which endorsed New Right positions and arguments.⁶¹⁹

I believed it was vital to dispel the “us versus them” illusion of two fixed, separate, different and opposed groups of “taxpayers” and “beneficiaries” that the government and its supporters were so intent on fostering. I specifically intended my book to counter this divide-and-rule discourse by defining unpaid and paid work, families and markets, even rich and poor, as completely interdependent, yet increasingly in conflict, due to changing historical and political factors. While a counter-discourse of resistance was growing rapidly, it did not take sufficient (if any) account of gender or of feminist knowledge. It also tended to discuss “the poor” as a “different” group, quite separate from the speakers themselves. As a woman who had been, albeit briefly, a sole parent, and whose footing in the labour market was often precarious, I knew very well that in slightly different circumstances, I could easily have ended up having to go on the DPB myself. I was well aware that, as an old feminist joke puts it, most mothers of dependent children are “only a husband away from welfare”.

I also wanted to appeal to as wide a readership as possible. To do this, I needed to find a way of solving the problem that Rosslyn Noonan and I had encountered in writing “Unfinished Business”: how to take apart New Right discourse, and construct a feminist alternative, without either over-simplifying (as was often the case in the media) or ending up with the kind of arid writing that I described to Rosslyn as “abstract nouns doing abstract things to other abstract nouns”.⁶²⁰

show that what was required was better use of existing resources, rather than more resources. Department staff also worked with local councils and community groups in setting up a variety of initiatives aimed at reducing benefit dependence and creating opportunities for beneficiary families...” Petrie, *Strategic Social Policy Initiatives: From Welfare to Well-Being and Strengthening Families* ([cited]).

⁶¹⁹ “Time Bomb” was heavily advertised, and screened in two parts on TV1 in May 1997. “While the department reportedly indicated the programme was not its idea, and it had merely provided information to those making it, Comunicado [the production company] reportedly saw the project as being related to the Welfare to Well-being initiative.” Petrie, *Strategic Social Policy Initiatives: From Welfare to Well-Being and Strengthening Families* ([cited]). Note 16.

⁶²⁰ Personal communication by Anne Else to Rosslyn Noonan, c.1993.

Susan Faludi's book *Backlash* gave me the kind of model I was looking for.⁶²¹ It was written in a style which appeared to “speak” directly and personally to the reader, and allowed the author herself to appear as one of many speakers in the text. Yet unlike *The Feminine Mystique* or *The Female Eunuch*, it was neither simplistic nor patronising. It drew on interviews, print sources, images and research to assemble a complex, richly detailed account of where the backlash against feminism came from, how it worked, and whose political interests it served. It was also thoroughly referenced, using a format which did not intrude on the flow of the main text.

In a later essay looking back on the 1990s, I recalled the “flood of material” generated or distributed locally as part of New Right discourse, including “speeches, lobby group and departmental reports, commissioned articles, conference papers, press releases, advertisements and a few books”.⁶²² In the mid-1980s I had begun collecting this material (such as the 1987 Richardson interview quoted above), along with all the oppositional material I could find to do with work and gender. This collection, while not completely comprehensive, was broad enough to prove invaluable in writing what eventually became *False Economy*.⁶²³ With support from Harvey, who had full-time employment, and an informal “review board” of four feminist friends,⁶²⁴ I completed the book in about nine months. As I later said in an interview for *Broadsheet*, as a topical book, with many “contemporary references to newspaper articles and current issues” (as well as current data), it had to be written fast. Another reason for speed was that in October 1996, the first MMP election would be held: “All along, the plan was to have [the book] out ahead of the main campaigning.”⁶²⁵

False Economy was published in August 1996. The commitment and marketing skills of Tandem Press’s managing director and co-owner, Helen Benton, persuaded many

⁶²¹ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992).

⁶²² Else, “History Lessons: The Public History You Get When You’re Not Getting Any Public History.” p.135. For a detailed account of this “flood” and those who produced it, see Janiewski and Morris, *New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets*.

⁶²³ Else, *False Economy: New Zealanders Face the Conflict between Paid and Unpaid Work*. Such *ad hoc* collections of material were then vital in critiquing the New Right, as Jane Kelsey noted when she described the research for her 1995 book, *The New Zealand Experiment*, as involving “collecting paper clippings, conference papers, documents and any other bits and pieces that might relate to the bigger picture. My office is literally full of cardboard boxes and filing cabinets where I store these things.” (Kelsey, 1999b, p.311). My study at home was similarly full.

⁶²⁴ Alison Carew, Beryl Hughes, Lynn Jowett and Anne Meade.

⁶²⁵ Margot Roth, “Facing the False Economy...Or Else?,” *Broadsheet*, no. 211 (1996): p.59.

initially reluctant journalists and bookshop staff to take a closer look at it, by showing them that it was relevant to their own everyday lives. The book had four parts, centring on unpaid work (“Hidden Hands – and Minds”), paid work (“Welcome to His World”), the recent changes affecting both (“False Economy”), and the escalating struggle between “market time” and “family time” (“The Time of Our Lives”). These were interspersed with eleven “stories” drawn from extensive interviews with nine women, one man, and one married couple. The introduction summed up the book's argument. It began by evoking an advertising image from my collection, deliberately placed to “hook in” readers:

The fit young man is stripped to the waist. He runs powerfully across the glossy page, staring straight ahead. On his back is a baby in a backpack. Below him runs the ad's punchline: “Responsibility should never impede performance.”⁶²⁶

The message is clear. Your family is your responsibility. But if you are a committed achiever, you should be able to take this literally in your stride, without missing a beat. Otherwise, you just won't make the grade.

I have a friend who is a professional marathon runner. She tells me that if you run with a baby in a backpack, you will break its neck.

This book charts the growing clash between “responsibility” and “performance” – that is, between unpaid work and paid work – and the resulting risk of social and economic breakdown. Right now, this clash is making itself felt in the lives of women and children more than the lives of men. But the book is not about what women should or shouldn't be doing to deal with it. They did not create this problem by going out to work, and they cannot solve it by staying home.

The whole structure of what “work” means today has been built on one idea: work is what we leave home to do, not what we do at home. *Someone else* [original italics] will stay at home to do the thousand and one everyday chores which enable other people (the real workers) to go out to work. Someone else will take care of them when they get sick, have an accident or get too old to work any longer. And someone else will raise another generation to take their place...Ironically, it's only because increasing numbers of women are now “at work” that the full extent of their work “at home” – as well as in that vague in-between space called “the community” – is starting to be seen clearly for the first time.

As the first-hand reports in this book show, in real life paid and unpaid work can't be separated. The economy we hear about every day is like a BBC

⁶²⁶ This was an advertisement for Volvo cars. I found it serendipitously in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 September 1995, lent to me by Colin James, who happened to be on the same plane flight.

costume drama. Just as the audience barely glimpses the army of servants who cleaned those beautiful clothes and elegant houses, so you hardly notice the ranks of unpaid workers who keep the economy going behind the scenes. Yet they are just as essential as the “productive workers” up there on the national stage. Unpaid work makes it possible for paid workers to produce and earn, and for children to grow and learn...

Today most of us accept that every effort must be made to stop any more unique plants and animals disappearing from the earth, as so many have done already. We understand the complex webs of connection which enfold them and keep them alive. We know that if too many of those connections are broken, they will not survive.

Yet all too often, business leaders and policy makers seem unable to understand that human beings, too, live in a complex web of connections. Every time state services shrink or falter, every time volunteer services have their funding cut, the unpaid workload increases. As paid work hours grow longer, more fragmented, or more unpredictable, and the “floor” under pay and conditions sinks, unpaid work becomes more difficult to do.⁶²⁷

The book received excellent publicity and enthusiastic reviews, and sold well. By the time women’s studies course orders began coming in at the start of 1997, there were barely enough copies left to fill them.⁶²⁸ Two responses, one from a women’s studies lecturer, the other from a distinguished writer, were the most memorable for me. Claire-Louise McCurdy told me that for her students, who had grown up with the New Right, this was the book that generated the feminist “click”. Lauris Edmond wrote:

This is a fan letter – your book is wonderful. I’ve just finished reading it, I found it from first to last absolutely compelling. These questions were in my mind already of course, and at times it felt as though I’d been waiting for someone to spell it all out as lucidly as you do, and with that great gathering of references and real life accounts.⁶²⁹

Her letter put into words my main aim in writing the book: to spell out what was wrong with the New Right, in a way that would be compelling for the general reader, and would come across as voicing the “view from elsewhere” which, I believed, so many

⁶²⁷ Else, *False Economy: New Zealanders Face the Conflict between Paid and Unpaid Work*, pp.1-2.

⁶²⁸ New Zealand’s small market means that print runs are small and very few locally produced books, particularly from smaller publishers, are reprinted.

⁶²⁹ Personal communication from Lauris Edmond to Anne Else, 29 November 1996. Lauris had experienced the death of a daughter, and had written a moving poem about my son Patrick’s death in 1987. Her work and its reception had been directly attacked, in sexist terms, by a prominent male academic who was also a writer.

New Zealand women, and men too, already understood, but which had not so far been clearly expressed in accessible book form.

Both in *False Economy* and in the speeches and essays which followed, I relied heavily on quoting the actual words used by those intent on explaining the rightness of the New Right. Sometimes these words had appeared in the mainstream press; for example, the statement “There will always be excess demand when services are underpriced”, to explain the growing waiting lists for hip replacement operations, came from a 1987 editorial in a major daily paper.⁶³⁰ Often they came from less widely read sources: the business press, official reports, or publications and speeches by local and overseas “experts”, commissioned by government departments or by lobby groups, notably the Business Roundtable. For example, I used the words of a judge, ruling against a union claim for homecare workers to be classified as employed rather than self-employed, and get the adult minimum rate of pay per hour instead of \$36 for nine hours’ relief for family caregivers. When he said that “a significant part of their time will not be spent actively working”, his words effectively dismissed a world of caring as worth nothing.⁶³¹

My direct, unequivocal use of such quotations in *False Economy* and later work differed from the way I had used New Right discourse in “To Market and Home Again”. When that text speaks, for example, of “two naturally distinct kinds of human beings”, or says that the state “should proscribe and punish the unnatural acts of homosexual relations and abortion”, without using any quotation marks, it does so not in the voice of the author, but in the voice of the New Right. The author’s voice is heard only in the overlay of something that I found precisely named in a recent commentary on Foucault, which calls it “implicit and pejorative sarcasm”.⁶³² In “To Market and Home Again” I used this sarcastic voice, as I had done in my early work on the 1950s, as a kind of indirect, underhand, less confrontational way to hold up to scrutiny the key assumptions which underpinned the latest reincarnation of gendered

⁶³⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 9 November 1987.

⁶³¹ Palmer J. Wellington Employment Court 3/96, W119/95, 31 January 1996, quoted in Else, *False Economy: New Zealanders Face the Conflict between Paid and Unpaid Work*, p.104.

⁶³² Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.6.

political discourse. I think that for me, it was also a way of distancing these assumptions, and therefore of keeping at bay my own fear, for myself, for New Zealand women, and for New Zealand generally, of what they meant and what kind of threat they posed. In “The Daffodil Doiley”, I had managed to find a way of writing directly about the gendered structure of the 1950s which did not rely on this device. By the time I wrote *False Economy*, I had completed both *A Question of Adoption* and *Women Together*, and had built up the confidence I needed to write equally directly and strongly, with much more limited resort to that kind of sarcasm, about the clear and present danger of the New Right.

In writing *False Economy*, I was moving into a new field of broad contemporary economic and social comment, without the status of recognised expertise or academic standing. The major difficulty in writing it lay, as before, in claiming for myself as the author what in Maori is termed *turangawaewae*, a place where I belonged and on which I had the right to stand and to speak without fear. The feminist concept which comes closest to *turangawaewae*, and which helped me most, is that of “situated knowledge(s)”. *Turangawaewae* implies community based on the recognition of “natureculture”⁶³³ – on the intermeshing of place, kinship, history, and shared knowledge. It is simultaneously both material and metaphorical, flesh and word.⁶³⁴

Feminist theorists have envisaged a similar basis for situated knowledge(s), which also:

...works on behalf of community, not isolated individuals, by recognizing that the only way larger political visions are enabled is by working from particular locations. Situated knowledge(s) makes relations by linking partial views and timid voices into “a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions – of views from somewhere.”⁶³⁵

For me, working from “particular locations” did not mean beginning with the kind of descriptive checklist familiar in feminist “identity politics”, setting out where I saw myself as “personally” located on various grids of power and hierarchy (for example,

⁶³³ Haraway and Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf*, p.106.

⁶³⁴ Similarly, the Maori word “whenua” means both “land” and “placenta”, earth and flesh, place and kinship.

⁶³⁵ Ingrid Bartsch, Carolyn DiPalma, and Laura Sells, “Witnessing the Postmodern Jeremiad: (Mis)Understanding Donna Haraway's Method of Inquiry,” *Configurations* 9, no. 1 (2001). The internal quotation is from Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.”

female, Pakeha, heterosexual, married, mother, early middle age, middle class, visually impaired, tertiary educated). This was not what I understood “the personal is political” to mean. What mattered, I believed, was the political location and operation of the writing itself, which could not be automatically “read off” or judged in advance from such a checklist – although occupying particular positions of “otherness” or “marginality” might well make a “view from elsewhere” more likely. In their essay in *Feminist Voices*, Alison Jones and Camille Guy defined identity politics as “the politics of naming ourselves – that is, giving meaning to the terms (such as ‘women’) with which we understand our lives and struggle”:

This is a crucial aspect of the feminist project. However, the form this naming often takes within feminism is fraught with problems...feminism can never be the product of women’s simply identifying the groupings which determine the constellation of their experience. Feminism is the alignment of women in a political movement, with particular interests in common. These interests are not the same as experience...[and] our experience is not self-evident in the categories we use to name ourselves.⁶³⁶

As far as I know, there has been no criticism of *False Economy* (or any of my writing) on the grounds of the categories that I do or do not fit into, and the consequent effects on my work.

Part Four: Countering the discourse of dependency

The reception of *False Economy*, particularly the evident appreciation of how it was written, encouraged me to write more freely, and in particular to make more use of image and metaphor as the organising “device” (meaning both technique and heraldic symbol) for shorter pieces of work, including the speeches and papers I was invited to give after it was published. Sometimes I would find these devices in media images (such as the car advertisement which gave me the opening for *False Economy*) or in news stories. For example, I built a conference paper called “Doing the Dirty Washing” around a brief press report from the USA:

⁶³⁶ Alison Jones and Camille Guy, “Radical Feminism in New Zealand: From Piha to Newtown,” in *Feminist Voices: Women’s Studies Texts for Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary du Plessis with, et al. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.311.

Doing the washing is an untidy business. So untidy, in fact, that US city councillor James Fragoli wants to impose fines of US\$1000 on anyone hanging washing in their front yard. But someone asked Councillor Fragoli a very smart question: what happens to his washing? His reply: "I come home, my wife has it done. I don't know what she does to it."... Women are held responsible – and for the most part, hold themselves responsible – for cleaning up most of society's everyday dirty washing. But they are also responsible for keeping this messy business out of sight and out of mind, so that it does not intrude on the real business of the world. If they fail in either task, they risk severe penalties.⁶³⁷

The original subtitle of my conference paper was "The Meaning of Dependency". In it I used the term, "the discourse of dependency" for what appears to have been the almost the first time in New Zealand.⁶³⁸ The paper was first given at a 1997 conference, "Beyond Poverty: Citizenship, Welfare and Well-being in the 21st Century".⁶³⁹ This was convened in opposition to an official Department of Social Welfare conference called "Beyond Dependency", which was set up as part of the redoubled efforts in the later 1990s to bolster popular support for the New Right in general, and for increasingly draconian, victim-blaming social policies in particular.⁶⁴⁰

In the 1996 election, the electorate had refused to endorse either National or Labour. Both parties received roughly the same low percentage of the votes cast, so neither could form a government alone. New Zealand First, the conservative populist minor party led by Winston Peters, held the balance of power. After weeks of uncertainty, Peters abandoned the anti-National line he had taken in his campaign rhetoric and formed an unstable coalition government with National, led by Jim Bolger (who was replaced in December 1997 by Jenny Shipley). As the new government and its backers, including many ostensibly non-political "experts" from overseas, strove to justify and

⁶³⁷ Anne Else, "Doing the Dirty Washing: Women as Scapegoats of the New Right," *New Zealand Studies* 7, no. 2 (1997). This article also appeared in the second-to-last issue of *Broadsheet*, no. 214 (1997).

⁶³⁸ Alliance MP Liz Gordon used this term in a speech in the House in the same month, March 1997, but she may have got it from me.

⁶³⁹ "Beyond Poverty: Citizenship, Welfare and Well-being in the 21st Century" was held at Massey University at Albany, Auckland, in March 1997.

⁶⁴⁰ Attendance at the official conference cost at least \$1200 (varying amounts appear in archival sources). The "Beyond Poverty" conference drew on the expertise of two groups who had been excluded from "Beyond Dependency": first, beneficiaries, low income groups, and those working with them, and secondly, New Zealand academics and independent scholars with expertise, in order to ensure that their knowledge was heard and used in the debates. It was so popular that it could not accommodate all those who wanted to attend. See Mike O'Brien and Celia Briar eds, "Beyond Poverty: Conference Proceedings," (Auckland: Massey University at Albany, 1997).

extend their policies in the face of widening inequality, deepening deprivation, and a faltering economy,⁶⁴¹ the shift from neo-liberal to neo-conservative themes became more prominent. There was less public emphasis on the economy and the market, and more on society, the welfare system, and the role and responsibilities of “the family”.

I see this shift as part of the discursive process outlined by Marion Maddox, charting a similar shift in the Australian context. She points out that “Selling the dry [neo-liberal] economic agenda is challenging. To voters ... it had come to mean relentless pressure and increasing insecurity. Terms like ‘change’, ‘reform’ and ‘efficiency’ suddenly took on new meanings, all seemingly euphemisms for fewer permanent jobs, more contract work, longer hours and the threat of unemployment if you didn't play along.” The neo-conservative response to this challenge involved “re-educating fellow citizens to see race [and gender] as a legitimate part of political debate...tying social conservatism to the 'inevitable' economic agenda...seeing a particular brand of social cohesion as the counterbalance to the insecurities fostered by globalisation...[and] skilfully fostering the impression of 'mainstream' support”, based on reinforcing a discourse of “Us”, as opposed to “Them”.⁶⁴²

The major neo-conservative themes in 1990s New Zealand were the need to combat the growing evil of “welfare dependency”, and the importance of insisting that parents and beneficiaries fulfil their “social responsibilities”. “Living on a benefit” harmed children, not because it put them at risk of poverty, but because it put them at risk of “intergenerational dependency”, a vague concept which is impossible to define with any rigour. Every beneficiary's most important responsibility, regardless of their unpaid work responsibilities, was to get off the benefit as quickly as possible.

Behind these moves by government lay a broader, strongly gendered neo-conservative agenda, focusing mainly on sole parents, derived partly from Britain, but more clearly from the USA, which aimed to end as-of-right benefits completely. In the “Dirty Washing” paper, I spelt out this agenda in its most extreme form:

⁶⁴¹ From 1985 to 1997, economic growth had totalled only 10 percent, that is, 0.8 percent per year.

⁶⁴² Marion Maddox, *God under Howard : The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005), pp.34-5.

Welfare dependency is a problem not because it leads to poverty, but because it signifies moral decay. The cited proof of moral decay is the rise in the number of sole parents. And the major cause of this rise is presented as welfare.

The conclusion is that the state must therefore institute drastic reforms of its welfare programmes, such as time limits on benefits, workfare, capped funds, and, wherever possible, the removal of the right to assistance itself. Within the limits of New Right economic principles, the state should do all it can to reinforce legal marriage and encourage men to support their wives and children financially, for example, through tax breaks for married male breadwinners with dependent wives. There should be no assistance for sole parents which does not also go to married ones. The small amount of welfare assistance which proves to be absolutely necessary should come not from the public sector, but from the private, because that is morally and socially better for both donors and recipients...If there is no unemployment benefit, men will get jobs, then wives, and stay with both. If there is no DPB, few men will abandon their wives and children, and few women will get pregnant to men who are not their husbands. If they do, they must take the consequences.⁶⁴³

It was important to discuss this extreme agenda, because it was being seriously touted as a practical programme for New Zealand by the Business Roundtable, supported by an endless procession of imported speakers. Some elements were in fact put in place when National reformed the benefit system in the later 1990s to centre on the concept of “work-based welfare”. Income support entitlement was to be based on an assessment of work capacity, rather than incapacity, regardless of whether viable jobs were in fact available. More cuts were made to rates, eligibility was tightened, and a range of programme attendance and “workfare” requirements (including compulsory work placements with voluntary agencies) were announced for almost all beneficiaries, and even for some beneficiaries' spouses.

In late 1990s New Zealand, this discursive strategy came unstuck. As the social indicators worsened and foodbanks, emergency housing, and budgeting services were overwhelmed by desperate need, the major Christian church denominations rose to protest alongside feminists and some women's organisations, Maori activists, left-wing academics, and many non-government social agencies (often church-affiliated). Throughout 1997 and 1998, I found myself sharing platforms with outspoken men and women representing many different perspectives, which I had previously believed held

⁶⁴³ Else, "Doing the Dirty Washing: Women as Scapegoats of the New Right," p.20.

little in common with my own. All of us recognised and were grappling with the discursive operations centred on “dependency”, in a context neatly summed up by Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon in 1994:

The terms used to describe social life are also active forces shaping it...Some words become sites at which the meaning of social experiences is negotiated and contested...To prevent welfare programmes from being used by conservatives to promote hostility to feminism, single mothers, minorities, and poor people, we must imbue our public language with different meanings and associations.⁶⁴⁴

My own writing and speaking was part of a collective effort to do this. I continued to be one of the few analysts focusing on the deployment of gender by the New Right. I used my book and conference papers as the basis for published opinion pieces and speeches, often by invitation, to many different community groups and academic audiences. In 1997, I pulled together many threads of feminist analysis of New Right discourse and policy for a formal paper published in the *Social Policy Journal*, in which I developed the concept of “having it both ways”: that is, constructing women as, on the one hand, the same as men, in terms of their ability as individuals to earn a living for themselves, and also for their children; and on the other hand, different from men, in terms of their responsibility for unpaid work, particularly caring work.⁶⁴⁵ Women were left with the impossible task of reconciling these conflicting constructions, and the policies which embodied them.

In February 1998, the Coalition Government released a draft of a Proposed Code of Social and Family Responsibility as a “discussion document”.⁶⁴⁶ Together with the imminent introduction of the “workfare” measures, this provoked high-profile resistance to the neo-conservative agenda. The Auckland District Council of Social Services circulated a pledge of resistance to workfare, and commitment to the rights of volunteers, for community groups to sign. In September, the Anglican General Synod,

⁶⁴⁴ Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “Dependency Demystified: Inscriptions of Power in a Keyword of the Welfare State,” *Social Politics*, no. 1 (1994): pp.5-6.

⁶⁴⁵ Anne Else, “Having It Both Ways? Social Policy and the Positioning of Women in Relation to Men,” *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, no. 9 (1997).

⁶⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of the Code, see Lesley Patterson, *From Welfare to Work: Women, Lone Parents and Neo-Liberalism: Seminar Presented at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 11 June 2002* (Massey University, 2002 [cited 7 August 2005]); available from <http://sspsw.massey.ac.nz/PDF/From%20Welfare%20to%20Work.pdf>.

Te Hinota Whauī, mounted a nationwide “Hikoi [march for a cause] of Hope” for “everyone who feels poverty is intolerable”, in which 38,000 people took part. The marchers came from each end of the country, gathering information about the changed circumstances of New Zealanders along the way. The stories were placed in kete (flax bags) and presented by the Anglican Bishops to politicians, including Labour leader Helen Clark, on the steps of Parliament on 1 October, when over 5000 people from the two marches gathered in Wellington. In a speech to mark five years since the Hikoi, Clark said that for her:

The Hikoi of Hope had enormous symbolism, which transcended even its advocacy of the core planks of a decent life for all New Zealanders. That symbolism lay in the sense of social solidarity which it engendered... We New Zealanders had always prided ourselves on having a country where everyone got a fair go and where everyone had the opportunity to succeed. That self image was shattered as the queues grew at the foodbanks and real and absolute poverty was being experienced by our poorest citizens. It was these concerns which were brought to the front steps of Parliament by the Hikoi of Hope, and it was these concerns which I was determined Labour would address if we were given the privilege of forming a government in 1999.⁶⁴⁷

Labour did win office again in 1999, when for the first time, the contending leaders of the two major parties were women. In the 2002 election, National’s vote fell after an inept campaign to a record low of 21 percent.

Part Five: The price of growing older

Another major New Right discursive strategy, which featured strongly in my writing towards the end of the 1990s, centred on New Zealand’s ageing population. New Zealand has what is generally acknowledged to be a simple, reasonable, egalitarian system of universal citizen pensions, paid at a set age and funded directly from taxes. Because it does not depend on paid work history or earnings, and both women and men gain a pension in their own right as individuals,⁶⁴⁸ it is fairer to women (who make up the majority of the elderly) than any other system.

⁶⁴⁷ Helen Clark, *The Hikoi of Hope - Five Years On* (New Zealand Government, 2004 [cited 8 August 2005]); available from <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/ViewDocument.aspx?DocumentID=19084>.

⁶⁴⁸ Those who live alone receive an additional allowance in recognition of their higher living costs. This provision, too, assists women, who make up the majority of pensioners living alone.

In November 1990, Treasury told the incoming National government that the high cost of pensions “threatened the credibility of the system and the economic prospects of the country”.⁶⁴⁹ Over the next eight years, another flood of material purporting to present “the facts” painted a frightening picture of the “gray tide” that was about to sweep over the country as the proportion of older people grew, pushing the cost of health care provision and the current system of taxpayer funded universal pensions to unsustainable heights. The proposed remedy was a return to some form of private provision, in order to stop the elderly becoming an intolerable burden on “taxpayers”. A prominent British promoter of the neo-conservative agenda, David Green, argued that those who had not saved enough to retire must simply continue to work, rely on their families, or resort to private charity, as their sturdy forebears had done.⁶⁵⁰ In line with Ruth Richardson’s message in 1987, such reconstructions of the past became an increasingly important strand of neo-conservative discourse from the mid-1990s, particularly in relation to old age. In an essay written in 1999, I described the multiple ways in which this was done:

[I]t has been common for politicians and commentators to claim or imply that for a period running roughly from 1935 to 1984, New Zealand society was fundamentally mistaken and misled, so that only radical, ongoing, top-down reform could put things right. In a textbook example of how to run a campaign to change people’s views, the various channels of mass communication have become saturated with multi-level representations of the welfare state of the recent past as an unambiguously wrong turn, leading to a dead end of budget blow-outs, dependence and irresponsibility...Although it makes no overt claim to be “history”, it does add up to a widespread and deliberate political attempt to reshape an important segment of “the presence of the past” in this country, in order to serve current political ends... nineteenth-century society is now being held up as a model for our times, with regard not so much to the hard work of sturdy settlers creating a “new land”, but rather to their reputed ability to cope, and even thrive, without assistance from the state, thanks to their traditional family values.⁶⁵¹

In 1997, Winston Peters led an attempt to replace the universal pension with an individualised retirement savings scheme. Under the complex, financially unstable arrangements he championed, 85 percent of women and 40 percent of men would not

⁶⁴⁹ Else and St John, *A Super Future? The Price of Growing Older in New Zealand*, p.110.

⁶⁵⁰ David Green, *From Welfare State to Civil Society: Towards Welfare That Works for New Zealand* (Wellington: New Zealand Business Roundtable, 1996).

⁶⁵¹ Else, “History Lessons: The Public History You Get When You’re Not Getting Any Public History,” pp.134-5.

have been able to save enough for even a very low retirement annuity without large government top-ups. Retaining the current scheme was of vital importance for women, who then made up 58 percent of all those aged 65 and over, and two-thirds of those aged 80 and over. Massive, well-co-ordinated resistance was led by a coalition of women's groups and the trade unions, and the scheme was rejected by over 95 percent of voters.

That year I made contact with another former classmate, University of Auckland economics lecturer Susan St John. She specialised in benefit systems and superannuation, and her highly readable articles had begun to appear frequently in the mainstream media. We decided that we would jointly write a book for general readers about providing for an ageing population. The publishers of *False Economy* gave us a contract, and we began work. Again, the book was timely. Although the retirement savings scheme was overwhelmingly defeated in a referendum, the wealthiest elderly had received a huge boost to their incomes when National abolished the surcharge on additional income. Further changes to the universal pension system had effectively reduced its value substantially, particularly for women living alone.⁶⁵² The elderly were continuing to be constructed as a threat to the young, to the economy, and to New Zealand's future.

*A Super Future? The Price of Growing Older in New Zealand*⁶⁵³ was launched by Labour leader Helen Clark at the Women's Book Festival in October 1998, in the Auckland Girls' Grammar School auditorium. Thanks to Susan St John's expertise, we were able to demolish the arguments for doing away with or substantially altering the universal pension system (although we did advocate a system of tax credits to ensure that the very wealthiest elderly contributed more). We also covered demography, health, housing, care, and the differences between the Maori and Pakeha populations. Like *False Economy*, the book included five "stories" drawn from interviews. While it

⁶⁵² In September 1998, as our book was about to go to press, it became known that National wanted to lower the floor of the band linking pensions with wages from 65 to 55 percent of the average wage (for a couple, leaving single people with less than 30 percent). It said this was necessary to cope with the (by then obvious) recession, but when two of the independent and minor party MPs refused their support, the measure was softened to 60 percent. The change was forecast to mean a decline of \$2.6 billion in pensioner incomes over the next ten years. In 1999, the incoming Labour government restored the floor to 65 percent.

⁶⁵³ Else and St John, *A Super Future? The Price of Growing Older in New Zealand*.

did not have the popular success of *False Economy*, it was well received. Again, speaking engagements followed, including an invitation to take part in the Winter Lecture series at the University of Auckland. This lecture, "Through a Glass Darkly",⁶⁵⁴ my last major piece of writing on the New Right before Labour regained power in 1999, gave me the opportunity to develop my analysis of neo-liberal and neo-conservative discourses in relation to old age. Considered from a feminist perspective, their operations came into sharp relief.

In terms of health care, what I called the "cost-benefit perspective" was at work.⁶⁵⁵ This perspective "sees public spending on health care for the old as already grossly excessive, warns of massive increases to come, and urges that it be cut in favour of spending on the unmet needs of the young".

The underlying assumptions of the cost-benefit perspective show that the way oldness is seen depends heavily on the way human existence itself is seen. What are these assumptions? First, that longer life and greater numbers of older people will inevitably mean much higher health costs. Secondly, that adequate collectively funded health care for all throughout life is unaffordable. Thirdly, that public health care spending is wasted on the old, especially the old-old (85 and over), because they are "past working". The implication is that the strictly limited public funds available for health care should instead be invested in more productive or potentially productive stages of life. Once the old have used up their meagre health care ration, they should be required to fund the rest themselves...This...ignores the fact that in a healthy society, it is generally the old who use the largest share of the services offered by modern medicine, just as it is the young who make the most use of the formal education system...

Even more significantly, the cost-benefit perspective can operate only by ignoring the human life cycle and the interconnections across generations. It requires us to see each stage of life as separate and distinct. Its basic premise is that the young have no connection with the old; instead they must compete against the old, in a zero-sum game which sets children and grandchildren against their parents and grandparents, and each generation against their own future selves.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁴ Anne Else, "Through a Glass Darkly: Seeing Old Age and the Old," *New Zealand Studies* 9, no. 2 (1999).

⁶⁵⁵ A telling example of the cost-benefit perspective was provided by Neville Bennett, "Elderly's welfare appetite gives everyone a pain", *National Business Review*, 4 July 1998. I noted that this perspective, like so many other aspects of New Right discourse in New Zealand, seemed to have been largely imported to New Zealand from the USA, where "The core problem is not the excessive cost of health care for the old...It is the failure to meet the health care needs of other age groups." *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The cost-benefit perspective on old age was essentially neo-liberal, and was deployed mainly in connection with health care. By contrast, the issue of financial support brought the neo-conservative moralism of the discourse of dependency much more clearly into play. This was not simply a matter of insisting that “In order to shed the stigmatised status of dependence, people should be permitted – or compelled – to remain in paid work regardless of their age”, then live on their savings, and that the state should supply, at most, the means for a meagre, stigmatised subsistence for those who failed to cope, as in the defeated Richardson/Shipleigh scheme; nor, despite the scaremongering predictions, was it simply a matter of demography:

[T]he predicted growth in the numbers and proportion of older people...is merely the convenient pretext for a reinterpretation which would have occurred anyway. It is not to do with demographic change; it is to do with the repeal of the welfare state, the destruction of collective social structures, and the concentration of power and wealth in fewer hands...⁶⁵⁷

As for gender, even though women so clearly made up the majority of the old, the growing focus on “retirement” and “dependence” was making old women more invisible than ever. This was consistent with the trend I had discussed in “Having it Both Ways”, of seeing women as no different from men in terms of paid work and earning ability, even in old age. Ironically, old age is the only period of life in New Zealand when men’s and women’s incomes converge to levels close to equality. However:

This is entirely due to our egalitarian pension system, which is not linked to paid work. In stark contrast to the discourse of dependency, it does not rank recipients on the basis of their paid work involvement, past, present or future...It is ironic that just as women’s paid work patterns (although not their earnings or their unpaid work) move closer to those of men, one of the few truly equal rights which New Zealand women have – that is, the right to be exempt from paid work obligations and to receive a universal pension at a set age – is coming under sustained attack.

If these rights are removed, it is women who will suffer most. The blinkered discourse of dependency leaves them facing an impossible dilemma: they will be expected to go on providing the lioness’s share of support for those who need it in old age, while simultaneously either earning their own living, or existing on a means-tested, asset-tested, poverty-level benefit.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.24-5.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., p.28.

When older women cease to be invisible, it becomes clear that the significance of the current debates over old age goes well beyond the issues of health care and pensions, important though these are. It has to do with the value of human life itself.

[O]lder women pose the ultimate challenge to market values. They rarely have paid work...[and] can no longer produce children. They are not usually shown as sexually active or attractive to men. The major part of their lives has usually been spent doing unpaid work, which is invisible to and devalued by the market. Eventually they may no longer be able to take care of others any more; and they may require help from others to take care of themselves. In other words, they have no market value at all...

If these women have no value, then human life itself has no value. What is the point of increased longevity, if the old are not worth supporting as human beings in their own right?...[M]ore clearly than any other stage of life, old age gives the lie to the notion that we exist solely to produce more and consume more market goods, and that human community can be sustained on a basis of user pays. Growing old demonstrates that there is life beyond paid production – even beyond reproduction – and there is growth beyond the market. If we end up giving in to the cost-benefit perspective and the discourse of dependency, and we deny the right to continue living – not just merely surviving – to those who are no longer productive in market terms, we will have lost the moral right to a future. If we allow a narrow philosophy of market values to rule, leaving our society unable to rise to the challenge of much greater numbers and proportions of older people, we will have profoundly failed to come to terms with our humanity.⁶⁵⁹

Despite New Zealand having had Labour-led governments since 1999, this counter-discourse is still far from dominant. It is currently the plight of a large group of mothers and young children, rather than older women, which most clearly demonstrates the continuing impact of the discourse of dependency.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.28-9.

Chapter 11: In conclusion

I had found no escape from the nervous blindness inherent in writing itself – the hurtling forward without knowing where you will get to; the wanting so badly to say something that is at first unsayable, and may remain so.⁶⁶⁰

All writing creates a particular view of reality; all writing uses grammatical narrative, and rhetorical structures that create value, inscribe meaning, and constitute the subjects and objects of inquiry...No textual staging is innocent...Writing is an intentional activity and, as such, a site of moral responsibility.⁶⁶¹

By claiming the authority of anger as the site of a discursive stance, feminist criticism becomes not only a different (and embattled) voice but also a continuing means of altering the truths by which we live.⁶⁶²

Like all the other pieces of my writing that I have discussed, I see this thesis as *necessary*. It is something that I needed to write; but it is also something that needed to be written. In this concluding chapter, I explain why.

First, I want to discuss some of the issues to do with the practice of writing which this thesis raises, both in discussing my earlier writing and in how it has itself been written. Tracing how one voice of feminist oppositional imagining has emerged and taken its own worded shape has been challenging, partly because few models were available. There is now an enormous and diverse body of feminist critical and theoretical writing, including a great deal of work on writing by women. Yet few of those who have written mainly in this expository way have directly considered their own practice as writers, or their own work as writing, although the use of reflexivity in academic writing has recently become more common.

Like all theses, this one assumes an authoritative voice. In Chapter 2, I recounted how I understood early on that “the trick in writing essays for school purposes was to assume an authoritative voice, as if you knew what you were talking about”. I have continued

⁶⁶⁰ Lauris Edmond, *The Quick World* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1992), p.207.

⁶⁶¹ Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*, p.58.

⁶⁶² Brenda R. Silver, "The Authority of Anger: *Three Guineas* as Analytical Case Study," *Signs* 16, no. 2 (1991): p.342.

to see producing this kind of textual confidence as indispensable not only to academic writing, but to any form of textual oppositional imagining which seeks to be part of a public conversation. It is therefore neither valid nor sensible to argue that in order to be true to itself, the oppositional imagination must relinquish this voice to the dominant discourses it seeks to oppose. What this thesis makes clear is that the authoritative voice is not the same as the voice of authority. It is a kind of tightrope walking, the textual embodiment of claiming the right to write and to be heard.

In this thesis, I have given an account of how I developed this kind of voice in my own work. I have written it partly to dispel the paralysing illusion that I harboured for so long, and still sometimes fall prey to, of “real writing” emerging like magic from uniquely gifted minds, even though I know perfectly well that this is an illusion. Like most of the other issues I have raised in relation to the practice of writing, this problem centres not on talent or skill, but on the politics of subjectivity, authority, and the position of the “I” in the text. The context of writing a PhD thesis brought all these politics powerfully into play again for me. It was to subdue the disabling spectres of illegitimacy and incapacity they raised that I carefully established my formal academic credentials in the very first line. In Chapters 2-6, I have traced the development of both enabling and disabling strands of self-narrative out from their discursive and historical origins and on through the process of claiming the right to write in a widening range of frames.

The next four chapters bring a deliberate shift of form and focus, moving back to survey aspects of recent history from a more distanced and far-reaching perspective, without abandoning altogether the close focus of the earlier chapters. In writing these four chapters, I have claimed the authority of anger and therefore of judgment. The thesis itself makes it clear that this point has been reached only as the latest stage in the long and far from straightforward process it canvasses, which is reflected in its spiralling structure.

This structure reinforces the point that although my account centres on published work, it is not primarily about results or outcomes. Instead it is about a set of active historical processes. It charts the uneven development of a long, evolving shift that is still

continuing, exploring how these complex, nuanced processes work and what they involve.

The first major theme of this exploration is the critical importance of the connections between subjectivity and oppositional imagining. By showing these connections and processes at work, it demonstrates how they are at once personal and impersonal, concrete and abstract, individual and relational, subjective and discursive. Imagining feminism in writing has depended on understanding myself as both needing and having the right and the capability to do so. It has depended on becoming the subject, in both senses, of my own discursive narrative.

The early chapters show how the conditions in which I grew up afforded me enough room and scope to begin to construct a serviceable self-narrative without too much difficulty. Even so, I could not help but become aware of the puzzling disjunction between the two different kinds of subjectivity that I have called “being a girl” and “being a mind”. Up to the point where I became a mother, I had been able to ignore or resolve the contradictions of these two shaping discourses sufficiently to go on “passing” as an effective speaking subject and producer of knowledge, to my own satisfaction at least. Yet I was surrounded by evidence that this was almost completely incompatible with being any kind of woman in 1960s New Zealand.

Such unstable accommodations could not last. As I turned from girl and student into wife and mother, I discovered that something was wrong, and that it had to do with the clash between who I thought I was, and what I saw myself becoming. When contradictions in the dominant discourses reach a point of crisis, such discoveries become more likely. But whether and how they take place, and how they are understood and acted on when they do, depends partly on what discursive frames of reference are available, and how these are understood to relate to each other and to the subjectivity they shape. In other words, it depends on the range of possible public conversations and common grounds.

My own discovery might simply have disabled me, as it had previously disabled others, had it not been for its conjunction with a particular historical moment when

what at first appeared to be a wholly new conversation, often requiring the invention of new terms and parameters, was begun and continued. This account has described the opening of a discursive space in which it became possible to think and to talk about what was happening, in ways that seemed to allow for the figure of a thinking, speaking female subject to emerge.

At first this amounted to little more than simply adding two separate subjectivities together, but this soon turned out to be unworkable. The questioning shifted from how to become a speaking female subject to why this should be so difficult in the first place. It was then that I began to understand how discursive frameworks operate, and how much the oppositional imagining of feminism matters. I began to find both my writing self and my subject.

My account of this process refutes the reductive notion that second wave feminism somehow sprang up overnight, from the seed sown by a spontaneous handful of “great books”, in much the same way as talented women writers have often been seen as suddenly appearing out of nowhere. Writing about some of the “great books” of feminism and what I now see them meaning to me, in the context of my remembered experience, I have suggested that (important as they undoubtedly were) they did not so much supply as nourish the seeds of a locally and historically specific feminism that already lay in waiting, and took from them only what it needed.

Although the process drew continuously on international currents, both self and subject were grounded in the local, as is this thesis. While historical conditions in New Zealand have borne a broad resemblance to those in other former British colonies with what became a predominantly Europe-descended population, there are important differences in histories of race, culture and class, as well as gender. I did my first feminist writing for a collectively invented medium producing a homegrown, broadly accessible form of feminist discourse that reached out to women around New Zealand. No one else was going to do this for us; we had to do it for ourselves. It is important to account for how this “view from elsewhere” could begin to take its own shape in a small country at the apparent edge of the world.

When I began to write in differently defined ways for audiences that were both more “general” and more narrow than those for *Broadsheet*, it was again the local connection that provided me with the ground I needed. Katherine Mansfield is an international figure, but she and her work also belong to New Zealand. New critical readings of earlier women writers, and of commentaries on them, have been a marked aspect of the development of feminist discourse; what this account has shown is that they have also been very important in struggles to become speaking subjects, even where these do not involve writing “literature”. My account confirms both the significance and the difficulty of bringing these two aspects together.

(I realise here that something is missing from the chapters on women and writing: the strong response I had to magnificently feminist essays by prewar writers such as Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West, which started to become available again from the late 1970s. As soon as I saw this kind of writing, I knew it was what I wanted to do too.)

Thanks to other women, at hand or on the page, and particularly to their accounts of their own struggles to think and to write, I grew brave enough to think of writing something more ambitious, which would go beyond critique or commentary on the work of others. But I could not stay outside what I was seeking to understand and explain, since it vitally concerned me, and formed the ground I wrote on.

It was then that I came up against the second major theme of this account: the need to find ways of knowing and writing which do not rely on preserving the distance between observer and observed, knower and known, subjectivity and objectivity, that has been the traditional hallmark of knowledge, but instead do what they can to overcome it, without relinquishing their claim to validity and value. Solving this problem has been crucial for feminism, and for feminist writers. Relying on the notion of the detached observer has turned out literally not to work. It produces an unusable, disabling account of how human knowledge-making takes place.

Writing a critical autobiography centred on expository writing, rather than literature or direct activism, has enabled me to explore how the effort to resolve this issue plays out

in practice. In considering my work on adoption, in particular, I have highlighted the complex ways in which knowledge can be understood as both situated and valid, and how this complexity can be reflected in the writing itself.

The discussion of my work on adoption, and the context in which it was embedded, also highlights the related question of what is a fit subject for inquiry – that is, what questions may properly be asked in the first place. To make sense of post-war adoption and of how it had been experienced, which included making sense of myself, it was imperative to invent new questions, categories and concepts. This took place most clearly in connection with the many-faceted issue of adoption and knowledge, which so often concerns what is defined as private and personal, and therefore as out of bounds to inquiry and to history. By making discursive as well as personal sense of adoption, I was laying claim to the historical significance of adoption experiences and the discourses in which they were embedded. In other words, I was locating them, and myself, in the public domain of knowledge and history.

The phenomenon of adoption has long been recognised to be at least something out of the ordinary. It is therefore both visible and interesting. Everyday unpaid work has no such obvious appeal, and has proved much more difficult to move into the public domain. I am well aware of the irony that, for me as for other women, one inescapable condition of being able to write about it is not being overly burdened with doing it. In this account I have charted the passage from my own naïve and belated realisation of what unpaid work involves, to seeing this as one of the most outstanding of the human reefs on which New Right discourse ultimately founders. Despite the best efforts of its proponents (including the incorporation of a simplistic rhetoric of “equality” and “choice”), this discourse continues to be much less likely to make sense of the world as many women experience it, particularly in terms of unpaid work, caring relations, and the role of the state, than as many men experience it. Feminist discourse provides the grounding for making this sharp disjunction explicit, as I have sought to do in my work.

In the four chapters dealing with feminism and the New Right, I have shown how it was possible to develop collectively, over time, a discourse capable of understanding

and countering New Right arguments, even if the historical context meant that it took too long to understand how the dominant discourse was shifting, and what was at stake. As these chapters have shown, the urgent need to respond to what was happening so close to home determined the direction of my own thinking and writing for over a decade.

It may seem as if I have devoted too much attention, both in my earlier work and in my thesis, to dealing with the New Right. I have argued that for historical reasons, the arguments, programmes and policies associated with its aggressive re-invention may have come as more of a shock (and been harder to recognise) in New Zealand than in the USA or Britain. As my account shows, the contest for discursive supremacy which erupted in the 1980s was also unusually fast-moving and visible in New Zealand.

Like many others, I saw and continue to see this contest as a matter of life and death, not only in this country, but worldwide. New Right discourse creates a context which undermines the entire basis for feminism and every other movement for social justice, because of how it frames what it means to be a human being and to live in human society. For me and for many other opponents, it has therefore usefully enforced a focus on the necessity of a commitment to social justice and human interdependence which narrower liberal concepts of individual freedom, autonomy and fulfillment cannot adequately encompass, and without which these cannot be effectively envisaged or achieved.

The discursive shift to the New Right has also revealed how significant feminism itself is as an opposing discourse, and what a profound challenge it is capable of posing to dominant discourses. In the campaign leading up to the September 2005 election, the major New Right organisations paid local feminism the renewed compliment of mounting a direct and well co-ordinated attack on it (sometimes fronted by women, and carefully secularised to fit local conditions⁶⁶³), as well as on Maori “separatism”, gay activism, and environmentalism. The unprecedented fact that the four highest constitutional positions were held by women was held up as evidence that feminism

⁶⁶³ This strategy came partly unstuck when the Exclusive Brethren (who forbid their adherents to vote) were revealed to be behind a \$500,000 pamphlet campaign smearing Labour and the Greens, undertaken with the leader of the National party’s knowledge and general approval.

had more than achieved all its legitimate aims, and now held excessive power within New Zealand in general and the Labour-led government in particular. Although there was almost no visible public defence of feminist principles or policies, least of all from the government itself, a response was discernible in the election. Over the last ten years, New Zealand has developed marked gender differences in voting patterns. It was largely due to the clear party vote preference for Labour over National among Pakeha women, as well as among male and female Maori, Pacific, and young voters, that the New Right failed by a narrow margin to regain the full power of government.⁶⁶⁴

As the major movement seeking to reverse the slow post-war advances in reducing inequality and various forms of entrenched privilege and power, by denying their underpinning discourses whatever discursive legitimacy and institutional footholds they have managed to acquire, the New Right push has had enormous resources of money, skill and status at its disposal. By contrast, second wave feminism has of necessity been largely an amateur, marginal movement, with scant and always precarious resources and no secure institutional bases. Its one advantage has been that unlike the New Right, it could not rely on any kind of “revival”; instead it has involved the development of a distinctive discourse to deal with the panoply of dominant philosophical and political frameworks, including those of the New Right, which have either excluded half of humanity, or included them only on terms which leave them facing insoluble dilemmas disguised as individual “choices”.

In struggling with these issues, feminism has developed one of the most important philosophical bases for alternative frameworks. My account has charted one local instance of how this development has come about, and linked it to the major discursive contest currently taking place within Western democracies. It suggests that liberatory (as distinct from merely liberal) feminist perspectives can not only distinctively illuminate inherently unstable and contradictory deployments of gender, but also show

⁶⁶⁴ Under MMP, voters have both a party vote and an electorate vote. IMt is the party vote (with some exceptions for special cases) that determines each party’s share of seats in Parliament. Labour and National each won 31 electorate seats, but Labour’s larger party vote gave it 50 seats, compared with National’s 48. A patchwork of minor parties took the rest. The party to the right of National won two seats, as a result of tactical voting in one wealthy electorate. The Greens (six seats) and the Progressives (one seat) were both aligned with Labour. No other parties were clearly aligned with either Labour or National. The preference among women for Labour over National was about 12 percentage points, whereas this was reversed among men.

how this instability ultimately undermines their discursive foundations. Whether this kind of oppositional imagination will be able to achieve anything more than, or even maintain, the stubborn resistance of a majority of New Zealand women to the most damaging excesses of New Right programmes in action, and to their underlying logic of the survival of the fittest, remains to be seen.

Finally, I see this thesis as necessary because it provides one historical example of the enormous difference feminism has already made. It was feminism which first provided me with and encouraged me to contribute to a language of possibility beyond the enclosing discourses of the times, in order to be able to see myself and to act as a speaking subject. By doing so, it saved my life and the lives of my closest friends. It forms the shifting yet constant ground of what we see as our life's work.

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Appendix I: Anne Else - Chronological list of major publications discussed

- "Limitation, Selection and Assumption in Antony Alpers' *Life of Katherine Mansfield*." *Women's Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (1984): 86-102.
- "From Little Monkey to Neurotic Invalid: Limitation, Selection and Assumption in Antony Alpers' *Life of Katherine Mansfield*." *Women's Studies International Forum* 8, no. 5 (1985): 497-505.
- "'Not More Than Man nor Less': The Treatment of Women Poets in *Landfall*, 1947-1961." *Landfall* 39, no. 4(156) (1985): 431-46.
- "The Daffodil Doiley." Paper presented at the Women's Studies Association Conference, Dunedin 1987.
- "The Perfect Solution: Adoption Law and Practice in New Zealand." *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 15 (1987): 237-57.
- [work on] "Women and Social Policy", in Royal Commission on Social Policy, *The April Report Volume II: Future Directions*, 189-274. Wellington: Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988.
- "Counting for Nothing: Some Aspects of Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand, 1944-1972." Paper presented at the Women's Studies Association Conference, Christchurch 1989.
- A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991.
- "To Market and Home Again: Gender and the New Right." In *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand*, edited by Rosemary du Plessis, with Phillida Bunkle, Kathie Irwin, Alison Laurie and Sue Middleton, 239-51. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- "The Need Is Ever Present: The Motherhood of Man Movement and Stranger Adoption in New Zealand." In *Women in History Volume 2*, edited by Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant, 225-53. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993.
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- False Economy: New Zealanders Face the Conflict Between Paid and Unpaid Work*. Wellington: Tandem Press, 1996.
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Appendix II: Extract from *False Economy*^a

The old rules don't work any more. It's becoming less and less feasible to split paid and unpaid work neatly down the middle into His and Hers, like matching pillowcases, each staying firmly on its own side of the double bed.

Now and then you might still hear someone muttering about women taking jobs away from men. But that's rare. Women are not responsible for rising unemployment, the disappearance of so many "men's jobs", the spread of casual work, or hours that seem to be always too long or too short. Thousands of women are unemployed, underemployed or overemployed too. And these days their wages are just as likely to be crucial to their own and their family's survival as men's are.

Yet so is the unpaid work they do. The economy is run by and for human beings. Paid and unpaid work depend on each other. But in the official model of the economy, paid production takes centre stage and supports everything else. The traffic goes only one way, from "producers" to "consumers".

Unpaid work is not part of this official model. When it's thought about at all, it's seen as simply a natural resource, like air or water. Whatever else happens it will go on flowing, mainly from women and mainly "for love". Except that now the law says you have to ask permission before you can do anything which uses or alters natural supplies of water. But neither government nor business need to obtain any kind of resource consent before they make changes which massively increase demand on the supply of unpaid work, or make it far more difficult to do.

Over the last ten years, there have been many such changes - far too many to deal with them fully here. They're all based on the same narrow half-truths about how the economy works - and the same failure to understand how unpaid care works.

In the beginning

In 1965 I went home from hospital with a small foreign creature who couldn't speak English and wouldn't go to sleep. The Plunket nurse saved my life as well as his. Journalist and women's health activist Sandra Coney recalls what Plunket meant for her:

I had twenty visits with Plunket by the time my son was two. For the first three months, these were in my home...It was my Plunket nurse who spotted that what I thought was a simple post-feeding "milky spill" was actually projectile vomiting, caused by pyloric stenosis, an obstruction in my baby's stomach.^b

Plunket is part of the network of services and benefits which used to be called "the social wage". This network is funded and supplied by the state and the voluntary sector combined. Most of the people who staff it, for pay, part-pay or no pay, are women.

In a modern economy, all unpaid work relies on this kind of support. Down the track, paid work relies on it too. It's not a question of sturdy independence versus spineless dependence. The 1983 Family Networks Project^c looked at 68 "typical" urban families with preschoolers. It found that in six months, the main caregivers (66

mothers and two fathers) used a total of 44 different social and community services. The average per family was between seven and eight services.

Plunket is in at the very beginning. Like national women's suffrage, it's a New Zealand invention. For nearly ninety years, it has provided a free "well-child" health service. It's a universal service: every family with a new baby is entitled to it. In 1995 its nurses saw over 93 percent of all new babies.

Dianne Armstrong is the current national president of Plunket. As a "voluntary professional", she heads what is now a \$21 million a year organisation. She stresses the way paid and unpaid work interact for families:

Women are returning to the work force in huge numbers, often very soon after birth, and that brings a new set of problems. There's the stress and tiredness it brings to the mother. But also professional women are incredibly good at controlling their lives, managing their time, and they think having a baby is going to be really simple. They've read all these child-rearing books and it's going to be a piece of cake, it says on page 96 that the baby will do such-and-such.

Then all of a sudden they are confronted with this little being who doesn't do anything like what the books say, they can't control it, it won't sleep or feed when they want it to, and their time management has gone out the door. So they feel they must be doing something wrong, they've failed. And they haven't, it's just normal. We help them understand that.

Then there's the pressures the economy is forcing on people. The economy's not good for many families out there. We see empty homes, no clothes, no heating - a lot of them don't know the benefits they're entitled to, they have no idea.

Our nurses have huge caseloads. But when you go in there at 9 a.m. and you're confronted by a house with nothing in it, that's seven other people you don't see that day. You can't just walk in and do a well-child check and walk out.

People still have this perception that we just weigh babies. But it's a lot more about support, education, safety. Women will talk about their health, their relationships. The Plunket nurse is still very much the person who's got the open door. It's not the police, it's not social welfare - it's non-judgemental.^d

Elizabeth had her first child when she was in her mid-30s. She stresses that Plunket fills a vital niche for mothers:

Plunket is the only service you can call on for all the non-urgent but still really worrying concerns you have as a new parent. You can't call your GP because the baby is screaming, but you can call Plunket. It's that lifeline which is really important when so many women are isolated and have no one else to turn to.^e

Carol, a part-time Plunket nurse with four daughters, couldn't agree more. In her experience, women's need for help is growing.

We're definitely seeing more post-natal depression. It goes right across the board, all the socio-economic groups. We call it post-natal distress - it covers a whole group of things. It's the increasing stress of being a mother now. I had a case where the mother was going back to a high level, high stress job, the day after she had the baby. That was her "choice" - but what was behind that decision? She probably didn't have many real choices.^f

Like so many other state and voluntary services which support unpaid work, Plunket has been drastically affected by recent policy shifts. The Regional Health Authorities set up in 1992 decide how much of each health service to buy. They have now decided that the basic number of Plunket nurse contacts in the first five years, home and clinic combined, should be nine. Dianne Armstrong:

The RHAs keep trying to drag the number of contacts back down, claiming that "normal" women need very few. We get some discretionaries, and it's presumed we will target. So what they're suggesting is that a 30 year old middle-class mother living in Karori or Epsom might get only four contacts, but a young sole mother in Porirua or Otara might get 15.

But how do we know you don't need us? You may look as if you're living in luxury, but you may have no money of your own or your husband's beating you every second night...everyone can be at risk.

Targeting doesn't work. It puts a great big label on you. And circumstances change. We see families who are doing wonderfully well and then the husband's made redundant. It has a terrible impact on what happens in families. We have these little checklists - if you meet the criteria you get an extra visit. But you mightn't have met any of them yesterday, and today you meet all ten.

Carol says the cutbacks are now so severe, they're jeopardising the effectiveness of the home visiting programme: "We're now contracted to do only three visits in the home. Until recently, it was four. You have to get through everything and leave enough time to get all the vital information over in those three visits. That's very difficult."

In 1994 Plunket set up a free phone line to help make up for the reduced visits. It's now getting 200 calls a day, three times the number expected. It's understaffed, so only 80 percent are being answered - callers are having to make five attempts to get through. Even if there was enough money to staff Plunket Line better, it couldn't stitch together all the gaps now appearing as a result of the cutbacks.

As it's been reduced over the years, now they're saying "oh goodness, we have a gap here". But if they had continued to fund the original home and clinic visits properly, there wouldn't have been a gap. There's a lot of agencies out there, including Plunket, that have had their funding constrained.

Plunket got \$17.6 million from public funds in 1994/5 for its basic service. Volunteers not only raise all the extra funds needed - over \$5 million in 1995 - they also contribute thousands of hours' work. But this free labour force links back to the wider economy:

We apply all the funding we get from government to salaries. Every other thing is provided by volunteers. If they walked away from Plunket tomorrow, our nurse would be standing in the street without anything but what she wore - she wouldn't even have a pen.

The community support for Plunket is overwhelming, but in terms of volunteers we're suffering the same problems as everyone else. We can't get the committees. I see that Scouts and Guides have got a lotteries grant to look at how they could improve the numbers of volunteers. It's women going back to work - and most men don't feel comfortable unless it's Lions or rugby. So everyone's fighting over the one volunteer in the patch. And everything's being devolved to the community - but it's the same women doing it, every time. The community is shrinking, but it's getting more to do.

Competition rules, ok?

National community-run services such as Plunket used to decide the kind of service needed, and get their state funding direct from central agencies. That all changed when the health care system was restructured.

The changes are so complicated that it's difficult to explain them clearly. But in essence, the idea was to invent a system which would create an artificial "market" in the supply of health services. The government divides the funds among the four Regional Health Authorities (RHAs). They decide what services they want to buy each year for their area, and who to buy them from. Voluntary providers, private providers and public providers (including the new Crown Health Enterprises, formerly known as hospitals) all compete for the contracts. Of course, this means the RHAs have to have far more office staff to run this complex system.

Competition is the key. The RHAs call for tenders for various "services" they want to buy - from well-child visits to Meals on Wheels. The RHAs are not supposed to decide solely on price, but it's up to providers to keep their costs low enough to win the contracts. The theory is that this will improve efficiency and drive down the overall cost of health care. The public will benefit, we were told, because the available funds will buy more services.

Just who the "customers" are in this new "market" - patients, taxpayers, medical professionals, government - is not clear. Most people can't possibly know what health care they might need, they have to rely on professionals to tell them. And which of the hundreds of possible services should the RHAs buy? How many cancer treatments, cataract operations or preventive health services should they fund? The Core Health Services Committee was asked to come up with a list of basic health care essentials, but failed.

So far, a pared-down well-child service is still provided in every RHA area, and Plunket has won the main contracts. But Dianne Armstrong says the new system is throwing up new problems - and far more work for the volunteers.

We now deal every year with four different RHAs, plus we had a contract with the Public Health Commission [now disbanded], so that's a separate round. You spend your entire life tendering and contracting.

But the central problem is that we don't believe the RHAs are acting as genuine purchasers. They say "here's the amount of money you got last year, this is the amount we'll give you this year." Nothing about "these are the services we want and this is what we reckon the costs are, so let's negotiate a price."

If they could say "We've costed this up, and we believe it's worth X dollars a client", we'd have a base for negotiation. But we are saying, "We believe it will cost this much", and they say "that's too much, we won't pay you that". So we say "what do you think it should cost?" and they have no idea.

Yet the fact that the costs of each service were not known was one of the major arguments for changing the system in the first place.^g

Ross Grantham is executive director of the Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations. It has 115 members; half are major national organisations, the rest are regional. The most recent survey showed that, overall, these organisations got about half their funding from government. Half reported increasing workloads, and not one reported a decrease. But funding was shrinking for two-thirds.

Among the full-time workers for these organisations, there are five women to every two men. But there are 50 percent more part-time than full-time staff, and four out of five part-timers are women. The exact numbers of volunteers aren't known. But they are shrinking fast. Ross Grantham says people are "too busy trying to protect their families and their working life". And the new contracting regime is putting the whole voluntary sector under huge stress.

The private sector can adjust because they've got cash-flow to do development training and cover the transition costs. We don't have that. The accountability and transaction costs for these contracts are enormous, but nobody in government will acknowledge that. There is no funding to help the voluntary sector cope with the new environment. The attitude of government agencies is, "The world's changed and you've got to figure out how to change with it. And we're not going to figure out how to help you do that."

Basic services such as mental health care are being shrugged off onto the voluntary sector. But where is the funding for it? And how do you value the voluntary work? The Community Funding Agency is the major government funder of social services. It funds only 25 percent of the service it contracts you to provide, but wants you to account for 100 percent. It has no interest in where the rest of the money comes from. But if we don't deliver that 100 percent, the contract says we have to pay back the money.

Other organisations such as Crown Health Enterprises (CHEs) simply stop delivering the service when the money runs out. We can't turn people away because we've run out of money - perhaps we should. The government just doesn't understand that. If they want us to provide for vital needs through voluntary organisations, they have to talk to us about the best way to support our work. If they want a free market system, then they have to pay the full cost of what they're buying. They can't have it both ways...^h

Voluntary social service groups used to co-operate, pooling knowledge and expertise. So did the other parts of the health service. Now that they have to compete, that's stopping. But they aren't just competing for contracts. Because they are so under-funded, they're competing for a share of public and political attention, in the hope that the squeakiest wheel will get the oil. And that's where low-key, preventive, universal services like Plunket miss out, says Dianne Armstrong. They're so basic they become invisible.

You can put someone who has a problem on TV and people have some emotions, and something gets done. But what happens when you put a well child on the telly? You go off and make yourself a cup of coffee, because there's nothing striking about it. Just keeping children well isn't a sob story, it doesn't pull at your heart strings. We can't say "We've saved x number of children from dying, or having an accident, or we've trained x number of parents so they didn't drown their child in the bath." We can't prove any of that. The only proof is if we were out of business and it all went down the tubes...

Sandra Coney calls these start-of-life service cutbacks "the most dangerous experiment of the health reforms".ⁱ Dianne Armstrong puts the blame squarely on political disregard of women's work as mothers, as employees, and as volunteers.

The politicians don't seem to know what we have here in this country. Because it's just out there, and it's always been there, it's not valued or worth anything. I don't know how we convince them to value what they've got.

Getting sicker

Nurses are the professionals most highly respected by the New Zealand public, according to opinion polls. But they too have been severely buffeted by the health restructuring storm. They've never been highly paid. Now they are seeing permanent jobs, penal rates, and pathways to seniority disappear. Brenda Wilson, national director of the Nurses' Organisation, explains the thinking behind the loss of permanent jobs - and the consequences for health care:

Where you would have had wards with a staffing ratio that met the peaks and the troughs, the accounting way of looking at it was to say "We shouldn't be having anybody extra when there's a trough, they should be going where there's a peak." A lot of the jobs were made casual, so they could just call in people when they got into strife.^j

A "Configuration Study", put together by the Wellington CHE Advisory Committee, took this approach. It recommended a plan to "Reduce permanent staffing in all areas to the lowest level which is required to meet the lowest activity level that occurs on an annual or other basis..."^k But like everything else, hospitals have changed. Brenda Wilson says patients are much more acutely ill than they were ten years ago:

We are now more able to treat people at home, people are discharged earlier, there's a lot of day surgery. A lot of public hospitals now are just not doing relatively minor things like haemorrhoids and veins. So the cases you're getting are much more acute, and the care of those people is much more sophisticated. It's almost intensive care. If you're a nurse who is used to working in orthopaedics, and you're sent to a pediatric ward looking after very sick children, your skills are not absolutely transferable.

And when you bring someone in today, another tomorrow, someone else the day after, there's no opportunity to build up a relationship with the patient. But that's how we can help people develop new skills in learning about and managing the condition themselves.

Cutting permanent jobs and upping the use of casuals led to a great loss of skilled, experienced nurses, as many went off into other occupations. In some parts of the country it's now very hard even to get casuals. Meanwhile, remaining permanent staff have all the extra work of supervising a constant stream of casuals who have never seen the ward before:

They are getting awful rosters, lots of overtime with no penal rates, call-backs after two hours to do another complete shift....There is a CHE which is sending its nurses a Milky Bar and saying "well done, you're done two double shifts this fortnight".

When nurses are really tired, what do they do? They're told "There's nobody else". But if they go back and make an error, they are liable. Claims on our indemnity fund have doubled.

Now there's a shortage of experienced nurses for permanent jobs. Auckland has the hospital with the highest proportion of acute cases in New Zealand. In 1995, over 80 percent of its permanent nursing staff were in their first or second year...

The more delay and anxiety there is over health care, the more "free" caring work someone, somewhere, has to do to take up the slack. The load is heaviest in the first years of life, and the last - the years when everyone becomes "dependent" on others.

The golden years?

How long is a working life? As the government repeatedly reminds us, the proportion of "retired" people in the population is growing. But that doesn't mean they stop working. Women whose only economic label has been "not in the labour force" may find they are working harder than ever.

Many of those who care for "the elderly" are elderly themselves. Because women usually marry older men, and live longer than men, they provide more care for their partners. But they're more likely than men to be living alone by the time they need care. When they can't manage without regular family help, it's mainly their female relatives who provide everyday care. And by then those women, too, may be

well past 60 - as my mother was when she cared for her own mother, who died a few months before turning 100.

In 1991, in the 80s-plus age group, only 25 percent of the men lived alone, but 44 percent of the women did. Only 11 percent of the women were living with a partner, compared with 44 percent of the men.

Mary has not had a paid job for fifty years. But she has served on the national executive of several organisations, and was a leading figure in New Zealand's post-war craft revival. She has brought up three children, often on her own: her husband held a prominent executive position and spent several months a year overseas. In many ways Mary was "married to his job": "I was the hostess for many work functions, sometimes at home, but very often at restaurants and hotels...he used to work at home a great deal, so there was less companionship."

Robert retired eighteen years ago, and Mary looked forward to spending more time together. At first he carried on with part-time work. Then he began to show the first signs of Alzheimer's Disease. He is now classed as Stage 3, and Mary cares for him full-time. She has never worked harder in her life, not even when the children were small. She never gets an uninterrupted night's sleep. Her husband gets up several times and usually needs help even to find the toilet:

I might have to change him and sometimes his bed during the night. He's so slow getting to the toilet that sometimes he has an accident on the way. He used to have diarrhoea, with an accident or two most mornings, which I had to clean up. Recently he was given medication and the problem has improved.

I hope to get up myself first, dress quickly and have my own breakfast, and have a little peaceful interlude listening to the radio. Then I go back and hope to find him still in bed, and not getting dressed and putting his arms through his trouser legs, or putting his pants on over his wet pyjamas. I dress him, but he helps - I can give him his jersey or shirt and he'll put it on - and then he'll go out to the kitchen where his breakfast is all ready, he just has to sit down and have it. Sitting down is very difficult, and getting up - most movement is hard for him.

Until fairly recently he used to wash the dishes slowly, and dry them too, but as time went on he couldn't remember where they went, so I'd put them away. But lately he sometimes forgets to do them, or I'll do them because he isn't ready...then every other day, and recently every day, I do the washing. He sits in his chair and tries to read - he can read the words, but I don't think he remembers much of what they mean. He watches television a lot. I can sometimes garden in the morning, or go shopping - I can leave him for up to an hour.¹

Mary has had to take over for Robert at home. As well as the domestic work, she sees to their finances, deals with household repairs, and organises all his health needs - doctor, dentist, pharmacy, hospital. Without support services, Mary could not cope and Robert would have to go into full-time care...

After Robert was diagnosed as having Alzheimer's, he was offered 28 days a year of free alternate care. Mary could use this as blocks of time or regular time off each week.

She chose half a day a week, so once a fortnight Robert goes to Nansen Rest Home for daycare...Hutt Hospital also offered free intermittent care in Ward 18. Robert could have two weeks there after every ten weeks at home. As his condition worsened, he went in after every six weeks:

While he was there, they took care of any health problems that came up. There was also an excellent carers' group attached to the hospital. The social worker and occupational therapist convened it. They were able to offer us professional advice.

Mary found both the respite and the group invaluable. It wasn't just the physical relief. Sharing problems lessened the feeling of isolation:

I have noticed, as have a number of my friends in the carers' group, that friends seem to drift away when there's dementia in the family....One does get isolated - not from the family of course, who are marvellous, but this sort of caring does lead to social isolation.

In mid-1995 the Ward 18 social worker told the group that she was no longer allowed to visit carers in their homes to help them with their problems. Like several other staff members, she was to be limited to assessment and rehabilitation of the "clients" only, to see if they met the criteria for intermittent care, relief care, or the long-term care subsidy. Mary says the carers really miss this easy access to expert help.

In July, both the carer relief schemes were transferred to the RHA, and the contract to run them was won by a private firm. Carers lost the right to a set amount of relief care. Instead the firm assessed each case and allotted care accordingly. Then in September 1995, just when Robert's next fortnight of intermittent care was due, Mary had a phone call from an executive of the private firm which had won the tender. Ward 18 was going to close:

They were going to close even sooner, but they discovered that the company had not realised some people would be halfway through their fortnight. So they stayed open till they'd worked through that, then closed. That was the fourth ward to close in recent years, and all were to do with the elderly.

They offered us a place at Glenbrook, in Whitby. But I don't drive, and it was very difficult to get him there, or visit. Later they offered me one at Heretaunga, but that was no good either. Besides, Robert gets so distressed if he's in a strange place.

Nansen is the only other secure home in the area which will take Stage 3 patients, who are "wanderers". Mary and the family could reach it easily, and Robert was familiar with it. But when Ward 18 closed, Nansen had no vacancies. At first the company representative insisted there was no hope of a place there. It took five and a half months, and persistent efforts by Mary, before one was made available. The company offered her an extra half day's relief care a fortnight while she waited, but she got none

of this. And she is not the only carer to have had a long wait for replacement care. The fortnight of intermittent care started again a few weeks before her eightieth birthday.

Mary's experience of the health "reforms" has a flip-side. It shows how blurred the boundaries are between the unpaid caring work which women do and the same thing done for pay. The lack of value placed on the first spills over onto the second, so that it's barely seen as work at all – let alone skilled, demanding work which deserves a decent wage.

As Mary explained, provided they meet all the criteria, elderly people and others who need it can get some paid help at home – "home help" with the housework, and "relief care" to give round-the-clock carers a break. While Mary was trying to cope with all the cutbacks and changes in the supply of the help she needed, in another area a different company had won the local contract for managing this work. This company sent contracts to women who were providing the paid help. It defined them as self-employed.

There's a big difference between employment and self-employment. Anyone defined as "a worker" is entitled to minimum wages and conditions of employment, such as holiday pay and sick pay. But self-employed people are not "workers", so these minimums don't apply to them.

For relief care, the new contracts set rates of \$36 for a "half day" (up to nine hours) and \$72 for a "whole day" (up to 24 hours). Out of that, the women would have to pay their own transport, tax and accident compensation levies. This must be the kind of work the Minister of Labour was talking about in January 1996. Some jobs at the bottom end of the labour market, he said, "actually aren't worth very much...some jobs would not exist if employers were required to pay workers more".^m

An RHA spokesman saw it differently. He said that if the women were paid more, other services would suffer. "We believe [the rate of pay] is fair. The people are not compelled...to undertake this work and there are people who are prepared to do it and receive a payment."ⁿ

Andrea Todd is one of them. A trained nurse, she relies on her earnings, plus family support, to keep herself and her six-year-old daughter. She says she would rather work than go on a benefit. She was told that if she didn't sign the new contract, the payment for work she had already done would not come through. She had to provide her own replacement if she was ill, and sometimes had to make up to 19 calls to find someone.^o

The union took a case to court, and lost. The judge ruled that the women were indeed self-employed. The rate was certainly low, but they should have been told that they could negotiate directly with their "clients" for "top-up" payments. And after all, he said, when these women are providing relief care for people like Robert, "a significant part of their time will not be spent actively working".^p

Carrots and sticks

The health-care system changes are creating huge social and economic shock-waves - and women are the main shock-absorbers. But these changes are only part of a much bigger shift which is having drastic effects on unpaid work.

Failure to understand unpaid work is nothing new. But in the days when all married women were assumed to be at home full time, what they did there received at

least some recognition from policy-makers. The taxpayer-funded "social wage" was a form of payment acknowledging the importance of unpaid work. Now it's as if our whole economy and society is being reflected in a trick mirror. It blows up "the market" until it fills the entire frame, crowding out everything else. Canadian economist Michele Pujol explains how this works:

- all human behaviour can be seen as based on exchange - like buying and selling
- all motives can be reduced to a balancing of costs and benefits
- money or a money equivalent can be taken as the common measure of everything.^q

What kind of people live in this mythical market world? Apparently, they're simple folk who behave very like donkeys. New Zealand economist Girol Karacaoglu has neatly summed up this view of what makes people tick. Economics, he said, is not about sharing resources out fairly; it is about "analysing behavioural responses to changing doses of carrots and sticks."^r

In this curious world, everyone is completely free to make their own rational choices. They respond immediately to economic carrots and sticks. This makes working out the right policies quite straightforward.

Market logic says the "social wage" is bad for you. It leads to laziness, greed and dependence. The more the government takes in taxes, and the more it spends, the less people will want to work and the less the economy will produce. But if both taxes and government spending go down, everyone will work harder. The economy will grow, and we'll all be better off. If the purely self-interested people in this simple economy can get something without "working" for it, they always will. Or as Ruth Richardson put it back in 1987, before she became Minister of Finance: "In the end, people will try to maximise their return. They are not stupid, and if they can maximise their welfare by buying into a benefit they will do that."^s

It's called "the woodwork effect". Offer a free service or benefit, and suddenly people will stop being independent and looking after themselves and their families, on their own. Instead, they'll start crawling out of the woodwork to grab the free goodies. Even health care is supposed to work this way. Most "normal" women don't need Plunket visits; they just take them because they're free. It's the same with hip operations: "There will always be excess demand when services are underpriced [that is, free]."^t

Politicians have said the same thing about foodbanks, says Bonnie Robinson, executive officer for the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services: "We've been told that the only reason more people are using them is because they offer free food. If they didn't exist, the demand would disappear."^u

It's this kind of thinking that lies behind many of the major policy moves of the last ten years. Looking back in 1995, Ruth Richardson spelt out the way it had shaped her views on the domestic purposes benefit, for example. Notice the market language:

For men, the DPB made it easier to be more casual about family ties. Suddenly abandoning one's family became a far less costly exercise....For women, the DPB also meant they had less at stake when investing in a relationship.^v

It was precisely because so many women were struggling alone to care for and support their children that the DPB was set up in the first place. And how can any woman be sure that a relationship will turn out to be a good "investment"?

Sole parenthood is rarely a lifetime state. But despite Richardson's confident assumptions, we know very little about how or why people enter and leave it, and we haven't bothered to find out. As for all those irresponsible single teenage mothers, they make up less than 3 percent of all sole parents. There are so few of them that as a country, we could afford to make sure they all carry on with their education and get the help and childcare they need to parent well.

Two-parent families and sole-parent families are talked about as if they were permanently separate groups. Yet as so many of us know from personal experience, one can turn into the other overnight. The old 1970s joke put it in a nutshell: "you're only a husband away from welfare".

Bonnie Robinson of Christian Social Services points out that the continuing rise in the numbers of women on the DPB is positive in one way: "The message that you don't have to live with an abusive partner has got through. A lot of women are making the choice earlier on to get out for the sake of themselves and their children."^w

Family violence is certainly very expensive. Suzanne Snively has worked out the total economic cost of family violence, including losses to the individual and the economy, plus direct state costs such as police work, benefits and hospital care. It comes to at least \$1.2 billion per year. She points out that this is "more than the \$1.0 billion earned from our wool exports in 1993/4".^x But to cut these costs you have to cut the violence, not the services.

In 1995, 5000 women and 8000 children came to women's refuges for help. Surely leaving a violent partner must be better for them, and ultimately for society as a whole, than staying - even if they do have to use the DPB to do it. But that's not how Ruth Richardson saw it in 1988, when journalist Gordon Campbell interviewed her. Leaving a violent marriage and going on the DPB, she said, was simply moving from "partner dependency to state dependency":

"But surely one might be beating you up, and the other isn't?" "That's right", Richardson says brightly, "but in the end, the state just might beat out of you your will to become self-sufficient."^y

The state is not your friend

In her first Budget, Richardson used several big sticks to beat people *into* becoming "self-sufficient". Altogether, the 1991 cuts took about \$1 billion from the poorest people in the country, just as the economy slid into its worst recession since the 1930s. Then the Housing Corporation put their rents up.

Benefit money doesn't disappear down a black hole. It's recycled straight back into the local economy. Economist Susan St John believes that from a purely economic point of view, it was not a sensible move to pull that much money out of an economy which was already fragile:

Certain regions were extremely badly hit by those cuts. We had a long recession in NZ, perhaps even starting as early as 1986. What we seemed to do was just kick the recession down a bit further with the

benefit cuts. In my view they did make things worse and probably were not necessary.^z

In 1991 there were well over 165,000 registered unemployed, up from 90,000 in 1988. By 1993 there were 217,000. By December 1995, there were still 161,476. The number of "jobless" - without a job and wanting one - was 185,800, or one in ten New Zealanders of working age.

It's extraordinary that in times like these, the government should decide that welfare benefits and subsidies are fostering an unhealthy "culture of dependency", and that cutting them severely will force people to get jobs, not have babies, and stay with their partners. All it does is force them to use foodbanks. Bonnie Robinson has charted their growth:

We've had foodbanks for a long time, but until the late 1980s they were very small. They were not stand-alone services. The local Methodist mission, say, would have a food cupboard and once a week they might have to give someone some food as part of their overall situation. But those people had a range of other difficulties too.

In the late 1980s that began to change, with the huge increase in unemployment. The churches found they were giving out more and more food. They were having to establish the foodbanks as services in their own right. The people who came were coping normally, but on this one occasion they just simply didn't have enough money to make ends meet.

When the benefits cuts came on board in 1991, that's when it just skyrocketed. Between 1991 and 1993 use of the Salvation Army foodbanks went up by over 1000 percent. The numbers of foodbanks shot up to cope. Now [January 1996] there are around 375 established. We can attribute that to the benefit cuts, the increases in rent for state house tenants, and the unemployment.

The majority of foodbank "clients" are parents having to ask for food to feed their children.

Foodbanks are really a symptom of child poverty. Most people who come are sole parents or couples with children. It is mainly their children's hunger that forces them to come. It's embarrassing. There aren't many people who enjoy having to go and ask for a box of food. It's humiliating. People come when they absolutely have to, not because they think it's an easy ride.

Foodbanks are very careful to make sure people cannot become regularly dependent on them, because we have no interest in existing at all. We'd rather not be there. It's a waste of our time and energy and money having to do this. Government has tried to say that these people are irresponsible, they don't know how to budget, they don't know how to cook, or they haven't accessed all the assistance that's available. But you're not going to have 1000 percent increase in irresponsible behaviour over three years.

Now that the economy is improving and employment is picking up again, we could expect that the demand on both benefits and foodbanks would quickly fall away. But Bonnie Robinson says it is not that simple. Getting a job may not keep you and your family out of poverty. More and more employed people are now starting to turn up at the foodbanks. They may work long hours, but they don't earn enough to live on...The irony is that many of the lowest-paid are doing the basic work which makes modern life possible. They handle food, clean up dirt, and get rid of the mountains of rubbish our economy produces. Veteran Economist J.K. Galbraith calls them "the functional underclass". This group of people:

serves the living standard and the comfort of the more favored community. The economically fortunate...are heavily dependent on its presence...One of the basic facts of modern economic society [is that] the poor in our economy are needed to do the work that the more fortunate do not do.^{aa}

The global economy is no excuse for rock bottom earnings in these vital jobs. They can't be moved offshore. We can't get a man in Bangladesh to clean our sewers, or a woman in Poland to scrub our hospitals...

Without families and communities, the economy means nothing. It has no life of its own. Its only purpose is to enable us to live, to care for one another and to raise our children to take out place. If we lose the power to do that, no matter how fast the gross domestic product rises or how much the budget surplus grows, we will have no future worth working for.

^a Anne Else, *False Economy: New Zealanders face the Conflict Between Paid and Unpaid Work*. Wellington: Tandem Press, 1996, pp.88-109, 159.

^b Sandra Coney, *Sunday Star-Times*, 22 October 1995.

^c Anne Meade, unpublished research, New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

^d Diane Armstrong, interviewed by Anne Else, 16 November 1995.

^e Personal communication, 21 May 1996.

^f Interview by Anne Else, 15 February 1996.

^g See, for example, Alan Gibbs, interviewed by Linda Clark, *National Business Review*, 8 January 1988.

^h Ross Grantham, interviewed by Anne Else, 29 February 1996.

ⁱ Sandra Coney, *Sunday Star-Times*, 22 October 1995.

^j Brenda Wilson interviewed by Anne Else, 7 March 1996.

^k New Zealand Nurses Organisation, paper on casualisation, Annual Conference 1993.

^l Interview by Anne Else, 2 October 1995.

^m Doug Kidd, as reported in *The Dominion*, 24 January 1996.

ⁿ As reported in *The Dominion*, 3 February 1996.

^o Andrea Todd, speaker at Service Workers' Union press conference, Wellington, 16 November 1995.

^p Palmer J. Wellington Employment Court, 3/96, W119/95, 31 January 1996.

^q Michele Pujol, *Feminism and Anti-Feminism in Early Economic Thought*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1992, p.7.

^r Girol Karacaoglu, "The triumph of politics", *National Bank Business Outlook*, April 1988, p.4.

^s Nikitin Sallee and Colin James, "Richardson and Upton: state-busters", *National Business Review*, 16 October 1987.

^t Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 9 November 1987.

^u Bonnie Robinson, interviewed by Anne Else, 18 January 1995,

^v Ruth Richardson, *Making a Difference*, Auckland: Shoal Bay Press, 1995, p.209.

^w Bonnie Robinson, 18 January 1995.

^x Suzanne Sniveley, *The New Zealand Economic Cost of Family Violence*, Wellington: Family Violence Unit, Department of Social Welfare/Coopers & Lybrand, 1994, p.ii.

^y Ruth Richardson, interviewed by Gordon Campbell, *New Zealand Listener*, 10 December 1988, p.34.

^z Susan St John, interviewed by Anne Else, 5 September 1995.

^{aa} J.K. Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992, pp.31-3.