be 'employed for its literal meanings as the empirical base of the analysis'.[77] While the reconstructive mode is largely employed here I am aware of the extensive studies that have been done examining oral testimony as text and evaluating it for its mythic quality; these ideas will be discussed later on in this section.

Some traditional historians have expressed disquiet about oral history. Gwyn Prins suggests in *Oral History* that literate cultures value the written word above the spoken.[78] Criticisms are levelled at three areas: the problems of memory; the nature of the interviewer; and the problems of a retrospective interview itself.[79] The distinction made between written and oral sources, however, blurs on closer examination. For example historians and sociologists have been using the interview technique for generations. What is unique, however, is that it is evidence that was not collected in written form at the time. Therein lies a strength, rather than a weakness, since as both Trevor Lummis in *Listening to History; the authenticity of oral evidence* and Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, emphasise, this collection of evidence takes place within a different culture, and is no longer subject to the pressures and biases of the time.[80] Through oral history many hidden subjects have been rescued from the past, one example being Steve Humphries' study on sexuality in the first half of the twentieth century.[81] The recent publishing of a number of reconstructive studies based on oral history, by Elizabeth Roberts and Anna Davin in Britain and by Claire Toynbee in New Zealand, assert the continuing value of this form of history.[82]

Memory, of course, is fraught with contradictions, but how people remember is as illuminating as their memories itself and brings a new dimension to oral history. The point that should be made here is that historians question oral history not because its methods are inherently faulty but because it seems to belie the line between reality and myth, and defies the notion that history as a discipline discovers objective truths. The construction and symbolic categories of a life history, or oral histories, attain as much significance as the content. The form of telling and the memories revealed are both equally important. The subjective that historians have always ignored becomes reintroduced and

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[77] S.Hussey, ''We Rubbed Along All Right': The Rural Working-Class Household Between the Wars in North Essex and South Buckinghamshire,' PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Essex, 1994.

[78] G.Prinz, 'Oral History', in P. Burke (ed) *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, p.116.

[79] A. Seldon & J. Pappworth, *By Word of Mouth. Elite Oral History*, Methuen, London, 1983, p.16.

[80] Yow provides a useful exposition of these ideas. arguing that oral history grants access to unrecorded information and illuminates material that has been recorded. V. Yow, *Recording Oral History A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*, Sage Publications, California, 1994, pp. 10-15.

[81] Steve Humphries, *A Secret World of Sex. Forbidden Fruit: The British Experience 1900-1950*, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1988.

[82] E.Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working -Class Women 1890-1940*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984, reprinted 1995. A.Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1996, Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His: Family Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1995.

> the individuality of each life story ceases to be an awkward impediment to generalization, and becomes instead a vital document of the construction of consciousness, emphasising both the variety of experience in any social group, and also how each individual story draws on a common culture; a defiance of the rigid categorization of private and public, just as of memory and reality.[83]

It has been suggested that myth shapes what is remembered, and recent exploration of this theme by oral historians has revealed fascinating evidence to support this claim. Alistair Thompson explored the effect of the Gallipoli myth on the recollections of old soldiers, and eventually concluded that it was impossible to study this subject unless the importance of the myth was explicitly acknowledged. Their memories of this event had been incorporated into the public myth because of the numerous books, films and legends about that battle. He re-interviewed subjects four years later using the public myth as the starting point to determine how each soldier had enmeshed the myth in their lives. [84]

Oral history relies on retrospective evidence so the question of memory is integral to an understanding of the value of oral evidence. In a sense most evidence is retrospective and selective, but oral evidence has received the most scrutiny because it can involve a considerable passage of time between an event and its recording as history. Although much work has been done by psychologists like Elizabeth Loftus, some aspects of memory remain unclear. Concerns focus on two main areas: how accurate is the memory of an event that may be seventy or eighty years old, and to what extent is it possible to determine the truth of a recollection? Elizabeth Loftus acknowledges that although there is evidence to suggest that some memory functions do decline with age, most people remember fairly well. She says 'Those who had recently graduated from high school could correctly identify nine out of ten of their classmates' pictures, but so could people who had graduated thirty-five years earlier'.[85] What is evident is that all memory is to some extent selective.[86] Memory, and the narrative of the past, is a shaped thing where people try to make sense of the contradictions and complexity of life. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson argue that people emphasise those memories that fit comfortably with their view of themselves. 'And all embody and illustrate character ideals: the desire for independence, say, in those who celebrate their childhood for its moments of freedom, or filial loyalty for those who festishize family tradition.'[87] It must be accepted that we do not get direct access to memory. Oral history is a link to the past: but it is not the past itself talking; rather it is the past talking through the present.

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[83] R. Samuel & P. Thompson, 'Introduction,' in Samuel & Thompson (eds.), *The myths we live by*, p.2.

[84] A. Green, 'The Construction of Memory: Oral History Revisited', *Historical News,* no. 64, October 1994, p.2.

[85] E.Loftus, *Memory: Surprising New Insights into How We Remember and Why We Forget*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts, 1980, p.116.

[86] Samuel & Thompson, 'Introduction,' in Samuel & Thompson (eds.), *The myths we live by*, p.7.

[87] ibid, p 10.

Problems with memory should not be over-emphasised. Lummis states that his experience of interviewing leads led him to suspect that individual memories 'are rather less malleable than some supporters of the dominant ideology would have us believe'.[88] Many individuals retain clear, detailed and accurate memories of their past, within the framework of their life story. Indeed many of the studies on memory have failed to recognise that memory depends on interest, and as Paul Thompson suggests, 'Accurate memory is thus much more likely when it meets a social interest and need . . . Reliability depends partly on whether the question interests the informant.'[89] Valerie Yow suggests that evidence has shown that from the age of fifty people begin a process of life review and reminisce about the past. During this process people concentrate on the defining experiences of their life, childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and recollect these life experiences more vividly than later events.[90] Certainly asking about childhood was a fairly rewarding process since (with the exception of one woman) people saw childhood as a very important part of life and had very clear and distinct memories of this period.[91]

The way in which memory is structured is interesting. Experience in interviewing suggests that there may be two levels present when people remember. One is more structured, and may be christened 'mythical memory'. In this level memory is shaped around certain perceptions and most clearly relates to social expectations. The levels of memory are especially evident in questions like, 'Did you get into any mischief as a child?' If the person (usually male) has a perception of themselves as a 'bit of a lad', he will merrily relate sometimes unpleasant tricks he played on people. Women, however, are more likely to think of themselves as never getting into any trouble as children, and will make comments like, 'Oh we were good children'. Yet they will later relate stories that may contradict their structured vision of themselves. Contradictions may not be recognised by the informant but are picked up by the interviewer or listener.

It is necessary to check and evaluate oral evidence, as with any historical source. One of the most useful is by simply cross-checking the recollections of the subject with other interviewees, for example descriptions of the family wash. Yow writes that 'In my own experience of interviewing, I have found that certain kinds of daily events are remembered. Women could recall the kinds of dishes they prepared for Sunday dinner as well as the things the family ate during the week . . .These were details of daily life - humdrum, yes - but important to survival'.[92] She notes that while people may be inaccurate with dates they are consistent about feelings and experiences in their lives. 'Consistency within testimony is easily checked, and questions about inconsistencies pursued. Accuracy (the degree of conformity with other accounts) can be checked by consulting other sources and comparing accounts'.[93] Generally people felt a responsibility to be accurate. Most interviews took three or four hours and were usually conducted one hour at a time.[94] Between interviews people had a chance to think about what they have said, and many commented that they tried to be as accurate as possible. Here it must be stressed that they attempted to be accurate within the range of their own perceptions; others may have a different vision of events, for instance the experiences of children in the same family might be affected by factors such as their place in the family. Especially in poorer families, older children might have experienced a harder childhood and less opportunity than younger children.[95] With details like the relationship with parents the evidence becomes much more subjective and tends to take on more of a mythic quality. Often, though, people were keen to comment that 'that was how it was for them' and acknowledged that other family members might have had a different view.[96]

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[88] Lummis, *Listening to History,* p.122.

[89] Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, p.106, quoted in S.Hussey, p.31.

[90] Yow, *Recording Oral History,* p.19.

[91] The exception to this was an interview conducted with Wyn Britain in England (she is the mother of a friend of mine, a woman who has emigrated to New Zealand). The interview only lasted an hour and Wyn seemed unable or reluctant to remember much detail about her life as a child at all. This, I believe, was due to three reasons, firstly there was very little variety in her life at all so there were few 'signposts' or 'events' around which to structure memory. Secondly, the experiences of her childhood were so relentlessly unhappy that memory was painful and she was reluctant to talk about many details. Lastly, her childhood was characterised by a sense of almost total powerlessness, and it was only when she grew older and was able to make decisions and begin to shape her own life to some extent, that for her life really began.

She was orphaned and brought up in a workhouse with a sadistic matron who used to beat the children, the she was transferred to another workhouse, and then fostered at the age of nine to a woman who wanted a big strong girl to work in the house. The second woman was also unkind and beat her so she ran away at the age of 14, but was discovered and sent to Borstal. From Borstal she ran away again and was put into service as a kitchenmaid where she was paid five shillings a month.

Social relationships and interviewing

Other factors in interviewing affect the information given. First, since it is a social relationship, the personality of the people involved, and their age and sex will shape the result. The extent that the relationship present in the interview affects the resulting material is open to dispute, but it is a question which must be addressed. Karl Figlio discusses this issue in 'Oral history and the Unconscious'. He suggests that the interview process involves a kind of transference that invests a mythic quality in the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent. 'These past relationships - more particularly, the emotion-laden fragments of experience fixed in the psyche - find their way into present relationships, fleshing them out, often bestowing on them what is felt to be real and recognizable. This is the essence of transference in the psychoanalytic sense'.[97] It seems indisputable that the subject's past relationships and experiences will directly effect how that person will see the interviewer. This is inevitable since each of us can only respond to others within the context of our own experience; thus the interviewer becomes part of that process. Figlio uses evidence from therapy sessions and interviews to justify his argument. Oral history relationships are not therapy so they will not necessarily have the some intense emotionality of a counselling session but a possibility exists that transference may occur. The oral historian must try and determine how their relationship with the subject might affect the way that the interview develops.

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[92] Hussey, 'We Rubbed Along All Right', p.31.

[93] Yow, *Recording Oral History,* pp.20-21.

[94] In England I had to travel around to see my interviewees and because of the expense and time-consuming nature of travelling I generally did all the interviews at once. Sometimes I stayed with the interviewee and did the interviews over two days, or I visited them and did two hour interviews in one session. I think both methods have advantages and disadvantages. It is easier to maintain coherence and keep track of the interview if it is done at one time, but it is more exhausting for both interviewer and interviewed. Also if a person is interviewed over a period of time it is possible to build up a better rapport with the subject. This however makes it more difficult when the interviewing process is over as it is not possible to keep in touch with all the people interviewed.

[95] For example Mavis Benson was the oldest child in a poor family that constantly moved in search of work. Her mother suffered from ill health and at the age of 10, 11 and 13 Mavis took over most domestic work. Her memories of childhood are harsh and often unpleasant, as when at the age of 14 she burned her hands badly cooking in the camp oven, but had to keep on cooking, washing and looking after the younger children though in constant pain from unhealed burns. Mavis's younger brothers and sisters were fortunate since her father acquired more steady work and could afford to let them go to secondary school .

[96] In the section on family relationships I will be more concerned with analysis of these qualities in the interview setting.

While the interview is essentially an exchange of experience, it becomes fraught at times with remembered emotion. It is a different experience from reading papers at an archive, since it is a shared experience between the interviewer and interviewee. As Portelli comments, oral history undermines the neutral position of the historian as a narrator of facts. Assumed objectivity is therefore impossible. 'Oral history changes the manner of writing history much in the same way as the modern novel transformed literary fiction; and the major change is that the narrator, from outside the narration, is pulled inside and becomes a part of it'.[98] The historian becomes a part of their own history: by becoming a protagonist any access to omnipotence is lost. These views raise an interesting question about how the social relationship of interviewer and interviewed affects the information given. Once an understanding is reached, then it is possible to understand the material that is received and duly archived as oral history. Therefore in this thesis I will attempt to convey how I saw my relationship with those that I interviewed - a largely retrospective understanding, since it is hard to analyse the relationship while it is happening.

There are three essential questions to examine: why does the subject want to be interviewed, how do they see the interviewer, and to what extent does this shape the information given? In my research I have decided that there is probably no one relationship that emerges as dominant but instead a series of patterns emerges. First I will deal with the question about why people wanted or allowed themselves to be interviewed. Perhaps it is useful to discuss first those who refused to be interviewed. Some subjects regarded an interview as being an unnecessary complication in an already busy life, but three women declined to be interviewed, largely because they had experienced a poor and miserable childhood. They did not want to think or talk about their experiences and perhaps they also felt suspicious of an academic researcher. The experience of an unhappy childhood did not preclude involvement, since others who also had experienced an unpleasant background were prepared to talk. I did notice though that these people on the whole tended to have had some contact with students, often because their grandchildren or the grandchildren of friends had been students and so they felt some sense of connection with a university and the desire to assist with student research.

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[97] K.Figlio, 'Oral history and the Unconscious', *History Workshop Journal*, p.122.

[98] A.Portelli, quoted in ibid, p. 121.

The gender, social background and personality of the researcher undoubtedly affects the relationship with the subject. Thus the first and second questions combine when I examine how the interviewees saw me and why they talked to me. Mike Roper discovered that certain patterns emerged when he made a series of interviews with businessmen. Some of his subjects regarded him as a younger version of themselves, others as a stand-in for his competitors. These expectations shaped his interviews decisively but I do not believe that my interviewees had the same sense of identification. Rather than interviewing about a specific topic, I discussed a general area, childhood, and interviewed people from a variety of backgrounds. Instead I think I fitted into a loosely familial pattern; they regarded me as perhaps of the same generation as their grandchildren, or friends' grandchildren. A few regarded me as a friend, while to others I was almost a stock 'representative' of a 'younger' generation. I came to the conclusion that the roles that were enacted in the interview were shaped to some extent by that disparity in age. Perhaps it is part of the role of grandparents to tell stories, to give a shape to the past and meaning to the present and that by acting the part of the listener I was able to assist with the fulfilment of this need.[99] Though this was the general pattern I did meet people who regarded me as a 'friend' rather than a substitute grandchild role. While interviewing for my Master's thesis one man of ninety-three expressed a feeling that he felt that I was someone he could talk to and he regarded me as a real friend.[100]

People felt a strong need to impart stories, partly because of the genuine human desire to talk about oneself, but also because telling stories of the past gave some coherence to a world they saw as having changed enormously within their lifetime. They were also influenced by the growing popular concern to record family history and to discover something about the past. For some the interview was partially an experience of self discovery, many commented that the questions 'brought things back', and became absorbed in the process of remembering. Since many of these people were fairly elderly they were also undergoing what Paul Thompson would describe as the life review process, where people reflect and recall the experiences of their past. They enjoyed being able to share some of this process with others. Sadly this reflects on the lonely and isolated position of the elderly in our society and the simple fact that their own family, if they have one, might not want to listen.

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[99] Indeed some expressed regret that the young people they knew were not as interested. It is interesting that many of those interviewed had not been the recipient of such stories themselves because they recalled that older people did not talk to children or youths the way parents or grandparents would talk now.

[100] Verdon Sheehy, interviewed at Catholic rest home in Caversham, Dunedin, in 1989.

People had a number of reasons for participating in an interview. Some subjects wanted the younger generation to know what life was like back then, a reaffirming of the validity and worth of their own experience, dignified into history. One woman wanted to make the interview a tribute to her parents.[101] Another man wanted to record his parents' hard life on a small soldier settlement farm in the North Island; again his aim was to pay a tribute to his parents. Yet in the end he proved remarkably frank about difficulties in his family life.[102] Others simply wanted the opportunity to record their lives, and quite a few wanted copies of the tapes to give to their family. Many families did want to know about their past and had requested such information from their older relatives. To some extent their desires affected the interview but in most cases I was able to extract the information that I wanted as well, and my questions shaped the interview.

Relationship between interviewer and respondent

The question of how the interviewees regarded me, and to what extent this affected the interviews, is perhaps more difficult to assess. I have already explained that I felt many people regarded me as similar to a grandchild, but I think also that gender played some role. Lummis suggests that the greatest status exaggerations come from two people of a similar age and opposite sex, but this is reduced significantly when the people are of different ages, as happens in a typical oral history interview.[103] Yet being female did affect the relationship with my interviewees. In my experience women tend to recount greater and more intimate detail of their lives. Evidence also suggests that they remember details about family life and kinship, and have a different style of recollection.[104] Men, however, tend to 'relate their lives mainly in terms of their occupational and personal experience'.[105] It is hard to judge whether women would be as open with a male interviewer, but women on the whole (but not always) were easier to talk to, especially when it came to talking about the body, experiences of puberty and sex education. I did not get the same frankness from men and think that it is in more socially 'risky' areas that these factors are most important.

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[101] This desire acted as a barrier to finding out any negative details about her life. For instance her parents lost the boarding house they ran during the 1930s depression but I found it impossible to determine when, how or why that happened. She was unwilling to talk about this subject, perhaps because it conflicted with the sense of security she saw as being primary to her childhood. Mada Bastings, born in Dunedin in 1914, interviewed 1994, 1995. She gave one of the more idealised pictures of childhood and I checked in the Stones street directories to try and obtain other information about where the family had lived. These directories are a useful source since they list occupation as well as street name and it seemed probable that her father also became unemployed in the 1930s - but she did not talk about that. The interview was also made more difficult because she could not dismiss the idea that I only wanted to know about the period up to 1923-1924 despite my repeatedly asking her about later life. However, the information I did obtain was accurate as far as I could ascertain. In her case, the silences are certainly evocative.

[102] Thomas Ryan, born 1916, interviewed 1995. His father had an alcohol problem and the childhood was affected by poverty since his working class parents had no capital other than the government loan, and their farm was in a very marginal area.

[103] Lummis, *Listening to History,* p.52.

[104] Richard Ely & Alyssa McCabe, 'Gender Differences in S.Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini & Paul Thompson, *Gender and Memory,* Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.17-31.

[105] Lummis, *Listening to History, p.129.*

I am sure also that being a 'middle class' university student also affected my experiences. Here I must say that I accessed my interviewees through three different methods, through friends and relatives (the snowball effect), through advertising and finally, when I felt that I did not have enough 'working class' informants, through visiting a day care centre for the elderly in what had been a traditionally working class suburb of Christchurch.

Gender relationships affected the process of interviewing as well as the content. I found interviewing men sometimes became problematic, because some men seemed uncomfortable with the structure of the interview and would challenge my questions; 'Why do you want to know that?', so that it became difficult at some points to keep control of the interview. A couple of women also had a fixed idea about what they thought that I wanted and responded to my questions briefly, before launching back into what they wanted to talk about. I found that after I let them talk for a while I could ask my questions and obtain the information that I wanted. I tended to use my detailed questionnaire as a guide but to be as flexible as possible and this meant that the interviewees to some extent directed the course of the interview. I found in some cases very little need to resort to the questionnaire, but some interviewees were less fluent and liked to have the structure of questions. Women tended to be anxious that they were telling me the right things, that they were not rambling on and talking unnecessarily. They tended to reveal more personal information than men, with a few exceptions. Interviewing in England had some significant differences from New Zealand since I took on the role of an outsider. But, since I met most of my subjects through friends or acquaintances I had the added benefit of being a 'connected' outsider. Respondents felt relaxed talking to someone from another (but familiar) country. This is partly because my accent did not delineate any particular identification with any of the social groups in Britain.

The advertising responses are interesting since they were from people who were interested by my project and wanted to talk about their past. Since these people chose to be interviewed I also believe that while it is important to talk about the relationship of interview and interviewed, this problem can be overstated. Many people had already made the first step towards the interview and sometimes I got the impression that they would have talked no matter what I was like (though obviously if I had been rude or incompetent the interviews probably would not have succeeded).

In conclusion, then, I believe that to some extent the personal interaction between interviewer and interviewed affected the information given in the interviews but I suspect that any competent interviewer with the same set of questions would have received similar but not identical results.

Methodology

i) The questionnaire

There has been a certain amount of debate in oral history circles about the validity of using a questionnaire when carrying out a study. It is argued that if the informant is allowed to follow their own path, they will reveal the important events in their past. An unstructured method may work on highly articulate people but others need some prompting and welcome the structure of a questionnaire. If questions are used sensitively, as a basis for discussion, rather than as a question and answer session, it provides a sound framework for the interview. Questions prompt memory, particularly of areas that people have not thought about for a long time. I used a questionnaire but followed the informant if they begin to talk about a relevant area, and often made up questions during the interview. This may sometimes be messier and can result in repeated material but reduces the formal aspect of the interview. Suspicions about oral history derive from fears of vagueness, and the other advantage to a good questionnaire is that it reduces the difference between each interview.

In consultation with Paul Thompson I developed a very full range of questions to get a broad view of all aspects of children's lives during this period. The areas that form the basis of my thesis, the parent-child relationship and the role of the child within the family, are explored in the greatest depth. The very detailed nature of the questions meant that I kept the sample size of informants at forty-one New Zealand interviewees, and nine in England (I have been able to access a large number of British transcripts by other researchers and so did not need to complete many interviews). Depth and breadth of experience attained the most priority.

The form of a question is also vital. If the interviewer seems to want a certain response the informant will attempt to satisfy that perceived need. An open-ended non-judgemental approach will thus produce a more accurate response. For instance, 'Did you get on with your father?' might result in a defensive response, whereas 'Describe your relationship with your father' will elicit a more detailed and open reply. When asking questions about things that might be frowned upon socially or viewed differently in the present, it has been suggested that a good approach is to use distancing techniques. For example when asking about discipline, one might say, 'I understand that in those days it was quite common for parents to use the strap a lot. Can you remember ever getting the strap?' By using, 'in those days', the interviewer is suggesting a non-threatening division of time.

ii) The process of interviewing

All the interviews except with two men were conducted in the informant's own home.[106] This meant the interviewee felt comfortable in their environment, and helped to make the interviews fairly relaxed and friendly. The length of the interviews varied from person to person but most took about four hours, and several interviews took six and a half to seven hours. Interviews took place over several days with the maximum length of a session being between one and a half to two hours. Some interviews only lasted for half an hour at a time because respondents tired easily. I interviewed one man in a day care centre for the elderly for half an hour at a time because he fitted the interview in between morning tea and bingo. The result of these detailed interviews was a very comprehensive insight into their childhood experiences. I gave each person I interviewed a chance to have copies of the tapes themselves and many were delighted to have this recorded information about their lives. Once recorded the tapes were abstracted, rather than transcribed - a less time-consuming method - and much of the information codified. These abstracts, in combination with the tapes (180 hours of tape), form the basis for the thesis.

iii) The sample

It proved difficult to reflect exactly the geographical spread of the New Zealand population but my sample of forty-one New Zealanders includes a balance of social class, and rural and urban interviews. Women outnumber men because of the simple fact that women tend to live longer than men. Before I started the project I aimed to gain as representative a sample as possible, though the vagaries of interviewing meant that I could not gain a fully representative sample.[107] Sampling is an important element in oral history but cannot be applied as rigorously as in other disciplines. A useful comment about sampling comes from Erikson who states that it is 'the strategy of persons who work with vast universes of data; it is a strategy of plenty'.[108] 'Plenty' is seldom a luxury that the historian enjoys and more often they are forced to construct history around fragmented data. Here the emphasis is on qualitative rather than quantitative information.[109] It is important to be aware of these sampling techniques and use them as a guide to be as representative as possible, or at the very least to acknowledge that some types of experience may have been excluded. The oral historian must not only be 'aware of the individual as representative of a type of social experience, but also to construct an interview schedule that will elicit that information, and to conduct interviews with a flexibility which will enable us to make maximum historical use of them'.[110]

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[106] I interviewed G.Gunton upstairs in the shop he owns and has worked in for fifty-nine years (not an ideal place from the point of view of sound quality). He felt more comfortable being interviewed there than in his own home, and certainly it seemed to be the central point of his life.

[107] Since I was based in Christchurch, my sample contains a larger proportion of Cantabrians than any other part of New Zealand.

[108] K.T.Erikson, quoted in Hussey, 'We rubbed along all right', p.27.

[109] Lummis, *Listening to History*, p.32.

There are valid reasons for interviewing a small but carefully defined group of people. Even if it was possible to interview 1000 people, the essence of the oral interview - the quality of individual experience - would be lost. The number chosen for this study allows scope for individual experience to emerge while also allowing a reasonable coverage of different classes in society. The value of an interview, however, is greater if it can be placed into a comparative context. Oral material reveals information about a particular social group, but also reveals how they interacted with the wider world. Thus from one interview a wide vision of experience is garnered. 'It is only by being able to place a person into the context of their class, location and time that the full potential of the account can be utilized'.[111]

Issues of representativeness can be circumvented by the use of other sources. There is a wealth of sources for the interwar years that look at nutrition, health, income, and can be used to place the families in this study in context. For example it is possible to work out the average wage of a particular occupational group, and assess how representative that interviewee's family may be. Incomes during the depression could be equally low for two families yet the circumstances of the family could be wildly dissimilar. One family might have a garden and support from an extended family, the other be without support, with the subsequent result that they suffered far greater poverty than the first family. Here oral history provides an understanding of the interaction between individuals, social forces and historical events, in a way no other source can provide.

Modernity became firmly established in the interwar years and decisively shaped society and family life. Technology transformed the home and scientific child-rearing philosophies changed child-rearing practices. Dramatic events during these years also affected society and families. The crucial shaping forces of this period in history affected people (to varying degrees of course) in both countries. The very name interwar gives a shape to this twenty-year period, and suggests a transition between two closely defined points. The Great War, the 1918 Influenza epidemic, the fragile recovery of the twenties, the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, then the Second World War provide a ready framework, around which people structured their lives. Each of these events evokes tragedy and suffering. Interestingly the twenties has little part in this mythology, it is recognised as an in-between decade, a lull between the wars; if characterised at all, it is envisioned (at least in Europe and the United States) as the era of the flapper, marked by frenetic and decadent living.[112] Originally the decision was made to interview people whose main experiences of childhood were in the twenties and early thirties, (born in the ten year period between 1914 and 1924, with the majority born in 1916-1921) because the twenties is to some extent neglected in the popular imagination.[113] But increasingly it also became apparent that children growing up in this period lived lives that were decisively different from those of previous generations.[114] This generation has a valid claim to be the first truly modern family. The following chapter will explore the implications of the modern family, placing family life within the context of interwar New Zealand.

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[110] ibid, pp.32-33.

[111] ibid, pp.37-38.

[112] Perhaps this explains why the twenties is a curiously understudied decade, and comes across as somehow formless in the popular imagination, at least in New Zealand.

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[113] There are some exceptions to this as I have also gathered some information from people who were born as late as 1928 to 1930, since they seemed to fit in the general framework of the thesis.

[114] For my master's thesis I interviewed people who were born between 1890 and 1910. Despite some continuities I noted several major differences in family life, compared to my later sample.

Part One

Theories and Ideology of childhood

Chapter I

An Ideal Country for Children? The Family in Interwar New Zealand

> The family is a social as well as a biological construction, and we should not be surprised to find that expectations about relationships and interpretations of family interest differ widely. Women and men, parents and children may not share an identical vision; their experiences within the family circle may be quite diverse. For example, the value of co-operation may be accepted by all members and indeed may make possible the family's survival under difficult economic circumstances, but the burden of support and access to resources may fall unequally and influence each one's stake in resolving disagreements regarding family property. Relationships within a given household are also shaped by those external to it: the quality and quantity of contacts with kin, neighbors, and friends outside the household affect the interactions of those who live together on a daily basis. Finally the exterior worlds of work and politics, each an arena for social life and historical change as well as for individual experience, impinge on family life. [1]

The family is a biological and social unit, but as the above passage emphasises, considerable variety exists in the experience of family life. Although 'family' is a deceptively simple word, in fact it is a term redolent with many emotions and expectations. The family is regarded as an essential unit of society. While much has been written heralding its value, lamenting its decline or vilifying its inadequacies, little attention is paid to its complexities. Even within the confines of a single culture, factors such as social class and location can lead to a difference in family structure. Family status and income, and geographical location emerged as important themes in an exploration of family relationships. Variation also occurred inside individual families. Birth order and gender, as well as personality, influence how individuals experience family life. Only by separating these factors, and examining them in detail, can we make an adequate interpretation of family life and children's experiences.[2] Growing up in town or country determined family structure, and the shape of children's lives. This rural/urban dichotomy forms the basis for the exploration of family relationships. Despite increasing urbanisation New Zealand remained a rurally orientated society based on pioneering values, largely because of the rural idealism that shaped much of New Zealand society. Rural images infused New Zealand mythology, breathing potency into our self image.[3]

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[1] J.E. Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island 1900-1940*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1985, p.2.

[2] These ideas will be used as a basis to test the experiences of forty-one individuals who grew up in New Zealand; twenty-two from urban areas and nineteen from country districts. Contrasts with the experience of thirty-five British interviewees will also be made. I interviewed nine people and used material from the National Sound Archive in London, Paul Thompson's archive in Essex, and the North-West Centre for Regional Studies in Lancaster.

The chapter will concentrate on the 'nuclear' family of mother, father, and children, leaving an examination of other relationships that shaped and defined the family to a later chapter. All families exist within a social context of kin and community. Yet it becomes difficult to draw arbitrary distinctions; on closer examination, boundaries blur, since grandparents or aunts sometimes acted as parents and it becomes difficult to distinguish the nuclear from the extended family.

I

European family structures in New Zealand Society

Historically the New Zealand family shaped itself on British models. Claire Toynbee has identified two characteristic family types that settlers imported to New Zealand, the pre-industrial (or pre-capitalist) and the industrial family. The pre-capitalist family had distinctive features: large numbers of children, close kinship and neighbourship ties, traditional family roles which were transmitted from generation to generation, implying an acceptance of family control and authority.[4] Men had dominated pre-capitalist society in a patriarchal system. 'The Master: the Husband, the Father, the Head of the House, the Breadwinner is the responsible individual whose name and power upholds the household. . . . He is also legally and politically responsible for all the members of the family . . . such are the duties of a master, a husband and a father'.[5] Sociologists defined patriarchy as existing in a 'specific pre-capitalist social order organised around household production in which life was not marked off into different spheres of experience of work/home or public/private'.[6] Political and legal changes in both New Zealand and Britain had eroded the legal basis of patriarchy by the interwar years, but men's dominance continued.

Evidence suggests that despite essential similarities, certain historical factors made New Zealand families distinctive. A New Zealand historian, Stewart Houston, argues that lack of a wider kinship network made family members more dependent on the nuclear family for both physical and emotional support.[7] New Zealand shared these characteristics with other migrant societies. One characteristic, however, distinguished New Zealand from other migrant societies. The late arrival of industrialisation resulted in elements of 'pre-capitalist tradition' in family life lasting longer in New Zealand than in more urbanised and

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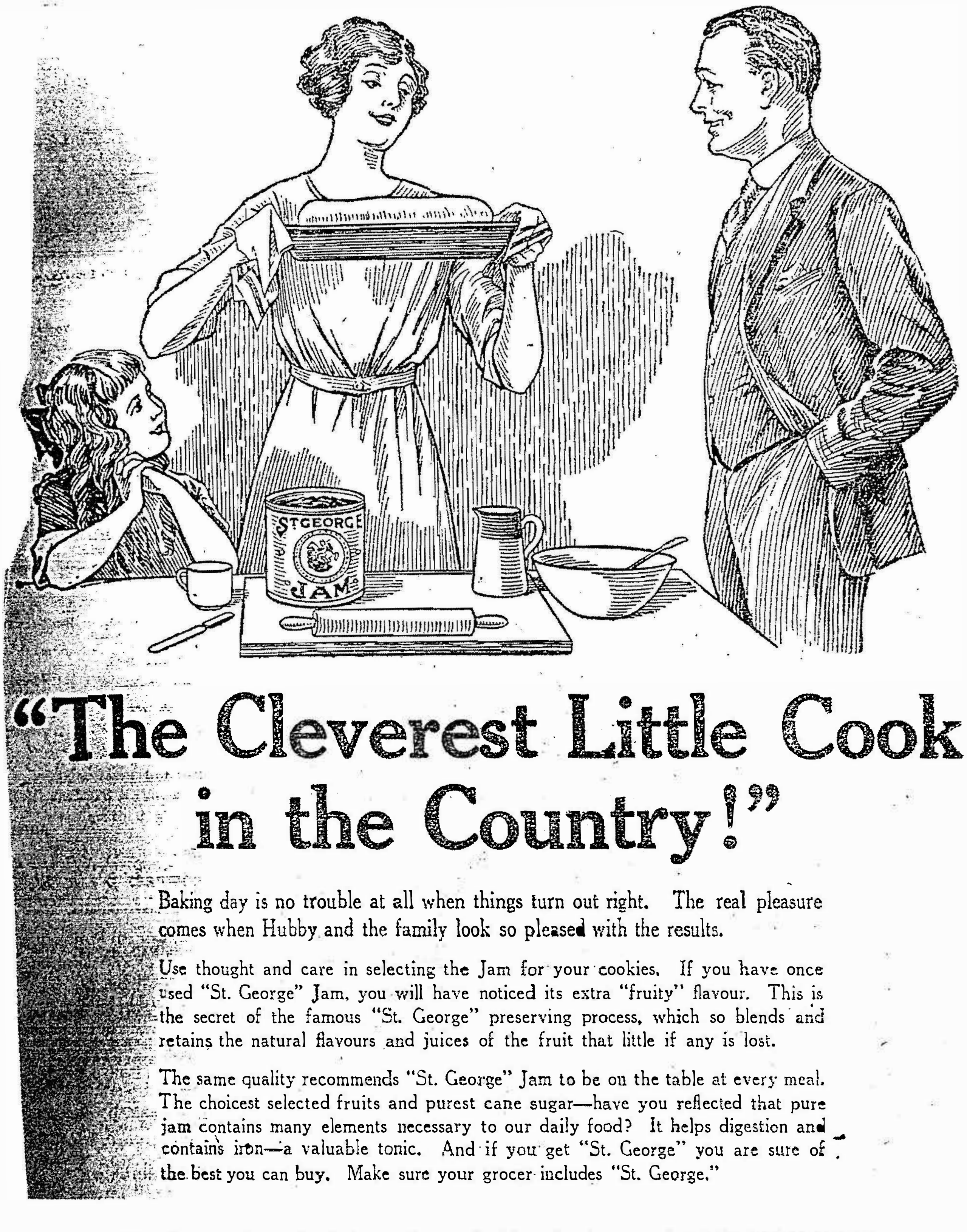
[3] H.Stewart Houston, 'The New Zealand Family: Its Antecedents and Origins', in H.Stewart Houston (ed), *Marriage and the Family in New Zealand*, Sweet & Maxwell, Wellington, 1970, pp. 35-6.

[4] ibid

[5] Quoted from *Cassell's Book of the Household*, in L.Davidoff, *Worlds Between Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, Polity Press, Great Britain, 1995, p.51.

[6] C.Toynbee, *Her Work and His: Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1995, p.89.

[7] There is support for this idea but the isolation of migrants has occasionally been over-emphasised. It will be argued here that where possible migrant families set up other forms of support, such as churches and neighbourhood ties that in part compensated for the lack of wider kin. Many families tend to emigrate in the chain pattern of migration and with other kin, making some form of replication of kin networks possible. Judith Smith's work suggests that these patterns were discernible in the lives of migrant families in Rhode Island.



"The Cleverest Little Cook in the Country!"

Baking day is no trouble at all when things turn out right. The real pleasure comes when Hubby and the family look so pleased with the results.

Use thought and care in selecting the Jam for your cookies. If you have once used "St. George" Jam, you will have noticed its extra "fruity" flavour. This is the secret of the famous "St. George" preserving process, which so blends and retains the natural flavours and juices of the fruit that little if any is lost.

The same quality recommends "St. George" Jam to be on the table at every meal. The choicest selected fruits and purest cane sugar—have you reflected that pure jam contains many elements necessary to our daily food? It helps digestion and contains iron—a valuable tonic. And if you get "St. George" you are sure of the best you can buy. Make sure your grocer includes "St. George."

'The Cleverest Little Cook in the Country!' The advertisement cheerfully depicts interwar domestic bliss. The father has arrived home from work in his suit, the wife is neat and smiling and the daughter happy, and the wife has been engaged upon a domestic task for the whole family. Ironically although the task celebrates domesticity, it advertises a convenience food, bought rather than home-made jam, implying that it is still possible to be a completely domesticated wife, without making everything at home. Source: Advertisement for St Georges Jam, *The Press*, 5 October 1921, p.11.

industrialised nations elsewhere. Many rural families followed the pre-industrial form outlined above because of the existence of the family farm, whereas urban families followed the model that industrialisation had imposed in Britain with the man as breadwinner and the women and children as economic dependants.[8] Women's and children's labour kept the family farm viable, so all family members contributed to the family economy. Toynbee dubs the industrial family as 'masculinist' and the pre-industrial as 'patriarchal'.[9] Both forms co-existed in early twentieth century New Zealand, although 'masculinism' was replacing 'patriarchy'. Delyn Day's work shows that rural women's labour continued to be a crucial part of the rural economy well into the 1920s and 1930s. Gradually, though, the value of women as producers diminished, as domestic ideology and mechanisation eroded the economic importance of their labour.[10] Men's economic power ensured dominance over subordinate wife and children whether a family was patriarchal or masculinist.

A major transformation had occurred in family life during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. 'Home' separated from 'work'. The family became a non-productive unit as women and children were gradually excluded from economic activities. Partly as a result of the increased financial burden involved in parenting, family size diminished. Economic factors, combined with a major shift in ideology, caused this transformation. A fundamental belief in the morality of separate spheres developed. The adult male worked and struggled in the world, secure in the knowledge that his home existed as a place of peace and comfort, a refuge from the world, staffed by non-earning wife and happy, carefree children.[11] Within this ideology the home became raised to the status of a temple, and the duties of the wife attained an almost religious significance.[12] The 'new' family emerged as a dominant form in both New Zealand and Britain during this period. These structural changes affected family relationships, and are vital to an understanding of family life and childhood.

Social class and location determined the rate of change. Families could not do without the labour of wife and children until it became possible to live on a single wage. A clear split in family life emerged between middle class and working class families. Yet the differential was not as marked as in Britain. New Zealand workers had higher wages than British workers,[13] and one would expect to see this financial advantage reflected in the lives of children. This differential in family structure began to decline in urban areas during the interwar period, although economic hardship in the depression may have widened the gap again. It is not till one compares rural and urban areas that the strongest disparity in family structure emerges and this will be the focus of the following chapters. Taking this as a model, one would expect the urban family to be markedly different from the rural family: in family structure, composition, family size, attitudes to children's work and in leisure activities.

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[8] Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.9.

[9] ibid, p.88.

[10] D.Day, 'The Politics of Knitting: A Study of The New Zealand Women's Institute and the Women's Division of the New Zealand Farmer's Union 1920-1940,' Post-graduate diploma in history, University of Otago, Dunedin, 1991, passim.

[11] Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, p.52.

[12] ibid, p. 53.

[13] One economic historian notes that at 'the turn of the century, Australians and New Zealanders were clearly the most prosperous people in the world. In comparison with the world's leading nations our average income and consumption levels were higher, our children were healthier, and our income and wealth were distributed more equitably'. G.D.Snooks, 'Wealth and well-being in Australasia in the early twentieth century: a survey', in G.D. Snooks (ed.), *Wealth and Well-being in Australasia.* Special issue of the *Australian Economic History Review,* XXXV, No. 2, September 1995, Economic History Society of Australia and New Zealand, p.3.

A New Zealand social historian, Erik Olssen, has shown that rural and urban families followed different patterns. 'In small towns and rural areas the family usually retained its control of social and economic functions, but in the cities, with the separation of home and work, the family tended to become more private, a refuge from the world'. The conjugal family became the new ideal for the urban middle class and for white collar and skilled workers and 'the family became the key to survival and a focus for much of their activity.'[14] Change affected urban family structures more deeply than in rural areas. This change in family life occurred concurrently with increased state responsibility and jurisdiction over families. Traditional welfare systems, Olssen argues, had fragmented as families became smaller and more inverted, forcing both private organisations and the state to take responsibility.[15] These reforms were also prompted, as indicated in the introduction, by the changing ideologies of the state and the emphasis on childhood that characterised the first decades of the twentieth century.[16]

The interwar period had been shaped by the Great War - the war to end all wars. Its importance cannot be overestimated. The family became the focus of hope, the vehicle through which a new society could be built after the extended anguish of a world war.[17] Four years of conflict had slashed through the fabric of British and colonial societies and the war years represent a sharp differentiation between the old and new.[18] A certain weariness and disillusionment emerged in society, personified in British literature during this period. Eliot's image of Londoners as living ghosts, 'I had not believed death had undone so many'[19], typified post-war cynicism and despair. Forgetting war proved difficult. One man commented: 'The war's baneful influence controlled still all our thoughts and acts, directly or indirectly'.[20] War scarred the lives of the men and women whose generation had been touched by death, or mental and physical trauma. Older generations faced with bewilderment radical change in fashion, and modernism with its sharp corners, its dissonance and distortion.[21] These changes swept across Europe and America, often scarcely touching New Zealand, but New Zealanders could not escape the short hair and short skirts of the modern woman. One letter to the Christchurch *Press* complained that the twenties had become 'the Degenerate Age', lamenting that 'the life we are leading now, and with the aid of the fashions and showing so much of the person, [means] morality is losing virtue'.[22] Fashion transformed the appearance of society, while both men and women had expectations about changes they expected to be fulfilled in the years of peace. Yet, while returned soldiers longed for family life, their war experiences sometimes marred relationships with wives and children. The effects of war are evident in the recollections of some of the interviewees in this study.

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[14] Olssen, 'Towards a New Society', *Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.258.

[15] ibid, p.260.

[16] Attention to the state of childhood had of course emerged in the nineteenth century but Ellen Keys, the child-theorist, heralded the twentieth century as the century of the child.

[17] Adjustment to peace time must have been difficult, especially for wounded and maimed men. H.P.Pickerell wrote in defence of ex-war patients, about men who commented to him that 'small boys not infrequently jeer at them and call after them in the streets– "Little beggars, they don't know, of course, and they don't really mean any harm, but it's a bit hard"'. 'Correspondence', *The Press*, April 3, 1926, p.16. K. Darian-Smith suggests that the horrors of World War One had long-term consequences on men. She quotes one Australian woman who stated 'my memories as a child of the First World War Soldiers were that they either suffered from alcoholism or that they disappeared.' K. Darian -Smith, 'Remembrance, Romance, and Nation: Memories of Wartime Australia,' S. Leyesdorff, L. Passerini & P. Thompson (eds), *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories, Vol. IV Gender and Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 153. P.Fussell suggests that soldiers in World War One felt a tremendous gap between themselves and civilians back home. P.Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford University Press, New York and London, 1975, p.86.

[18] Fussell argues that the war shaped everything that came after: memory, literature, attitudes, and war strategies. Men such as Winston Churchill viewed the second war as merely a continuation of the first war, the intervening peace just a pause in hostilities. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 317-318.

War influenced the government's attitudes to children. Huge casualties emphasised the importance of a healthy and patriotic population so children became too important to be left to their family's jurisdiction. Government efforts were sharpened by reports on the health of the troops and by concerns about the possible effects of urbanisation. Thus the modern family had less power than the pre-capitalist family and lost much of its autonomy to the state. A narrow definition of childhood developed, one that emphasised dependency. Concern about the physical and mental fitness of the population prompted the government's regulatory attitude to children and families.

Eugenics developed widespread support in the twenties and thirties, and focused attention on family life. Many people believed that without state intervention mentally defective men and women would propagate an inferior race. Doctors in particular embraced these ideas since it supported their efforts to gain power and authority in society.[23] New

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[19] T.S. Eliot, The Wasteland, I. The Burial of the Dead, *Selected Poems,* faber & faber, London, 1956, p.53.

[20] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p.325.

[21] Modernism affected the arts; music, architecture, painting, sculpture and even furniture. The War had a dominant influence on this new school. For example the Bauhaus movement was founded by the German, Gropius: 'He had seen action as a cavalry officer and terrifying evidence of the destructive power of machines had led him to modify his once-optimistic view of the benefits of mechanization'. F. Whitford, *Bauhaus*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1984, p. 31. These modern movements filtered very slowly into New Zealand. For example cubism and surrealism had little effect on New Zealand at first and New Zealand art remained highly conformist. Frances Hodgkins painted her most noted work overseas, and more radical artists were seldom appreciated at home. G.Docking, *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting,* A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd., Wellington, 1971, p.96. Janet Frame's autobiography *An Angel at My Table* , and Robin Hyde's *The Godwits Fly* show the difficulties nonconformists faced in New Zealand society of the time. In the 1940s only the success of Janet Frame's writing saved her from being given a leucotomy. J.Frame, *An Autobiography*, Random House, New Zealand, 1989, p.221.

[22] 'Correspondence', The *Press*, September 27, 1927, p.11.

[23] S.Robertson, 'Production not Reproduction': The Problem of Mental Defect in New Zealand 1900-1939, BA

Zealanders were aware of initiatives directed at families overseas. Doris Gordon, a well-known and influential New Zealand doctor, eulogised fascism's concern for maternal and child welfare in an article in 1939. 'Italy is in the van in child psychology, and the new regime aims at giving the rising generation a higher intellectual standard as well as a higher moral and physical one.'[24] Men and women were expected to follow official precepts on childcare, and provide a healthy and moral environment for New Zealand's future citizens. They would be blamed for any transgression from officially prescribed norms.

To some extent the division between pre-war and post-war society is an arbitrary distinction, since many elements characterising childhood and family life in the interwar years had emerged already. Nevertheless, after the war, these ideas became firmly entrenched, developing the tentative course of the pre-war years.

II

Family life in the Interwar period

After the war family life appeared more popular and more stable than in any other time in New Zealand's past. New Zealand reached demographic maturity; a more stable age structure and an even balance of men and women had developed. Death rates fell. Widowhood and orphanhood diminished. Marriage and parenthood became available to a larger section of the population. In 1911 41 per cent of men had never married but by 1930 this figure dropped to 30 per cent.[25] Men tended to become more settled in work and most married women did not work, an important factor behind unions pressing for a family wage. The family wage concept had been an essential part of the compulsory state arbitration system from its inception in 1894.[26] Only 3.7 per cent of married women in New Zealand were in paid employment, whereas in Britain 10 per cent of married women worked in 1931. Some paid work by women went unrecorded, since the census did not list casual or part-time work, but superficially at least, New Zealand statistical evidence reveals a greater conformity with the ideology of the family. It is not clear whether New Zealand women chose, or were forced, to stop working after they married. Certainly regulations barred married women from working in the civil service and in teaching, both major forms of female employment. Official policies, combined with pressure from society and comparatively high male wages, limited the employment of married women.

Hons dissertation (Hist), University of Otago, 1989, pp.4-8.

[24] D.C.Gordon, 'Maternal and Child Welfare in Italy', New Zealand Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society Section, NZMJ, vol. XXXVIII, June 1939, p.19. Dr Doris C. Gordon (MBE) was born in Melbourne in 1890 and arrived in New Zealand in 1894. She trained as a doctor at Otago and Edinburgh Universities, opened a general practice in 1918, founded the NZ Obstetrical Society in 1927, and later became Director of Maternal Welfare, Department of Health, from 1946. P.Mein Smith, *Maternity in Dispute New Zealand 1920-1939*, Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Government Printer, Wellington, 1986, p.150.

[25] Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male, - A History,* Penguin, Auckland, 1987, p.225

[26] This principle was also influential in Australia where a similar system was established in 1916. M.Nolan, '"Politics Swept Under a Domestic Carpet"? Fracturing Domesticity and the Male Breadwinner Wage: Women's Economic Citizenship, 1920s-1940', *NZJH*, Vol. 27, No.2, October 1993, p.199.

Chapter I: An Ideal Country for Children?

Successive New Zealand governments developed policies with a masculinist focus. Legislators paid little attention to fatherhood, focusing instead on the mother. Stereotypes of parenthood defined policy. Politicians and experts alike expected mothers to be responsible for their children; increased state support for mothers after 1922 reveals how deeply this belief became ingrained in the national psyche. A conservative government introduced a family allowance scheme in 1926, a measure heartily supported by Labour. Michael Joseph Savage had himself introduced a number of motherhood endowment bills in the 1920s and when the government introduced the scheme the Attorney General commented that 'I am sure that no one would deny him any credit . . . for his advocacy of the principle which by this bill is about to become established fact'.[27] One writer has argued that this the 1926 scheme 'took no regard of the employment status of parents and was financed out of general taxation, it stands out as the first true state family allowance system in the world.'[28] The husband's income determined the level of support, but women received the money. The Act paid '2s 0d per week to 3rd and subsequent children where the family income did not exceed £4 per week plus the monetary equivalent of the allowances.'[29] Strict racial and moral criteria determined eligibility. An applicant with a 'bad' character or an illegitimate child could be declared ineligible.[30] State benefits targeted mothers because of the belief that mothers, unlike fathers, would always act in the best interests of children. Family allowances softened the breadwinner ideal by giving women some discretionary income.

New Zealand initiatives in family policy often reflected overseas influence. In the 1920s a movement for family allowances spread across Europe. France, Belgium and Germany had the most extensive schemes, but nations such as Austria and the Netherlands also instituted some form of allowances.[31] These were partly intended to hold down wages after the inflationary war period, and never paid for the full cost of children.[32] New Zealand and Australia followed similar principles but were more radical than European nations.[33]

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[27] Barry Gustafson, *From The Cradle To The Grave A biography of Michael Joseph Savage,* Reed Methuen, Auckland, 1986, p.120.

[28] Macnicol sees New Zealand and Australia as being distinctively progressive in this area. They both introduced family allowance schemes relatively early, though in Australia these measures were prompted by economic and industrial conflicts. Trade unions in Australia also pushed strongly for family wages. In 1927 a Labour government in New South Wales introduced a family allowances scheme that gave 5s0d per week for each child under 14 years, when the total family income was less than the basic wage, plus £13 per year. J.Macnicol, 'Welfare, Wages and the Family, Child endowment in comparative perspective 1900-50', in R.Cooter (ed.) *In the Name of the Child,* p.260.

[29] ibid, p.261.

[30] ibid.

[31] ibid, p. 254.

[32] J. Lewis, 'Models of equality for women: the case of state support for children in twentieth-century Britain', in G.Bock & P.Thane (eds.) *Maternity and Gender Policies Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States 1880s-1950s*, Routledge, London & New York, 1991, p. 74.

[33] Feminists in Britain lobbied for a similar scheme there. Eleanor Rathbone noted in 1927 that the movement for family allowances 'seems to have begun, spiritually if not in material results, almost simultaneously and quite independently in several countries, and in different minds in each country'. Macnicol, 'Welfare, Wages and the Family', in Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child,* pp.244-245.

Progressive government policies and trade union ideology 'embodied the interventionist but masculinist principles of the new liberalism'.[34]

When the Labour government came to power in 1935 they firmly enshrined this ideal of the family, using legislation to reinforce the ideal of the male breadwinner. 'A social component was specified for the first time in that the male adult wage was to be based upon the needs of a man, wife, and three children.'[35] They also directed their family benefit scheme (a universal benefit that was not means-tested) at the mother.[36] Despite the Labour Party's belief in equality and democracy, Labour men could not conceive of true sexual equality.[37] They viewed nurturing as a purely feminine characteristic, yet the evidence from my earlier research shows that men were perfectly capable of caring for children. Masculinist ideologies downplayed the importance of fatherhood, leaving father's very real contribution to child-rearing unrecognised. Labour's policies, although radical and much more sweeping in comparison with previous governments, were still solidly family centred. They firmly believed 'that it was the community's duty towards the family to ensure that the mother at home caring for a young family should receive a benefit'.[38] Michael Joseph Savage, a bachelor, became the nation's father figure. His image gazed benignly down on many working class homes.

In the interwar years housing, for the first time, began to reflect the ideology of the home as a place of refuge from the world. Housing improved markedly over nineteenth century standards. In 1886 only 44 per cent of houses possessed more than four rooms, whereas in 1921 65 per cent did and only 9 per cent of houses possessed one or two rooms. Government statistics in 1921 revealed an average of 4.55 people per house, but this fell to 3.9 people in 1936.[39] A steady fall in the birth rate accounts for some of the decrease in overcrowding, but does not detract from the importance of this development. Better lighting, heating, and more consumer appliances also made the home a more comfortable place during this period.[40] The design of the new 'Californian' bungalow of the twenties incorporated labour saving devices, and was designed for convenience.[41] Gramophones, then radio provided leisure activities centred on the home.[42] In 1938 H.C.D. Somerset described that comfort as belonging even to the rural world. 'The kitchen is the farmer's retreat from the battle with forces over which he has no control. It is his little haven of security: the window is close curtained the wind and rain shut out. . . Here in the evening father reads the paper, mother makes and mends, the children pore over their lesson books.'[43] More people than ever before owned houses. By 1921 almost 60 per cent of houses were owned or under a mortgage.[44] Government policy influenced this pattern. The Reform government made cheap loans available to returned soldiers, and workers, fuelling a speculative housing boom in the 1920s.[45] They hoped to create an urban counterpart to the rural freeholder, thus developing a solid constituency of support.[46] By the end of the decade the government had tightened up on loans, which created a severe depression in the housing market. Falling incomes and unemployment in the thirties led to a decline in home ownership, as people were no longer able to finance their mortgages.[47] For a time, however, in the twenties the ideal of suburban housing became accessible to a large section of the population. [48]

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[34] ibid, p.257.

[35] R.Chapman, 'From Labour to National', in Oliver (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.339.

[36] The 1938 Act was still means tested and paid 4s per week for each third and subsequent child in families earning less than £5 per week. Criteria and payments were progressively improved until the Social Security Amendment Act of 1945 instituted a universal benefit of 10s a week for each child under the age of sixteen, or eighteen if the child still attended an educational institution. E.Hanson, *The Politics of Social Security The 1938 Act and some later developments*, Auckland University Press, Oxford University Press, New Zealand, 1980, p.127.

[37] Savage believed in the importance of the mother's role, and in 1926 he declaimed that 'The time would come when the mothers of the nation would be properly acknowledged'. Gustafson, *From the Cradle to the Grave,* p.120.

[38] Hanson, *The Politics of Social Security,* p.127.

[39] Phillips, *A Man's Country,* p.226.

[40] It is interesting that many interviewees recalled the purchase of a consumer appliance by their parents or themselves as of abiding importance. They gave dates and details of the appliance. For example, Jean Bevan recalled with great sadness that her mother worked very hard all her life and did not have any electrical appliances till she retired in the 1950s, but died shortly afterwards.

Buying a home conferred a degree of respectability, and reinforced the notion of the home-centred family. The importance of home ownership emerges in the interviews. Joan Wicks described the importance of home ownership in Southland:

> Financially in those days it was a very wealthy province. Everybody except for government people who shifted from place to place owned their own home. The Southland building society was the second one

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[41] Rogerson, 'Cosy Homes Multiply A Study of Suburban Expansion in Western Auckland, 1918-31', MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1976, pp. 136 -148.

[42] Phillips, *A Man's Country,* pp. 226-227. Previously, some families had used the piano as a focus of entertainment and some of the people interviewed recalled sing-alongs and musical evenings with pleasure. Undoubtedly the presence of radio and gramophones meant a decline in this form of home entertainment.

[43] H.C.D. Somerset, quoted in Phillips, *A Man's Country,* p.227.

[44] The 1922 Year Book claimed that 'Latterly an insecurity of tenancy, which is due largely to a severe housing shortage and the statutory rent-restriction, has led to the purchase of an abnormal number of houses by persons formerly content to remain tenants.' *NZOYB*, 1922, p. 542. This suggests the possibility that figures for home ownership could have been artificially high. Rogerson's work certainly supports this conclusion.

[45] The Reform government continued Liberal initiatives in cheap credit but were more concerned with self help and individual enterprise than social planning. In 1906 the Liberal Government instituted the Advances to Workers office which made cheap loans available to workers. This policy was 'fringed' with the 'yeoman' ideal, the vision of the urban worker settled with 'ten acres and a cow'. In 1923 State advances increased the maximum loan available under this scheme from £450 to £1250. The income limit for applicants was raised from £200 to £300, with an increase of £25 for each child. Rogerson, pp.37-38. In the period from 1.8.23 to 31.8.24 the State Advances Board received 4,496 applications for loans and granted 1,944. Rogerson, 'Cosy Homes Multiply', Table V, between pages 38-39. The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act of 1915 assisted men to buy or build in urban and suburban areas, and up to 31 March 1923 11, 363 loans were approved under this scheme. p.35.

[46] Rogerson, 'Cosy Homes Multiply', p.35.

[47] In the suburb of Mt Albert in Auckland the number of rented homes almost doubled from 1926 to 1936, while the number of homes under mortgage halved. This was largely due to houses being repossessed by mortgagors. Rogerson, 'Cosy Homes Multiply', p.179.

[48] ibid, p.153.

> in New Zealand. As soon as a young man or a young woman left school they would take shares out at two shillings a week. It meant by the time the young man was ready to marry he had a deposit for his house. You knew where you were going.[49]

The first Labour Government developed a housing policy that would ensure that the working people of New Zealand could share in the improvement of living standards.[50] The three bedroomed state house with its modern kitchen, typified the ideal of the nuclear family. An element of social control motivated this desire to improve housing standards.

The desire to build a better world after the war, and growing consumerism, contributed to increased expectations about family life and home comforts. Returning soldiers wanted peace and comfort as repayment for their ordeal. The violent male virtues of battle were to give way to the gentler ones of fatherhood and husband. Men as well as women looked to the family as a solace and a refuge. Jock Phillips identified the rise of the family man as an important feature of the interwar period. Fatherhood became valued for the first time. 'During the subsequent two decades of peace the sanctity of the family became the most precious of all national principles. The ideal family was conceived to be a bourgeois family, a family of hearth and home, a private largely nuclear family sentimental in tone and ruled in maternal love by a non-earning woman.'[51] This celebration occurred as consumer appliances emerged, and the development of consumerism provides a pervasive background to family life in the interwar years. Advertising, especially in the new women's magazines, stressed domesticity, while suggesting that labour-saving appliances were essential for the new style of home.[52] Labour-saving devices had a limited impact in the interwar period though numbers and types of domestic appliances increased steadily in the 1930s and 1940s.[53] Country areas often received electricity far later than urban areas so electrical appliances affected rural women later. Some historians have suggested that consumer appliances did not necessarily make women's lives easier, and may have decreased the importance of women's work in the household. (See chapter IV.)[54]

Government policies and increasing prosperity encouraged greater numbers of New Zealanders to adopt family life during the interwar period, but tells us little about the actual experience of families. Before examining the interview material it is worth delving into images of the family in the culture of the time. Popular culture sometimes reflected the official ideology of happy families, but more subversive works presented different images. Films, popular books and magazines followed official lines. They depicted glowing images of romance and family life. Films became a major form of mass entertainment, and Hollywood dominated the picture industry by this period.[55] Hollywood's glamorous film stars romanticised human relationships; given the popularity of such films, these images of love must have influenced men and women's expectations. A New Zealand writer, Ruth Park, described how her cousin Helga lived for the world of the movies, 'A world of icons, they dominated her life'.[56] Yet the most evocative images of sexual love and family relationships in New Zealand are not happy ones. Phillips identifies a strong misogynist streak in New Zealand culture of the time, one that found expression in popular jokes and in the literature of the period.

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[49] Joan Wicks, 23.3.95, p.21. Joan, one of two children, was born in Invercargill in 1914. Her father owned Wicks Drapry Store, which was a substantial business.

[50] Reports to the housing corporation in 1949 showed that a number of New Zealand families still lived in substandard accommodation. E2 1950/ 25b Child Welfare and Needy Families 1942-50.

[51] J.Phillips, *A Man's Country,* p.221.

[52] Davidoff, *Worlds Between,* p.65.

[53] J.O'Donnell, ''Electric Servants' and the Science of Housework: Changing Patterns of Domestic Work, 1935-1956,' in B.Brookes, C.Macdonald & M.Tennant (eds.), *Women in History 2,* Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992, p.172.

[54] Elizabeth Roberts argues that by the 1940s and 1950s the growth of consumer appliances meant that this role became less satisfying and women lost much of the respect that their position had previously entailed. E. Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History 1940-1970,* Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, passim.

The 'family man' became a central image of masculinity in this period, but it was an image with blurred edges. Society's expectations of men were difficult to resolve. The supportive husband and tender father, and the tough rugby-playing pioneer, represent almost irreconcilable images. Though historical change made the former dominant, men were supposed to represent both aspects of manhood. This contradiction existed because people believed that motherhood was natural whereas men had to be prompted into fatherhood. Men played two parts, one public and one private, while women were supposed to perform only one. The most consistent images of fatherhood stressed the idea that the father was essentially part-time, there to provide fun and treats for the children, not to take part in their everyday care.[57]

Literature gives the most damning picture of New Zealand family life, and provides a counterpoint to official images of happy families. Sam Neil has dubbed New Zealand's film industry as a 'cinema of unease', a description that could well be applied to New Zealand writing. Most good New Zealand writers were outsiders, dissatisfied and unhappy, and their work reflects this bias. The mirror they held up to society refracted images back darkly. Autobiographers such as Robin Hyde, Mary Findlay, John A. Lee and Janet Frame depict New Zealand as a harsh and narrow society. Fictional writing is hardly more cheerful. *Man Alone* and *Allen Adair* celebrate New Zealand manhood, but express dissatisfaction with relationships between men and women. Relationships between men are celebrated as fundamentally honest, whereas relationships with woman complicate and sully the purity of the male world. Peter Alcock suggests a fundamental lack of communication between men and women emerges in New Zealand literature. Mateship, or the relationships between parent and child are represented as more emotionally satisfying. He sees a sterility in sexual relationships in the way that 'parental roles are dominant in the home not only towards offspring, but between the parents themselves'. Alcock refers here to the common practice of husband and wife calling each other 'Mother' and 'Father' rather than referring to each other by their Christian names.[58] Individual identity and sexuality is submerged in the generic role of parenthood. A similar sense of dissatisfaction emerges in writings about childhood, leading Alcock to the rather depressing conclusion 'that something rather badly is amiss, there is fundamental human deprivation, in the traditional New Zealand family pattern'. He saw these childhoods as being characterised by an 'underlying and powerful frustration, loneliness, and lack of love' and providing 'a reservoir for bitterness and hatred which provides the sour discordant groundtone recorded in New Zealand fiction'.[59]

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[55] Phillips, *A Man's Country*, pp. 228-230.

[56] Ruth Park, *A Fence Around the Cuckoo*, Penguin, Auckland, 1992, p.143.

[57] Phillips, *A Man's Country*, pp.234-237.

Writers may give a grim picture of family life in New Zealand but autobiographies and fiction by British writers hardly suggest a more positive picture there. Orwell, Lawrence, Woolf and Eliot all depicted their society as repressed, unhappy and essentially dysfunctional. It would be wrong to suggest that New Zealand writers were unique in finding family relationships dissatisfying, or in being alienated from society. Perhaps New Zealand writers suffered more because of New Zealand's small population, which reinforced certain aspects of British culture, emphasising conformity without the hope of escape. Writers tended to be outsiders, rejected by, and reflecting on, their communities. It is difficult to determine whether others shared their dissatisfaction, but their writings provide a contrast to the prevailing ideology of the family. The interviews in this study do not support this overwhelmingly depressing picture of family life but they are not uniformly optimistic either.

Families faced financial struggles, uncertainty, and dissatisfaction, despite the popular celebration of family life, and legislative efforts to improve family circumstances. Schooling kept children's labour unavailable to parents, adding an extra strain to poor families. Inability to control family size added extra financial and emotional stress. Society became obsessed in the 1920s with the fear of increasing immorality among the young. Both women's organisations and the government blamed women for sexual misdemeanours.[60] Phillips argues that the prevalence of extra-marital conceptions (about 20 per cent of first births) meant that a number of marriages were enforced and unwilling affairs 'reinforcing men's sense of being trapped'.[61] Between 13 and 18 per cent. of marriages in the interwar period were 'shotgun affairs', although extra-marital conceptions in New Zealand followed a steady downward pattern after a high point in 1931. His argument depends on two factors: whether couples were willing to marry in the first place, and their attitude towards parenthood. Not all such marriages can have been enforced and unwilling. Some people may have shared the opinion of a Littledene farmer who 'rationalised his own conduct by saying that "a man has a right to know whether he is going to have a family to help him out on the farm before tying himself up"'.[62] This attitude to fertility had roots in a rural past in Britain. John Gillis, a British social historian noted a high incidence of pre-marital pregnancy in the nineteenth century, which followed a similar downward trend to New Zealand, in the early twentieth century.[63]

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[58] P.Alcock, 'Eros Marooned', in Stewart Houston (ed.), *Marriage and the Family in New Zealand*, p. 261.

[59] ibid, p.257.

[60] S.Griffiths, 'Feminism and the ideology of motherhood in New Zealand. 1896-1930,' MA Thesis in History, University of Otago, 1984, p.69.

[61] Phillips, *A Man's Country*, p. 240.

Sexual satisfaction in marriage faced many obstacles. Inadequate knowledge of contraception meant that parenthood followed soon after marriage. In 1923 almost 50 per cent of first births occurred within one year of marriage, 77 per cent within 2 years, while a fifth of first births were conceived out of wedlock. In nineteen families in this study the first birth occurred within a year of marriage, whereas only ten had an interval of two years or more between marriage and first birth. Miriam Vosburgh suggests in a survey of those married in 1927-37 that 64 per cent used no contraceptives before the first birth and 54 per cent used no contraceptives after the last birth. Sexual restraint was often seen as the only remedy, but may have placed a barrier between men and women.[64] A double standard existed in relation to sexuality; men were supposed to be active and passionate, women passive and accepting but chaste. Society believed that men were incapable of controlling their sexuality, so women faced the burden of controlling and regulating sexual relations.[65] Society reviled women who transgressed against this narrow definition of sexuality, often labelling the unfortunate sinner as 'feebleminded'.[66] Guilt and the fear of conception hindered the enjoyment of sexuality. Parenthood could involve financial and emotional stress, though it also gave parents considerable satisfaction.

These images give a gloomy picture of family relationships, but whether marriage caused disillusionment or satisfaction really depended on people's expectations. There is a danger in applying a late twentieth century perspective onto earlier periods. Jane Lewis suggests that working class people did not expect either romantic love or sexual intimacy from marriage.[67] This aspect of marriage will be explored in greater detail in later chapters. Certainly organisations such as the Society for Protection of Women and Children[68] show that women and children faced mental and physical violence.[69] Women's letters to the *NZWW* show some evidence of dissatisfaction, but their financial vulnerability meant they had more to lose by the break-up of a marriage. Petitions for divorce increased by 47 per cent during the interwar period, but total numbers remained small: from 785 in 1928 to 1,154 in 1937.[70]

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[62] This is a very pre-capitalist attitude towards fertility. H. C. D. Somerset, *Littledene A New Zealand Rural Community*, N.Z.C.E.R, Whitcombe & Tombs, N.Z., 1938, p.59.

[63] Pre-bridal pregnancy dropped to 16% of all births just after World War II. It seems probable that traditionally some sexual contact between engaged couples would have been condoned. J. R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse British Marriages, 1600 to the Present*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1985, p.277.

[64] Phillips, *A Man's Country*, p.240.

[65] Robertson, 'Production not Reproduction', p.27.

[66] ibid

[67] Lewis, 'Models of equality for women', in Bock, *Maternity and Gender Policies*, p. 78.

[68] The Society was established in 1893 in New Zealand. Its objectives were 'to institute proceedings in cases of cruelty, seduction, outrage or excessive violence to women and children; to give advice and aid to women who had been cruelly beaten; to provide neglected children with homes; to agitate for improvement in the law in respect to protection of women and children.' There is evidence of a strong desire for social control, however. to impose middle class morality and attitudes on working class families. J. Green, 'The Society for the Protection of

Evidence from this study suggests that the Depression affected family live adversely. I dispute Phillip's statement that the Depression may have reinforced the home-centred life of the interwar years. His evidence seems largely to rest on Somerset's suggestion in *Littledene* that the 'depression has tended to consolidate home life and much less time is spent at the Workingmen's Club, the cinema and social evenings'.[71] He supports his argument by stating that lack of money prompted the father to stay at home rather than pay for outside entertainment. Women benefited because they could make a greater contribution to the household by recycling clothing, sewing and providing more of the family's needs at home.[72] This information seems to imply the opposite. Making do could put an immense extra strain on women already loaded with household work. The evidence in this study shows that financial pressures caused more strain and unhappiness in family life. Men may have stayed at home more but that hardly implies greater satisfaction with family life. The close conjugal home was not necessarily one of harmony; driving the family in on itself could sometimes be destructive. Poverty placed family life under greater stress. Figures from the Society for the Protection of Women and Children reinforce this view since cases of destitute wives, cruelty and drunkenness increased during the depression. Although the SPWC had been concerned with social control as well as assistance, the organisation became less pejorative during the Depression, after members were faced with scenes of real desperation.[73] Family ties weakened, then strengthened again as the economic situation improved.[74] Some people did have fond memories of the Depression, so perhaps the extent of financial pressure may have been a determining factor. One rural interviewee described the Depression as being wonderful because she gained useful skills as a result of learning to 'make do'. However her definition of hardship included not being able to persuade her father to buy a second car for

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Women and Children: Dunedin Branch 1914-1945,' BA Hons Dissertation, University of Otago, 1982, p.1.

[69] No one interviewed for this study (in New Zealand) recalled - or would admit to - their mothers being beaten by their fathers but some thought their mothers were the recipients of mental cruelty. Madeline Smith in England recalled her stepmother being beaten by her step father, and was beaten herself. Children themselves were often harshly disciplined, in ways that would be termed child abuse today. Fathers were identified as the main culprits and some children were afraid of them. Where this occurred the children identified very strongly with their mothers.

[70] *NOZYB*, 1939, p.104.

[71] Somerset, *Littledene*, p.22.

[72] Phillips, *A Man's Country*, p.227.

[73] Green, 'The Society for the Protection of Women and Children', p.47.

[74] Green comments that at one point the Society suggested that home life improved because of the depression. Their overall figures do not see to support this view. Green, 'The Society for the Protection of Women and Children', p.58.

the children to use.[75]

By the 1920s the masculinist family, with its strict gender roles, had been firmly established as the official model of family life. Evidence supports the supposition that it was largely the urban middle class - the group who could most afford to - who assimilated modem ideas of family life. They incorporated notions of lives centred on the family, romance between partners, scientific care of children, and above all children who played and learnt rather than worked. A combination of factors made this possible: exposure to ideas, more comfortable homes, and most importantly incomes that made the ideal of the male breadwinner achievable in comfort. These ideas pervaded society until they became part of the definition of respectability, and it can be argued that respectability was one of the most dominant forces in New Zealand life. Divisions emerged in society as a result of this ideology. Government policies and popular culture stressed the importance of family life but families found the ideal hard to obtain. The families in this study reflect both the ideals and some of the tensions evident in achieving an ideal family life. Real people were faced with the problem of reconciling ideals of masculinity, femininity, and family life within their day to day existence. Official ideology denied the existence of such conflicts. As Karl Ittman states in his study of gender and the family in Victorian England:

> Conflicts between work and home, between the needs of children and the limits of parents and between men and women over resources and sexual power all existed in the Victorian family. These issues appear only tangentially in the discourse on the family, for the dominant ideology of separate spheres displaced these concerns and reduced them to adjuncts of the larger question of the moral fitness of parents and children. Yet these issues were crucial to working-class families as they struggled to meet the needs of home and work.[76]

Parents who adopted narrowly defined ideals of family life faced an extra burden if they lacked the resources to implement it properly. The Rylance family experienced the strain of respectability after being deserted by their father. Mrs Rylance responded, perhaps predictably, by isolating herself rather than appear needy. Her desire for respectability and pride at all costs blighted the lives of her children. Irene explained her mother believed 'everyone was talking about her - because they used to call them, a deserted wife was the name - and they always, I seem to remember Mum telling me they always blamed the woman if her husband leaves and she felt that too.' She never had any friends to play at their house because her mother 'did not like to let anybody know how jolly hard up we were'.[77]

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[75] Anna Chapman (Hayes). Parents married in 1910, Anna, the middle child of three, was born on 5 September 1915. Lived on dairy farm in the North Island till 1922, then North Otago (South Island). Father had mixed farm of 1200 acres.

[76] K. Ittman, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England*, New York University Press, New York, 1995, p.142.

[77] Interview with Irene Rylance, taped 17.7.96, pp. 2-6. Parents married 1917. Irene was the eldest of four and

The ideology of separate spheres became established in towns, yet for much of the period officialdom defined the urban, rather than the rural family as problematic. By the twentieth century the education department recognised that rural schools had distinctive needs and to some extent accommodated these. Many rural schools acknowledged the need for child labour by closing at harvest time, but gradually throughout the interwar period an unease developed about the prevalence of women's and children's labour on farms. Even if families in rural areas followed different patterns, they would be judged by this model and found wanting. A report on rural school children argued that overworking of mothers led to 'domestic inefficiency', the most destructive criticism that could be levelled against a housewife.[78] Yet for most of the period official concern focused on urban families

Urban living, many argued, put children's health and morality at extreme risk. Occasionally popular concern surfaced over rural children's health but few held fears that these children suffered from moral degeneration.[79] Authorities viewed the 'larrikin', and later the juvenile delinquent, primarily as urban phenomena. Cities were 'a bacterial culture that contaminated the nuclear family institution'.[80] People feared that city slums would lead to children of different sexes sleeping together, and cause an increase in immorality.[81] Modernisation and urbanisation produced a sense of anxiety in society. This sense of crisis prompted first the Liberal government and then later governments to enact legislation that would reinforce the family, and therefore strengthen New Zealand society.[82] Bureaucratic institutions proliferated from the 1890s onwards,[83] and the Health Department and the Education Department became interested in children. Private organisations also multiplied, many of them looking to the government for financial support. The fear of the delinquent or unhealthy urban child lurked behind many initiatives directed at children in the interwar period. Some institutions already existed, but such fears contributed to their success in this period. Scouts, Guides, Boys Brigade, sport in schools, open air schools, health camps, and organisations like the Sunlight League, are all different manifestations of this concern.

Initiatives in child health and welfare usually focused on urban children for two reasons. Firstly, as already discussed, authorities believed urban children to be at greater risk, and secondly, they were simply more accessible to authority. Therefore urban families came

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was born in 30 May 1918, Dunedin. Father had various jobs: as a clerk for the harbour board; he worked in Smiths paint works, which was owned by his parents; then as a labourer on the Waipori falls electricity project. He deserted the family circa 1929, and they relied on charitable aid.

[78] 'Rural Children', Evening Post, Wellington, 23 May 1930. In H35/8911 35/78.

[79] Inquiries into rural children revealed that they faced some health problems. The media reported extensively on a report on rural school children. See 'Report on Rural School Children', School Medical Inspection, H 35/8911 35/78.

[80] M. Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier: An Approach to New Zealand Social History, 1870-1940, *NZJH*, Vol. 9, No. 1, April 1975, p.5.

[81] ibid

[82] P.Meuli, 'Occupational change and bourgeois proliferation', MA Thesis (History), Victoria University of Wellington, 1977, p. 70.

[83] Meuli, 'Occupational change and bourgeois proliferation', p.70.

under greater scrutiny from authority, in the form of truant officers, doctors and Plunket nurses. Officials and concerned citizens regarded all children as a source of anxiety but directed their attention most often at the urban child. Urbanisation resulted in the urban family losing many of its traditional functions. Specialised institutions began to take over responsibility for leisure, education and welfare.[84] The myth of the healthy rural lifestyle meant that rural children were regarded as physically and morally superior.[85] Governmental neglect of rural children diminished in the interwar years. The Country Women's Institute and the Women's Division of Federated Farmers lobbied for change because they wanted rural women and children to enjoy the benefits of urban living.[86]

Concerned authorities, such as Professor James Shelley, believed that urban youth could be redeemed through the introduction of Ruralism into an urban setting.[87] He argued vehemently about the detrimental effects of the urban environment:

> I want to speak a little more of the town as an environment. I do not think you realise how destructive it is. The child's ideas have got to be continually stimulated in regard to some institution which is basic in our existence. What is the life of the child in town when he walks through the streets – he goes to the picture house at night–and the picture house again jerks up his emotions and ideas . . . No child is properly educated who has not had the care of some living thing–it may be a pet rabbit or a bird–if he has to care for a living thing and the country provides the opportunity of doing this–he realises something of the instinct of motherhood and parenthood . . . He should not be educated in the town, so that when he grows up he has so little direct touch with the land that he does no[t] want to go back to it, even at the present time. Give them plenty of space, give them a big sheep run . . .[88]

Although salvation on such terms posed certain practical difficulties, these ideas proved remarkably influential, if in modified forms. Shelley, as Professor of Education at Canterbury, trained a generation of educationalists, and many of his disciples became influential in the civil service.[89] The Labour party later repaid him for his support (and acknowledged his undoubted brilliance and enthusiasm) by appointing him as the first director of Radio New Zealand. It is difficult to assess his influence on the Labour party, but Labour certainly believed families would benefit from a rural environment. Harry Holland, leader in the 1920s, argued that 'the inner-city under-privileged would be regenerated in the environment of the garden city or garden suburb'.[90] Ruralism influenced education and housing policies.[91] In 1936, Labour's leader in the Legislative Council commented that 'it is contrary to the best interests of family life that three and four families should live in one house, because living under such circumstances there cannot be that parental control that is desirable and possible when a family occupies its own home.'[92] Labour ensured that the first state houses would be single unit dwellings on individual sections. John A.Lee, the Labour Director of Housing, believed that state houses should also be surrounded by open space and have ample recreational facilities.[93] Sir Arthur Tyndall, former director of the Housing Department, recalled Prime Minister Peter Fraser's dismayed reaction when shown a multi-unit block in Lower Hutt. 'When I told him it was the first he muttered rather acidly "and I hope it will be the last!"'[94]

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[84] ibid, p.76.

[85] An interesting issue in the young persons page of the *New Zealand Farmer* in 1919 asked readers for opinions about whether country children 'were as well reared and nourished to maturity as are the children of the cities?' The general consensus, perhaps unquestioned assumption, was that rural life was healthier though some anxiety over the excessive work of children in the country emerged. 'Our Round Table', *The New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, August 1 1919, p.1112.

[86] Day, 'The Politics of Knitting', p.31.

[87] Parallels emerged in Britain through the work of activists such as Margaret MacMillan. Her open air, child in garden campaigns, undoubtedly influenced New Zealand developments; the flow of ideas from Britain being disseminated by figures like James Shelley (see introduction).

[88] 'Compulsory Education for Parents. Professor Shelley on "Environment"', *National Education,* August 1, 1923, no. 50, p.265.

[89] Dr C.E.Beeby was one of the most notable and distinguished of these disciples. Peter Fraser, the education minister, appointed him Assistant Director of Education in 1938. 'This was a radical move as Fraser went over the heads of Department regulars and appointed Beeby Assistant Director of Education with the right of succession to the Directorate'. R. Goodyear, ''The individual child' A study of the development of social

Rogerson disputes the extent of Ruralism in suburban development in New Zealand, arguing that 'unfortunately for the convenient generalisation, the suburb of the twenties- the speculator's suburb- embodied the *ad-hoc* decisions of section salesmen and the state, rather than the theory.[95] However I would argue that basic assumptions about ideal living in New Zealand were so firmly ingrained in people's minds that speculators thought along certain lines, and built low-density suburbs rather than high-rise high-density housing. One gets rich by fulfilling dreams rather than by trying to work against a society's ideals. It is interesting to note that the wealthier urban families (who could exercise most choice about where to live) in this study, the Vales, the Johnsons, and the Gales chose to live in the semi-rural outskirts of Christchurch.[96] The Andersons and the Maudsleys lived in the centre of the city (Christchurch and Wellington respectively) but had access to that other great New Zealand institution, the bach (or crib).[97] Some English interviewees had a similar desire for rural living. The Sullys,

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services in education in relation to the first Labour Government's educational policy.' B.A. Honours dissertation, University of Otago, Dunedin, 1987, p.7.

[90] Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier', p.17.

[91] The Reform government under William Ferguson Massey introduced the Housing Act in 1919 in an attempt to alleviate the housing shortage after the war. The Act contained provisions for garden city ideas but these were never implemented. Little was done, and after the housing division (of the Department of Labour) was absorbed by the Advances to Settlers office in 1923, only two houses were built or purchased by the government. Rogerson, 'Cosy Homes Multiply', pp.30-34.

[92] Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier', pp.17-18.

[93] E.Olssen, *John A. Lee,* University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1977, p.98.

[94] Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier', p.18.

[95] Rogerson, 'Cosy Homes Multiply,' p.12.

[96] The Vales had a ten acre block, the Johnsons and the Gales lived respectively in Sumner and Mt Pleasant, both which were surrounded by farm land.

[97] The Andersons had a 'hut' at the mouth of the Rakaia River, and the Maudsleys a bach by the beach. At one point during the depression they hired out their house in town and lived at the bach, a reasonably substantial

a prosperous English middle class family, lived in a small village while Mr Sully commuted to London to work.

The rural/urban dichotomy shaped much of New Zealand's social policy, particularly towards children and families. Rousseau's argument that children should be brought up in a natural environment undoubtedly had an influence, but the uneasy relationship between rural and urban society in new Zealand had a much more fundamental basis. Concern over increasing urbanisation occurred because of the pervasive Ruralism in the settler's psyche, a Ruralism that stemmed from England. Table One shows that although originally intended as a rural paradise, an 'Arcadia', New Zealand had become an increasingly urbanised society by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the end of the First World War Government statistics defined almost half the population as urban, a proportion that steadily increased in the interwar period. By 1926, over one-third of the non-Maori population (38.5 per cent) were living in one of the four principal urban areas, with over one-half (51.6 per cent) in these and ten secondary urban areas.[98] The agricultural workforce shrank. The proportion of the population involved in primary industry diminished to 30 per cent by 1926, whereas the tertiary sector had grown to 45 per cent.[99] The New Zealand economy still relied on the sheep's back and the cow's udder but fewer New Zealanders worked on the land. This raised the contentious issue that towns were parasites relying on the country for sustenance.[100] Urban living became a salient feature of the interwar period, since even at the turn of the century only one New Zealander in ten lived in a city with a population of 25,000 or more.[101] This contrasts with England and Wales where only 20.6 per cent of the population were rural in 1920, although it almost exactly mirrors the proportion in the United States.[102] The shift towards urbanisation had unexpected consequences for families and children. In New Zealand and England, fears of the detrimental effects of urbanisation focused attention on children, especially in urban families.[103]

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[98] *NZOYB*, 1929, p.97.

[99] Meuli, 'Occupational Change and Bourgeois Proliferation'.

[100] Day, 'The Politics of Knitting,' p.45.

[101] Houston, 'The New Zealand family: Its Antecedents and origins', in Houston (ed.), *Marriage and the Family in New Zealand*, p.32.

[102] *NZOYB*, 1929, p.99.

[103] Concerns were fuelled by dire health statistics about recruits in the First World War. Authorities believed that intervention in childhood might correct such problems. Many forums debated these issues, one of the most influential being *The New Zealand Medical Journal*. The following quotes reveal some typical attitudes to the dangers of urbanisation. An editorial written in 1920 talks about the value of medical inspection in schools and states 'Now that we have such knowledge of New Zealand's manhood of from 20 to 45 years of age, what sort of nation may we expect to have in forty years' time, with overcrowding and the various causes of physical degeneration?' Overcrowding, of course is an urban phenomenon. 'Editorial', *NZMJ*, Wellington, December, 1920, XIX, no 94, p.245.

Table 1: Urbanisation in New Zealand

Year	Urban pop.	Rural Pop.	Migratory pop.	Urban pop. per cent
Excluding Maoris				
1881	194, 981	292, 036	2, 916	39.80
1886	245, 612	328, 144	4, 726	42,46
1891	270, 343	352, 991	3, 305	43.14
1896	307, 294	392, 678	3, 381	43.69
1901	350, 202	418, 746	3, 763	45.32
1906	424, 614	459, 492	4, 467	47.79
1911	505, 398	497, 858	5, 008	50.13
1916*	585, 306	501, 956	3, 463	53.66
1921	681, 988	531, 694	5, 231	55.95
1926	785, 040	552, 344	7, 085	58.39
1936	884, 293	602, 519	4, 672	59.29
Including Maoris				
1926	790, 555	610, 446	7, 138	56.14
1936	892, 024	677, 087	4, 699	56.68

* Figures exclude military and internment camps

Source: *Official New Zealand Yearbook*, 1939, p.68.[104]

The rural-urban distinction is somewhat problematic in a country like New Zealand where towns could be almost rural in character. The New Zealand environment contrasted with the British. While England and Wales had a population of 649 per square mile (1926 figures) New Zealand had only 14 people per square mile.[105] Admittedly some of New Zealand is uninhabitable, but even so the population density was far smaller, making the contrast between town and country less sharp. Some families moved between country and town, others lived on the outskirts of the town and experienced an almost rural lifestyle.[106] The rural quality of many New Zealand cities originated in the development of suburbanism overseas. In Britain a desire for country living in cities led to the creation of the suburb 'somewhere on the urban fringe, easily accessible and mildly wild, the goal of a "nature movement" led by teachers and preachers, bird-watchers, socialites, scout-leaders, city-planners and inarticulate commuters'.[107] These concerns influenced town planning in New

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[104] Note: The census definition of urban changed in this period: whereas in 1880 cities, boroughs, or town districts of over 1000 inhabitants were defined as urban, in 1921 'urban' meant people living in towns of over 2,500. Rogerson argues that if one uses the later definition, New Zealand only reached the 50% mark (of urbanisation) in 1926, rather than in 1911. E.W. Rogerson, 'Cosy Homes Multiply', pp.2-3.

[105] R.J.Ford, 'Some changes in occupational and geographical distribution of the populations in New Zealand - (1896-1926)', Thesis presented for MA and Honours in Economics, University of New Zealand, 1933, pp. 96-97.

[106] For example Jocelyn Vale lived on a ten acre property on the outskirts of Christchurch, and her parents had a small hobby farm. J.Vale (McIlroy) born 1919, father engineer, who owned Vale & Co., heating and ventilating firm.

[107] Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America*, quoted in Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, p. 64.

Zealand. Cities were planned to incorporate substantial green areas: Dunedin's ring of native bush, popularly known as the town belt, is a good example. In contrast to Britain, New Zealand towns sprawled out into collections of suburbs, linked at first by horse-drawn, then by electric trams. Surburban dwellers lived in peaceful pseudo-rural settings but relied on the city for their livelihood.[108] As a result home, work, and often leisure became increasingly separated.[109] Even though rural and urban formed a less sharp divide in New Zealand than elsewhere, a clear distinction existed between rural and urban families. Rural families took far longer to respond to changes in the ideology of the family.

Since New Zealanders believed so implicitly in rural, pioneering values, many feared that urbanisation would adversely affect the population. These fears originated in Britain. Despite being a highly urbanised society, the English believed in rural life as an ideal.[110] 'The English countryside was contrasted with the English town (especially the industrial town) and found not only to be aesthetically superior, but somehow sounder in social character and moral purpose, strength of physique, and English virtue. . . . Thus to be truly English by the beginning of the twentieth century was to be rural.'[111] These ideas were firmly transplanted to New Zealand, forming an integral part of the New Zealand image. In 1930, the Governor General, Lord Bledisloe, worried that urbanisation would damage New Zealand society. He believed that the 'foundations of the greatness of the British Race were laid in the homes and the countryside, so the future of the British Empire depended on the maintenance of home life'.[112] In contrast, twentieth century America glorified urban living, while downgrading the values of rural society. 'By the twenties, farmers were not commonly seen as anything special. Indeed, they were more likely to be seen as backward and retrograde elements in an increasingly sophisticated society'.[113]

This clash of ideas about the countryside gives an insight into the New Zealand psyche, perhaps revealing some of our innate conservatism and attachment to Britain. Ruralism persisted in Britain despite, or possibly because of, urbanisation.[114] To the British, an increasingly urbanised people, the countryside became infused with a sense of the past, representing ancient glory and traditional virtues. The United States had a more ambivalent relationship with nature. Nature had a different meaning in a new and expanding country. The American West was far wilder, vaster, and more threatening than England's neat hedgerows and ancient fields. Nature represented insecurity, rather than stability. Frederick Jackson Turner argued in 1893 that the frontier myth decisively shaped American society.[115] 'Free land' to be explored represented opportunity and democracy. Yet Americans also greatly valued progress and civilisation since they were trying to create a new society in a new land. The West personified freedom but also primitive and undeveloped nature. 'The capital difficulty of the American agrarian tradition is that it accepted the paired and contradictory ideas of nature and civilisation as a general principle of historical and social interpretation.'[116] This innate contradiction led to the eventual triumph of urban values in American society. The cities represented civilisation and advancement. In contrast with Britain, America looked to the future, and the city represented that future. Skyscrapers, roads, and bridges shrieked progress and advancement. Strangely enough, New Zealand, also a country of immigrants, followed British rather than American attitudes. Frontier and pioneering myths reinforced rather than undermined Ruralism. Immigrants had come to New Zealand hoping to replicate the rural ideal. Successive governments agreed about the importance of the countryside and even the largely urban Labour party devoted considerable thought to rural areas.[117] In this, as in other ways, Britain and British ideology shaped New Zealand society.

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[108] D. Pearson, 'Johnsonville: Continuity and Change in a New Zealand Township,' Department of Sociology Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1980, p. 55.

[109] ibid, p.24.

[110] Raymond Williams traces the pastoral ideal in literature back to nine centuries before Christ, persuasively arguing that pastoral images have remained important in Western societies (but particularly in England) up till (and including) modern times. R.Williams, *The Country and the City*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1973.

[111] B. Short, 'Introduction', in Short (ed.), *Images and Realities in the English Rural Community*, p.2.

[112] D. Day, 'The Politics of Knitting', p.44. Charles Bathurst, 1st Baron Bledisloe, P.C., G.C.M.G., K.B.E. (created first Viscount, 1935) (1867-1958), Governor General from 19.3.1930-15.3.1935, J.O.Wilson, *New Zealand Parliamentary Record, 1840-1984*, Government Printer, Wellington, 1985, p.45.

[113] David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*, The John Hopkins Memorial Press, Baltimore & London, 1995, p.197.

[114] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.2. Britain underwent rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, followed by other European nations and the United States. Twentieth century literature remained pessimistic about urban living. Many great interwar writers, Eliot, Orwell and Lawrence, wrote about the sterility, loneliness and separation from nature that urbanisation represented. The city personified the wasteland of modern life. Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.239.

By the interwar period an ideal family structure had been established in both New Zealand and England. Families should consist of a male breadwinner, a thrifty and moral housewife, and their children. The family should not be too small, for that exposed moral selfishness among parents, but too large a family signified improvidence and a lack of self-control. The children should attend school, engage in wholesome and happy pursuits, and grow up to become good citizens. While this family should live in a rural setting, it would be acceptable for them to live in their own house in a pleasant semi-rural suburb. The fulfilment of this ideal would result in such perfect happiness that the sufferings of war, the pressures of change and economic instability would be nullified. Such promises helped to encourage matrimony, but, as this chapter has made clear, people found perfect happiness harder to achieve. Divisions occurred within families as well as within society. New Zealand, as a rapidly urbanising society, underwent a development that conflicted with the rural ideology central to the national self-image. Anxiety about urbanisation combined with the after effects of war to promote government intervention into family life and social change. The popularity of scientific child-rearing, the emphasis on sunshine and fresh air, the regulation of child labour, and the popularity of eugenics are all manifestations of this basic concern. These themes will be further developed in the following chapters because they influenced the lives of the families in this study.

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[115] Turner read 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' before the American Historical Association in Chicago in 1893. His 'frontier hypothesis' revolutionised 'American historiography and eventually made itself felt in economics and sociology, in literary criticism, and even in politics'. H. N. Smith, *Virgin Land The American West as Symbol and Myth*, Vintage Books, New York, 1950, p. 291.

[116] Smith, *Virgin Land The American West as Symbol and Myth*, p.305.

[117] The Labour Party thought that country areas should have equal access to education and facilities.

Chapter II

'The Rights of the Child': Education, health and children, 1919-1939

> By the present declaration of the rights of the child, men and women of all nations, recognising that mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give, declare and accept it as their duty that, beyond and above all considerations of race, nationality or creed:—
>
> 1) The child should be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually.
>
> 2) The child that is hungry should be fed; the child that is sick should be nursed; the child that is backward should be helped; the erring child should be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif should be sheltered and succoured.
>
> 3) The child should be the first to receive relief in times of distress.
>
> 4) The child should be put in a position to earn a livelihood and should be protected against every form of exploitation.
>
> 5) The child should be brought up in consciousness that its talents are to be used in the service of its fellow men.——
>
> Declaration of Geneva.[1]

The Declaration of Geneva in the 1920s defined childhood as a state that encompassed 'race, nationality or creed', and unequivocally stated that children had rights as individuals and were not merely their parents' chattels. The declaration's makers stressed that all people had a duty towards all children, thus removing childhood from the private to the public world. They believed children were entitled to a happy and carefree childhood, free from exploitation, and with the opportunity to develop their talents. It stands as a defining statement of modern attitudes to children, recognising the transformation in attitudes to children that had occurred over the last 100 years. The declaration established guidelines for state regulation of children and their families. Governments might fail to enforce these aims, but some recognition of these rights lay behind the relationship between child and state in the pre-war and interwar years. In New Zealand the public education system carried out the official commitment to protect and nurture the nation's children. Developments in education that began in the early 1900s accelerated in the interwar years, extending official jurisdiction beyond education. Politicians, educationalists, and doctors made the child's health and welfare a matter of national concern.

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[1] 'Notes of the Month', *National Education The Official Journal of the New Zealand Educational Institute,* Vol. VII, No. 75, 2 November 1925, title page.

Chapter II: 'The rights of the child'

The shift in attitudes to children is apparent in the expansion of New Zealand education in the first forty years of the century. A number of studies have explored the development of the school curriculum, but official efforts to improve children's health reveal vividly the concern with the child as social capital. The chapter will explore how the education system attempted to improve children's physical and mental health. The relationship between theory and practice emerges though examining official initiatives to interpret childhood ideologies and translate them into practical measures. During the interwar years the scope of services aimed at children expanded rapidly. The government established a school medical service in 1912 but the service expanded after the war and was joined by a school dental service, as well as a nascent psychological and guidance service. Philosophical ideas and medical fears about children's health inspired a transformation in classroom design. An interwar obsession with sunshine and fresh air combined with a belief in the rural ideal, to produce the open air classroom. The contemporary mind viewed the child's moral and physical welfare as inextricably linked together. These developments depended upon the transformation in attitudes to children stated so clearly in the opening quotation.

Earlier educational historians discussed the developments in children's schooling and welfare in a celebratory fashion[2] but later writers such as Roger Openshaw and Roy Shuker have been more critical. In 1980 Shuker challenged the New Zealand myth that the development of state schooling led to the gradual dominance of the principle of equal opportunity in education. He suggested that 'schools instead of promoting equality, have essentially served to reproduce existing social and economic divisions within society'.[3] Openshaw observes that histories have concentrated on the development of an educational bureaucracy, underplaying 'both tensions among policy makers and consumer resistance to 'official' education policy'.[4] It is not within the scope of the thesis to further this debate, merely to acknowledge its existence, since the purpose of this chapter is to discuss official attitudes toward children in the education system. A major part of this thesis, does however, concentrate on the latter point raised by Openshaw, the need to examine consumer resistance to 'official' policy. The thesis examines the relationship between official attitudes towards children and the experience of actual families.

Recent studies by educational historians have shown that education policy did not develop in an inevitable and progressively liberal fashion. The education system became a centre for debate, and interest groups lobbied fiercely to gain some control over the educational process. For example the Bible in Schools debate raged in newspapers and the *Educational Gazette,* and *National Education* in the 1920s and 1930s. The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) opposed the introduction of religious instruction in schools,

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[2] Roger Openshaw, Greg Lee, Howard Lee, *Challenging the Myths Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History,* The Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1993, pp.10-13.

[3] Shuker, quoted in ibid, p.12.

[4] ibid, p.9.

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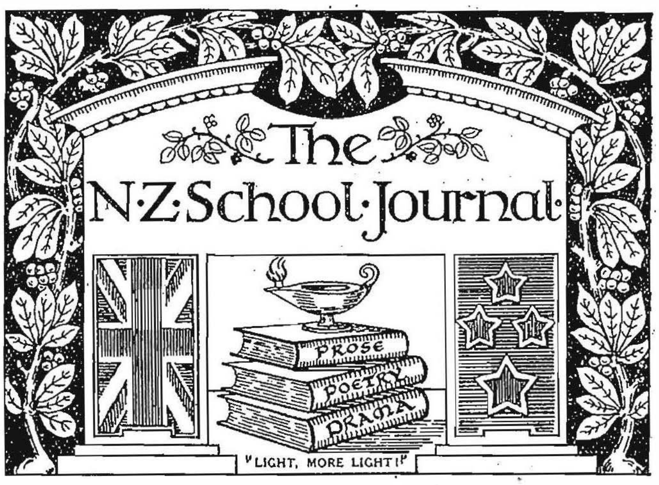

PART I.—FOR CLASSES I AND II.

Vol. XIII.—No. 1.] WELLINGTON. [March, 1919.

THE END OF THE GREAT WAR.

Peace Merry-making.

It was on Tuesday, the 12th November, that the news of peace came to New Zealand. I was on board a ship going from Wellington

'The End of the Great War', Source: *The NZ School Journal,* Vol. XIII.-No.1, March 1919, Wellington.
Popular propaganda presented the war as a positive triumph of Empire, ignoring the cost the war had exacted, on the nation and its people. The May 1919 Journal featured a poem, entitled: 'Children of the Empire'. 'Children of the Empire, your fathers fought and died / That you might stand, a noble band, in honour and in pride; That you might do the thing you will, and strike with arm of might/ For justice and for freedom's sake for country, King and right.