

SUGGESTIONS AND DEBATES

Unstitching the New Zealand State: Its Role in Domesticity and its Decline*

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SUMMARY: Studies of domesticity tend to take a simple view of the state's role. If the state made reforms, it was because some interest group forced it to do so. These studies risk a charge of functionalism by emphasizing that the state necessarily acted to further capitalist or patriarchal interests. In this paper I argue that the state's response to interests was neither as coherent nor as predictable as is suggested by these approaches. The state is a conflicting ensemble of institutions rather than a monolith. Various state agencies act independently, sometimes in conflicting ways, over domesticity. At the same time, overall, the state has relatively independent imperatives of its own too. Historically, domesticity has not been one of its high priorities. We can see that the New Zealand state undermined domesticity before second-wave feminism of the 1970s. But state powers are circumscribed by its democratic context. Just as there were limits to the state's willingness or ability to impose domesticity, so too were there limits to its power to legislate for equality.

AN ANTIPODEAN PARADOX?

Until recently, New Zealand historiography has emphasized the state's promotion of women's domesticity. There has been a consensus in seeing New Zealand both as a society dominated by the state, and a society dominated in the last hundred years by the ideal of female domesticity. Despite living in the first country in the world to grant women the vote, New Zealand women have been portrayed as being markedly domestic for most of the twentieth century.¹ For instance, John Gould argues that of all advanced capitalist countries, New Zealand has "kept its women the most rigidly

* I would like to thank Marcel van der Linden, the two anonymous *International Review of Social History* referees and Kim Sterelny for their comments on an earlier draft.

1. M. Gilson, "Women in Employment", in John Forster (ed.), *Social Process in New Zealand: Readings in Sociology* (Auckland, NZ, 1969), pp. 188–190. Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture and Power: Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture* (Auckland, NZ, 1989), p. 15.

bound to house and to children".² The "first wave" women's movement that succeeded in winning the vote in 1893 has been characterized as "domestic feminist".³ Indeed, New Zealand women's early suffrage has been attributed to their nonthreatening role within the colonial home and family as "help-meets" to men. Yet today both its Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are women, and neither are descendants of a male political dynasty.⁴ Similar women have become Governor General, mayor of the country's largest city, and the chief executive of the largest company. Indeed, a recent United Nations report, while observing that "no society treats its women as well as its men", concluded that New Zealand had one of the highest overall rankings of gender equality in the world.⁵ Income and economic participation were prominent aspects of this valuation. A historiographical paradox exists if this is true: how could a country whose women were so thoroughly domesticated at the turn of the century become a country whose women, relatively speaking, have done so well?

The historiography offers two suggestions. One idea is that the second wave of feminism was particularly marked in New Zealand. There were "mid-century rumblings" but the "second wave" of active feminism burst suddenly on New Zealand about 1970.⁶ One crucial aspect of women's domesticity was the relationship between marriage and employment. The state ensured married women's domesticity through its gendered wage-fixing policies. It instituted a male breadwinner wage in 1894 through an arbitration system which was not undermined until private sector equal pay legislation in 1972 and antidiscrimination legislation such as the Human Rights Commission Act 1977, and the Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act 1980. A second idea questions the extent of change even after the second wave. Perhaps the apparent escape from domesticity is a mirage. Gender inequality continued after the 1970s. Like most turning points, it was a turning point only of sorts. Married women still suffer disadvantage because the male breadwinner wage system survived equal pay legislation and even the dismantling of the arbitration system in 1991. Furthermore, some dismiss histories of change or progression because they are based upon educated, professional, *Pakeha* (European) women's experience. A history of Maori (indigenous New Zealanders) or working-class women's experience would show a different pic-

2. John Gould, *The Rake's Progress?: The New Zealand Economy Since 1945* (Auckland, NZ, 1982), p. 93.

3. Raewyn Dalziel, "The Colonial Helpmeet: Women's Role and the Vote in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", *New Zealand Journal of History (NZJH)*, 11 (1977), pp. 112–123.

4. Margaret Hayward, "Prime Minister for 2000: A Choice Between Two Very Different Women?", *Women Talking Politics: Newsletter of the Aotearoa/New Zealand Women and Politics Network*, New Series, 1 (1999) pp. 1–2.

5. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1997* (New York [etc.], 1997), pp. 39, 149–154.

6. Charlotte Macdonald (ed.), *The Vote, the Pill and the Demon Drink: A History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand, 1869–1993* (Wellington, NZ, 1993), p. 161.



Figure 1. Anna Brown, *A New Zealand Woman*, 2000. The United Nations' Human Development Report 1997, while observing that "no society treats its women as well as its men", concluded that New Zealand had one of the highest overall rankings in gender equality in the world. Income and economic participation were prominent aspects of this valuation. A historiographical paradox exists if this is true: how could a country whose women were so thoroughly domesticated at the turn of the century become a country whose women, relatively speaking, have done so well?
Watercolour on paper, 32 cm × 40 cm, 2000; private collection

ture.⁷ Like many overseas accounts of late, discussions about the change in women's position have become hedged, qualified and indeterminate.⁸ At the very least, recent historiography has made us aware of the uneven distribution of change among different social groups of women in the last hundred years.

7. Kuni Jenkins and Kay Morris Matthews, "Knowing Their Place: The Political Socialization Of Maori Women In New Zealand Through Schooling Policy And Practice, 1867–1969", *Women's History Review*, 7 (1998), pp. 85–105.

8. We discover that the "complexity of women's lives" leads to a "muddled picture" and "[p]rogress has been uneven and for individual women can also be subject to reversal". See for example, Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*

Most accounts measure domesticity by broad gender differences, a focus on married women's experience and an emphasis on the state's role. Concentrating upon these three particular subjects easily overlooks changes in state-sanctioned domesticity. Let us consider each in turn. The concept of domesticity is too blunt an instrument with which to measure change. "Domesticity" can mean at least three different things. First, it is the actual pattern of women's lives and work within the family and outside the paid workforce. Secondly, it is the set of ideological and cultural presuppositions that justify women's domestic sphere and make it seem "normal" and "natural". Thirdly, it is an ideal in which the two spheres of domesticity and paid work are separate – a useful rhetoric for the state, employers and others to popularize at certain times in the "national interest". Women's familial position is used to render them a flexible secondary workforce: able to leave paid employment at times of unemployment and to enter paid employment at times of labour shortage. Because it is such a broad concept, it is easy to overlook changes in its meaning or simply to emphasize an unchanging aspect of domesticity when there is obviously some change. Most women still marry and have children. While men on average take two years out from paid employment, usually for education purposes, women on average spend eight years outside the labour market, caring for children. Women are overrepresented in the part-time labour force and on average earn less than men.⁹ Given such broad parameters, it is plausible to argue that domesticity changes over time but continues to structure women's lives at work because the basic structure loses none of its potency. Equality has not been achieved and "domesticity" is still with us. However, there have been major changes in the meaning of domesticity since the early institutionalization of the family wage at the turn of the century. The average woman now bears half the number of children she did in 1900. Most women work in paid work and their employment, in general, is a permanent feature of the labour market. The female proportion of the male wage has grown from one-half to four-fifths.¹⁰

Secondly, discussions of the extent to which domesticity has changed have tended to ignore the experience of single women. In 1891 about thirty-nine per cent of women aged between fifteen and twenty-four were in paid employment. By 1921 the proportion had grown to over one-half, and had

(London, 1997), p. 574; and Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years* (Oxford [etc.], 1992), p. 10.

9. Research and Planning Division, Department of Labour, for the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, *Women in the Workforce: Facts and Figures* (Wellington, NZ, 1980). See also Lisa Davies, *Women's Labour Force Participation in New Zealand: The Past 100 Years* (Wellington, NZ, 1993), especially pp. 134–153.

10. There is some debate over whether the wage gap is now widening. Diana Cook and Phil Briggs, *Gender Wage Gap: Scenarios of the Gender Wage Gap. Report for Ministry of Women's Affairs* (Wellington, NZ, 1997), pp. 2–4.

reached sixty per cent by World War II.¹¹ From being a minority experience for young women in the nineteenth century, paid employment became the majority experience in the twentieth. Increasing numbers of young women became self-supporting, and eventually a period of independent, non-domestic life became a typical chapter in the life history of New Zealand women. The normalization of paid work for young women occurred at the same time as the more or less enforced dependency of married women. Increasing rates of married women in paid employment marked the second phase in a longer-term process. Such women returned to the workforce rather than being part of it for the first time. Both their own work culture, and the culture of their being at work, was prepared by the period in which single women standardly worked. The change that has occurred has been long-term.

So historians have concentrated on the institutionalization of the male breadwinner wage and state-sanctioned domesticity rather than examining their modification and erosion from the 1920s. In the process, thirdly, many of these accounts have a simple view of the state itself. "The state" was an entity which perpetuated the system. Both empirical studies and conceptual interpretation (under the influence of postmodernism) have led historians to see the heterogeneous character of women's life and experiences, but they have not led to equal scrutiny of other categories, such as the state. However, the historian's eye for complexity ought to be extended to the state too. In particular, the state's actions, motives and its mechanisms of change ought to be interrogated to the same degree as the status, and change of status, of women.

I am going to suggest, then, another response to the paradox posed by early twenty-first-century New Zealand women's relative equality under a state that is held to have sanctioned domesticity. It is an illusion both that there was little change in domesticity during the twentieth century and that the state sanctioned domesticity for women in that period. First, I examine the modification and erosion from the 1920s of domesticity and the male breadwinner wage. To further rule out the hypothesis that New Zealand women achieved a spectacularly rapid, albeit incomplete, escape from domesticity with second-wave feminism, I concentrate upon the period up to the 1970s. Second, I do not deny that the state sometimes sanctioned domesticity for married women. But I also consider those sanctions within the range of state actions which affected women, single and married and so on. In particular, important though the arbitration system was, I try to contextualize it. Finally, in the process, I critically assess the state's role in domesticity more carefully. This requires unstitching the state itself, examining understandings in the historiography of what the state is, as well as

11. Peter Brosnan and Moira Wilson, *The Historical Structuring of the New Zealand Labour Market* (Working Paper 4/89, Industrial Relations Centre, Victoria University of Wellington), pp. 22–27.

identifying historically the separate components of state intention and state action over women's changing position in the twentieth century. But, if the unstitching is to be thoroughgoing, it requires examining the state's responsibility for domesticity in the first place. This critique starts then with the arguments about the origins of state-sanctioned domesticity.

THE ORIGINS OF THE DOMESTICATING STATE?

New Zealand historians have developed two pictures of the origins of women's twentieth-century domesticity. The first emphasizes the importance of the labour movement in society and politics. That movement promoted the interests of male breadwinners, with women's domesticity emerging as a by-product of class relations. The second emphasizes New Zealand as "a man's country"; women's domesticity was the result of patriarchy. Of course it is possible to combine these views, and many have, arguing that women's domesticity was the result of both class and gender relations. While, like others, I argue that the issue is in fact far more complex, it is nonetheless useful to examine the New Zealand versions of these views because they are central to the two common understandings of the state in the historiography: a state in which domesticity is the result of consensus in society, and a dominating or hegemonic state run by a minority who implemented and manipulated domesticity.

The origins of the domesticating state version I: the class hypothesis

According to this view, domesticity is a by-product of class relations. Capital sought low labour costs in production, and low costs in the reproduction of labour. The labour movement opposed capital. It fought to prevent wage rates being undercut by cheap female labour, and promoted the male breadwinner wage. Employers were forced to cover some of the costs of reproduction by paying men a wage that supported their dependants as well. Labour then attempted to have this system institutionalized into public policy.¹²

Some historians have accepted contemporary views from the turn of the century onwards that working-class representatives successfully demanded that the state "humanize" capitalism, and that there were progressive concessions to workers and their welfare. The greatest advances in welfare were seen to be a consequence of labour mobilization and/or their parliamentary power, first under the Liberals (1891–1912) and then under Labour (1935–

12. This view is related to the long-standing New Zealand model of the class-based origins of the welfare state. David Thomson, "Society and Social Welfare", in Colin Davis and Peter Lineham (eds), *The Future of the Past: Themes in New Zealand History* (Palmerston North, NZ, 1991), pp. 99–101.

1949). New Zealand became a “social laboratory” for the state’s socialist experiments.¹³

More recent revisions of these earlier accounts have shown the importance of World War I and the Reform government’s expansion of welfare. According to this view, progress was linear and smooth rather than there being just two great advances.¹⁴ Despite New Zealand being perceived internationally as a successful social laboratory,¹⁵ some turn a slightly sceptical eye on the image of New Zealand’s national character as egalitarian and progressive. Recent studies show the comparative meanness of some New Zealand provisions, the limited extent of charitable aid, and the number of groups who “missed out”, such as Maori.¹⁶ Labour was not the only agent working to establish an egalitarian society and society was less egalitarian than some of its myths suggest.

Despite these variations, the view persists that the welfare state in general, and domesticity in particular, were the result of the strength of the workers’ movement in state and society. Francis Castles, for example, characterizes New Zealand (and Australia) as wage-earners’ states which embraced protective tariffs, centralized compulsory wage-fixing, and a residual welfare state unique among Western countries. Welfare provisions were “residual” (as opposed to “universal”) in that the compulsory wage-fixing system delivered social protection through a minimum living wage, a relatively egalitarian and compressed wage structure with a high degree of uniformity in wage increases, and a relatively high standard of living. Full employment for white males was achieved through controlled immigration, import restrictions and tariff protections. In 1874, forty-nine per cent of adult men had never married; by 1926 the figure had dropped to thirty per cent.¹⁷ The wage-earners’ welfare state assumed women’s, and not men’s, domesticity. Castles argues that the New Zealand state afforded high wages, jobs for all men who wanted them, and economic and political stability up to the late 1960s, albeit with a blip during the Depression. He argues that these features were not merely the result of a strong labour movement “capturing” Parliament, but also, more importantly, because labour’s ideals had broad popular support.¹⁸

Erik Olssen also emphasizes the role of labour, albeit locally, in the

13. William Pember Reeves, *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand*, 2 vols (1902 repr. London, 1923), 1, pp. 59–102. W.B. Sutch, *Women with a Cause* (Wellington, NZ, 1973), pp. 123–124.

14. Miles Fairburn, “The Farmers Take Over (1912–1930)”, in Keith Sinclair (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand* (Auckland, NZ, 1990), p. 209.

15. H.D. Lloyd, *A Country Without Strikes* (New York, 1900).

16. David Thomson, *Selfish Generations? The Ageing of New Zealand’s Welfare State* (Wellington, NZ, 1991), pp. 29–30.

17. New Zealand Censuses, 1874–1926, *Conjugal Condition of People*.

18. Francis G. Castles, *The Working Class and Welfare: Reflections on the Political Development of the Welfare State in Australia and New Zealand, 1890–1980* (Wellington, NZ, 1985), pp. 82–88.

shaping of a broad male breadwinner culture. He argues that between 1880 and 1920 New Zealand was characterized by “handicraft” production. Workers performed skilled tasks and controlled the labour process. Production was local and small-scale, with blurred lines (or no lines at all) between skilled and unskilled labour and ownership. Craft “cut across the grain of class”, and was a culture in which mutual support was strong. Skilled men mobilized for political action from the Long Depression of the late nineteenth century and the collapse of the 1890 Maritime Strike onwards. They constructed an ideology centred on the dignity of labour and on mutualism, around which a nationwide political consensus eventually developed. Pressure grew for the government to provide employment in “undiluted” skilled trades (that is, trades from which women and the untrained were excluded), and to guarantee regular work for men at rates of pay sufficient to support their families. The reason why women did not “make a fuss” was that they shared these views.¹⁹ Having organized politically, Labour was able to “capture” Parliament and influence the nation. In 1943 Walter Nash, later Prime Minister, described the “conservative socialist” position which Labour endorsed in power; a belief in collective welfarism for the nation which was a working democracy founded on families of breadwinning men and homekeeping women.²⁰

The central state institution that privileged the male breadwinner was arbitration. The unique state-instituted arbitration system established in New Zealand in 1894 came to have three main characteristics: trade union registration, compulsory conciliation and arbitration, and an award system.²¹ The early male unionists were not interested in negotiating equal conditions for women. In the few occupations in which they did not seek women’s exclusion, male unionists usually sought gender-based preference clauses, occupational classification and unequal wages. These moves reinforced women’s segregation into a small band of female occupations and their relegation to the bottom of labour hierarchies. Women’s work was strictly demarcated from men’s work; it was less prestigious, it was classified as unskilled and it was paid half the male rate.²²

It might seem that the male breadwinner wage system was the result

19. Erik Olssen, *Building the New World: Work, Politics and Society in Caversham 1880s–1920* (Auckland, NZ, 1995), p. 224.

20. Walter Nash, *New Zealand: A Working Democracy* (1943; London [etc.], 1944), p. 320.

21. Richard Mitchell, “State Systems of Conciliation and Arbitration: The Legal Origins of the Australasian Model”, in Stuart Macintyre and Richard Mitchell (eds), *Foundations of Arbitration: The Origins and Effects of State Compulsory Arbitration 1890–1914* (Melbourne, VIC, 1989), pp. 74–103.

22. Melanie Nolan, “Employment Organisations”, in Anne Else (ed.), *Women Together: A History of Women’s Organisations in New Zealand: Nga Ropu Wahine o te Motu* (Wellington, NZ, 1993), pp. 193–207.

of the struggle between organizing male workers and their unions against employers. However, the state's role was significant in the construction of the wider system. A number of historians acknowledge that the concept of the male breadwinner wage had other effects for women's breadwinning beyond wages and awards for which the state was directly responsible. When work was in short supply, men were privileged in relief schemes because of their domestic responsibilities. Between 1931 and 1936, women paid unemployment taxes but did not receive the same benefits as men. Even after that, married women had to prove that their husbands could not support them before they could receive relief. From 1914 until 1972 married women's wages were considered secondary income for tax purposes, and did not qualify for the concessions awarded to breadwinners.²³

The male breadwinning ethos also informed welfare measures. Most commentators regard the widow's allowance (1911) and the family benefit (1926) not as victories for the women's movement in its push for sexual equality, but as indices of the state's belief in domesticity. The measures caused little public debate and no party friction (apart from Reform's tardiness),²⁴ because they were part of the "family wage" system.²⁵ Widows, as women without breadwinners, were regarded as victims of the wage system. According to the logic of the system, the state therefore needed to provide for them. By the same logic, it was unfair that a family with thirteen children was required to live on the same wage as a family with only two. This anomaly led to the introduction of the family allowance, which was paid directly to mothers for each child above the average number (that is, two children under the age of fifteen). There was no provision for women with "no good reason" for being without a breadwinner. Mothers of illegitimate children and wives who had been deserted (it was assumed through some fault of their own) were not initially supported in the same way as "blameless" widows. Nor could they receive the family benefit. Deserted wives did not receive a pension until 1936, and a solo mother's benefit by right was not instituted until 1973.

The benign interpretation of domesticity is that the systematic promotion of women's homekeeping, and the undermining of their wage-earning, were communitarian. It was in the interests of the working class. The state had its own objectives. But it shared completely the male breadwinner ethos with the working class.

23. Peggy Koopman-Boyden and Claudia Scott, *The Family and Government Policy in New Zealand* (Sydney, NSW, 1984), p. 118.

24. W.B. Sutch, *Poverty and Progress in New Zealand: A Reassessment* (Wellington, NZ, 1969), pp. 169–173.

25. Eleanor F. Rathbone, *The Disinherited Family: A Plea for Direct Provision for the Cost of Child Maintenance Through Family Allowance* (1924; repr. London, 1927), p. 168.

The origins of the domesticating state version 2: the gender hypothesis

Most feminist commentators would agree that the labour movement played an important role in shaping state policy on women's domesticity and wage-earning. However, rather than emphasizing a consensus between the working class and the state, many feminists would stress the patriarchal mechanism at work behind the contract between "the state", "the citizen" and "the worker". In other words, the system of privileging male breadwinners is seen as the creation not of male and female working-class reformers at large, but of state bureaucrats, representing business interests and organized labour.²⁶

Certainly, much of the history of the sexual division of labour emphasizes the effects of state-orchestrated discrimination in both employment and welfare.²⁷ The colonial household was a self-sufficient institution in which men and women had different but equally valued roles and shared power. Moreover, Maori women had significant political roles in traditional society, which was stratified according to age and genealogy. According to this view, urbanization, industrialization and the alienation of Maori land upset the sexual balance.²⁸ The state reinforced the gendered society that replaced the disintegrating networks of social control in the breakdown of both colonial and traditional Maori societies. It did this by constraining women's opportunities and independence. First, it was the crucial factor in the formation of a gendered workforce – a dual labour market with men in the primary sector and women in the secondary. Secondly, the state reached into the private sphere to uphold the patriarchal structure of the family through its gendered welfare policies. The state also reached across the race divide, from *Pakeha* to Maori society, as Maori urbanized relatively late and became mostly wage-workers. The patriarchal state is thus held responsible for "naturalizing" women's dependence in both the public and private spheres.

Women did not have the resources to challenge this state-imposed patriarchal system. Some versions of the gender view suggest that the system itself caused women to exhibit a "false consciousness". By that they mean

26. Robin Ingram, "The Politics of Patriarchy: The Response of Capital and Organised Labour to the Movement of Women into the Paid Workforce in New Zealand" (M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, NZ, 1988), pp. 14–28.

27. Some sociologists, in particular, hold a dim view of New Zealand state patriarchy in the twentieth century. Nicola Armstrong, "State", in Paul Spoonley, David Pearson and Ian Shirley (eds), *New Zealand Society: A Sociological Introduction* (Palmerston North, NZ, 1990), pp. 114–131; Nicola Armstrong, "Handling the Hydra: Feminist Analyses of the State" in Rosemary Du Plessis (ed.) with Phillida Bunkle, Kathie Irwin, Alison Laurie, Sue Middleton, *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Auckland, NZ, 1992), pp. 224–238; James and Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture and Power*, p. 54; Maureen Molloy, "Citizenship, Property and Bodies: Discourses on Gender and the Inter-War Labour Government in New Zealand", *Gender and History*, 4 (1992), pp. 293–304.

28. Mira Szaszy, "Maori Women in Pakeha Society" in Sandra Coney (ed.), *United Women's Convention, 1973 Report* (Auckland, NZ, 1973), pp. 21–24.

that women failed to perceive their true interests and failed to become anti-patriarchal. Most suggest that the state managed to implement the patriarchal system more directly because women, having won the vote, were not entitled to enter Parliament until 1919, and did not do so until 1933. Women's organizations could not fight for women's subsistence rights from outside the system – a system that ignored working women and female family breadwinners.

So what did the patriarchal state actually do to establish the male breadwinner system? In its powerful and multiple roles as employer, legislator and educator, the state instituted a series of measures which together ensured women's domesticity. First, its protective labour legislation from 1890 to 1912 destroyed the late nineteenth-century push for women's economic independence.²⁹ The legislation was presented as protecting women through sex-differentiated minimum wages, and restrictions on the hours they could work (in particular, a prohibition on night work), the weights they could lift, and the work processes in which they could be involved. The state thus channelled women away from good jobs. In particular, the conditions of employment of women public servants deteriorated.³⁰ Their relative equality was lost as marriage bars were implemented. Women were either pushed to the bottom of the labour hierarchy or out of the service. The 1920 closure of the Women's Employment Bureaux, which was established in 1895, is further evidence of the state's commitment to confine women to domestic duties.

Secondly, the state reinforced women's domesticity through welfare, using pensions, maternity benefits and the family allowance. At its height, the average family benefit, the state payment directly to mothers to cover the costs of children, provided sixteen per cent of the total net income of the median standard family with two children.³¹ The state operated on the premise that married women would not be in paid employment but would be dependent on a male worker.³² Thirdly, from 1917 the state instituted a policy of compulsory domestic education for girls in secondary schools.³³ In addition, the Society for the Promotion of the Health of Women and Children (the Plunket Society) trained mothers in their role as homemakers. By

29. Margaret Wilson, "Areas of Discrimination", in Coney, *United Women's Convention 1973*, pp. 18–20.

30. Megan Cook and Jackie Matthews, "Separate Spheres: Ideology at Work in 1920s New Zealand: Letters to *The Katipo*, 1923–1924", *Women's Studies Journal*, 6 (1990), pp. 168–193.

31. Thomson, *Selfish Generations?*, p. 58.

32. Marilyn Waring, *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth* (Wellington, NZ, 1988), pp. 93–117.

33. Ruth Fry, *It's Different for Daughters: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900–1975* (Wellington, NZ, 1985), pp. 73–76; Ruth Fry, "Softening the Options in the Curriculum for Girls: The Influence of Back-to-the-Home Movements in Modifying the Curriculum for Girls from the Turn of the Century", in Clare Phillips (ed.), *Women's Studies Conference Papers '84* (Auckland, NZ, 1985), pp. 96–107.

1930 Plunket had sixty-five per cent of all *Pakeha* babies on its books. By 1947 it had eighty-five per cent, and a growing number of Maori babies.³⁴ The state subsidized Plunket heavily, and also distributed its publications on baby care to new mothers and couples seeking marriage licences during the war. Plunket is said to have instilled modern attitudes to time, discipline and organization into women in the home, just as employers were trying to achieve in industry.

According to the “patriarchy theory”, then, for half a century the various state agencies worked together and effectively pushed and lured women back into the home. Any controversy of this theory centres on two conceptions. First it depicts the late nineteenth century as an economic “golden age” of female paid employment. Second, it supposes that there existed a fairly even balance of power in pre-industrial colonial families. The state is seen as having upset both because middle-class male politicians and bureaucrats were bent on implementing their patriarchal views through state social engineering. Jock Phillips argues that bourgeois patriarchal hegemony channelled women’s career aspirations “back towards the home”. The concept of “the sentimental family”, based on the breadwinning father and the domestic mother, was originally a bourgeois ideal.³⁵ Trade-union support for the family wage is taken as evidence of the extent to which this ideal had penetrated the working class. Working-class men wanted – and were encouraged to want – to emulate the situation of middle-class men.

Domesticity is generally seen as a by-product of class and/or gender relations. It is not seen as a by-product of race relations. Yet domesticity and breadwinning are also regarded as constructs of colonialism. Domesticity as an experience is mediated by race as much as by class. Labour’s emphasis on the role of *Pakeha* male breadwinners had an effect on Maori women’s domesticity. Moreover, the colonial alienation of Maori land, the late urbanization of Maori, and Maori women’s limited political resources (until perhaps the Maori Women’s Welfare League was founded in 1951) affected their relationships with the *Pakeha*-male-dominated state, both as workers and as citizens. In general, however, the inclusion of Maori complicates the narrative without altering its basic shape. It reveals that Maori women underwent their own process of “domestication” as they, too, experienced urbanization and industrialization and were slowly integrated into the state’s education and welfare systems.³⁶

34. Erik Olssen, “Truby King and the Plunket Society: An Analysis of a Prescriptive Ideology”, *NZJH*, 15 (1981), pp. 3–23.

35. Jock Phillips, *A Man’s Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History* (Auckland, NZ, 1987), p. 225.

36. Barbara Brookes and Margaret Tennant, “Maori and Pakeha Women: Many Histories, Divergent Pasts?”, in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (eds), *Women in History 2: Essays on Women in New Zealand* (Wellington, NZ, 1992), pp. 25–48.

*The origins of the domesticating state version 3:
dismantling the monolithic state*

There are a number of significant problems with the pictures of the state in the two standard-origin stories. I want to cast some doubt on two issues in this historiography. Was the state a powerful monolithic force for domesticity as in the class view? Or was it an orchestrated ensemble as in the gender view?

First, the state's capacity to be a powerful coherent structure even in the 1890s is compromised by the fact that state-building was a drawn-out process. While the state instituted arbitration in 1894, implemented protective regulations and established regulatory bodies such as the Labour Department, the majority of workers were only slowly drawn into the arbitration system and state regulation. For instance, it took more than forty years to extend the Arbitration Court's jurisdiction throughout the workforce.³⁷ While the Labour Department's biographer suggests that the New Zealand institution was "the most powerful and all-embracing government body" he does so in comparative international terms of those times, rather than what it was to become. Nor was he comparing it to non-state factors.³⁸ F.W. Rowley, Secretary of Labour from 1913 to 1929, reviewing the means of government around the turn of the century described them as being quite narrow.³⁹

Clearly, domesticity predated the completion of the process of state formation. Gendered wage differentials were well established before 1894.⁴⁰ The arbitration system institutionalized these pre-existent differences. Furthermore, non-state factors continued to be important in elevating the male breadwinner wage before 1936. The Court's policy was to institutionalize only that which "reputable" employers had already conceded in the workplace.⁴¹ A male breadwinner wage was not made an officially explicit policy until the 1936 Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Amendment Act. The Arbitration Court had previously assumed that the average man supported a family of two children, while the breadwinner "basic" wage was defined in 1936 as being one "sufficient to enable a man [...] to maintain a wife and three children in a fair and reasonable standard of comfort" in spite of

37. John E. Martin, "Rural and Industrial Labour and the State in New Zealand", in Chris Wilkes and Ian Shirley (eds), *In the Public Interest* (Auckland, NZ, 1984), pp. 119–133.

38. John E. Martin, *Holding the Balance: A History of New Zealand's Department of Labour 1891–1995* (Christchurch, NZ, 1996), p. 11.

39. F.W. Rowley, *The Industrial Situation in New Zealand* (Wellington, NZ, 1931), p. 168.

40. Margaret Galt, "Wealth and Income in New Zealand 1870–1939" (Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1985), p. 214.

41. Noel Woods, *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration in New Zealand* (Wellington, NZ, 1963), pp. 96–97; James Holt, *Compulsory Arbitration in New Zealand: The First Forty Years* (Auckland, NZ, 1986), p. 105; James E. Le Rossignol and W.D. Stewart, *State Socialism in New Zealand* (London, 1910), p. 239.

dropping fertility.⁴² New Zealand law specified differential wage rates for men and women only between 1936 and 1954.⁴³ Non-state factors were vital for the male breadwinner wage to exist in practice in the early twentieth century.

Secondly, in the gender view of the origins of domesticity there is a tendency to regard the state as possessing an institutional unity for repression. However, we find that the ensemble of institutions did not always work together to institute domesticity. A number of state agencies instituted different policies regarding women's employment. For instance, the fraught history of women in the public service is attributed to the Public Service Commissioner's support for women's domesticity. Under the Liberals, the state expanded and then restricted women's employment in the public service. As others have shown, the conditions of women public servants deteriorated from the late nineteenth century, at a time when the state was generally the single largest employer in the country.⁴⁴ In principle, girls were eligible to sit the public service examinations from their inception in 1869 but did not do so until 1884. In 1887, without the backing of legislation, the state declared that girls who passed the examination would only be offered jobs deemed suitable for females. From the 1890s a small number of female cadets were employed on the same basis as male cadets. However, the policy of allowing girls to compete equally with boys changed from the turn of the century. From 1913 girls were excluded from public service examinations, and were offered only low-paid and low-status positions. The number of female clerks dropped, while the number of women employed as typists and telephonists rose. Post-Liberal governments formalized this trend. In 1913, the Public Service Commissioner ruled that female officers must resign their post upon marrying. In 1914, he decreed that female employees were to have lower maximum salaries than men – once again, formalizing what was already happening in practice. Between 1919 and 1947, women were excluded from the permanent staff,⁴⁵ and New Zealand's level of women public servants fell to one of the lowest internationally. The proportion of women public servants peaked during World War I at one-third of permanent staff, dropped considerably in the interwar

42. Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Amendment Act, 1936, No. 6, s. 3 (5).

43. Stephen Robertson, "Women Workers and the New Zealand Arbitration Court 1894–1920", in Raelene Frances and Bruce Scates (eds), *Women, Work and the Labour Movement in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Sydney, NSW, 1991), p. 40; (special issue of *Labour History*, 61 (1991)).

44. John E. Martin, "The Public Service, Patronage and Women's Employment: 1860s–1940s", *New Zealand Society of Genealogists, Proceedings of 1995 Conference* (May 1995), pp. 28–38.

45. Anne Else, *Getting On: Women in the Ministry of Commerce and its Predecessors, 1894–1993* (Wellington, NZ, 1993), pp. 8–9; Bronwyn Dalley, *Women of Value: A History of Women in the Valuation Department and Valuation New Zealand 1896–1993* (Wellington, NZ, 1993), pp. 24–31; Fiona McKergow, *The "Taxwoman": 101 Years Of Women Working In The Inland Revenue Department 1892–1993* (Wellington, NZ, 1993), pp. 16–24.

period, and rose to about one-quarter of all staff by 1945.⁴⁶ This was despite the fact that clerical work generally was undergoing a process of feminization (that is, a shift from male to female). In New Zealand, the proportion of women in office work rose from two per cent in 1891 to forty per cent in 1921, and then stabilized until the late 1930s.⁴⁷ The New Zealand public service as a whole lagged behind the general trend, particularly between 1912 and 1945. The rate was low in local terms, too.

Despite this compelling example of the state as an employer restricting women's employment, in other areas of the public service the state supported women's employment. From the 1880s job opportunities for women in some professions began to expand, largely as a result of the developing education system. New Zealand universities admitted women and opened a small but significant number of professional doors for them. Women graduates often found themselves employed by the state, mostly as teachers.⁴⁸ The state sanctioned a number of developments in women's higher education. In 1896 it passed the Female Law Practitioners Act which enabled women to practise law on the same basis as men.⁴⁹ Ethel Benjamin, the first woman in the British Empire to qualify as a lawyer, was educated at a university funded by the New Zealand state.

More significant were developments in nursing and teaching, which began before the Liberals established the Education and Health Departments. Officials in these departments further promoted both the state regulation of these two professions and expansion of women into them. The pupil-teacher system and training colleges were established in Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland between 1876 and 1881. The Public School Teachers Incorporation and Court of Appeal Act 1895 provided for the registration of teachers and a 1901 Royal Commission led to the introduction of a scale of salaries and job classification. While women made up nearly forty-one per cent of teachers in 1878, the number of women teachers continued to rise from 2,617 in 1891 to 5,053 in 1911 as teaching expanded.⁵⁰ The numbers of married women in teaching was not really an issue until the 1930s depression. The nursing profession saw similar developments. In 1888 the first formal training course for women nurses was established. The

46. Martin, "The Public Service", pp. 34–35 (calculated from). See also Margaret Corner, *No Easy Victory: Towards Equal Pay for Women in the Government Service 1890–1960* (Wellington, NZ, 1988), p. 21.

47. Shannon Brown, "Female Office Workers in Auckland: 1891–1936" (M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1993), p. 24.

48. Beryl Hughes, "Women and the Professions in New Zealand", in Phillida Bunkle and Beryl Hughes (eds), *Women in New Zealand Society* (Auckland, NZ, 1980), pp. 118–138.

49. Female Law Practitioners Act, 1896, 11; Carol Brown, "Ethel Benjamin, New Zealand's First Woman Lawyer" (B.A. Hons., University of Otago, 1985), pp. 24–25.

50. Colin McGeorge, "Short Adventures? The Mobility, Qualifications and Status of Women Teachers in New Zealand Primary Schools 1894–1904", *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 29 (1994), pp. 47–58.

Nurses Registration Act 1901 ensured the training and registration of nurses, and the Midwives Act 1904 did the same for maternity workers.⁵¹ The number of nurses rose from 1,018 in 1891 to 3,403 in 1911. By world standards these developments were early. The legislation providing for women lawyers and registered nurses were two decades ahead of equivalent measures in England.

Most importantly, despite the domestic education lobby, the state's education system trained a nation of women to enter paid employment. It may not have trained them to be equal with men but it was not a training in domesticity. This is especially true of clerical work. The state's education system underwrote the "white blouse" revolution, the feminization of office work described above. The number of girls with the postprimary qualifications required for good shop and clerical jobs increased as secondary school retention rates rose. Before 1914, about one-third of primary school leavers went on to secondary school. By 1930 the proportion was slightly more than one-half and this continued to increase. We should not underestimate these developments, albeit they just modified and expanded a female role.⁵² The state opened up new avenues of employment for women and improved their training and career options.⁵³

STATE'S ROLE IN THE DECLINE OF DOMESTICITY

The observation that some of the state's measures helped women to gain independence from men and enhanced their wage-earning opportunities leads us to consider more closely the state's role in the decline of domesticity. As has been discussed, most accounts date the decline of domesticity in the 1970s and do not credit the state with initiating it. I have already pointed to more continual changes during the twentieth century. A description of the state's role in the decline of domesticity has further implications for our understanding of the state's role.

State's role in the decline of domesticity version 1: The class hypothesis

According to the class-based argument, the long consensus over women's position broke down when traditional male wage-earners lost power and the postwar economy could no longer afford the family wage.⁵⁴ New Zealand's

51. Nurses Registration Act, 1901, 12, s. 4 and s. 6; Midwives Act, 1904, 31, s. 4, s. 5, s. 6, s. 8.

52. Michael Belgrave, "A Subtle Containment: Women in New Zealand Medicine, 1893–1941", *NZJH*, 22 (1988), p. 45.

53. For a more positive view of the state's actions, see Rosemary Du Plessis, "Women, Politics, and the State", in Brian Roper and Chris Rudd (eds), *State and Economy in New Zealand* (Auckland, NZ, 1993), pp. 210–225.

54. Castles, *The Working Class and Welfare*, pp. 21–23.

standard of living, one of the highest in the world for large chunks of the century from the 1850s to 1950s, fell from third in 1953 to nineteenth by 1975.⁵⁵ The fall was relative rather than absolute: other countries simply improved at a faster rate. Meanwhile, occupational change undermined the skilled working class. The rise of white-collar unions changed the composition of the union movement. But more than that, clerical and retail unions with an overwhelmingly female membership slowly evolved into “women’s unions” from the early sixties. It was not simply coincidence or liberation politics behind this; the growing numbers of married women, or more specifically, “working mothers”, in permanent full-time paid employment had flow-on effects. Men and women were beginning to agitate for change, particularly through equal-pay organizations. Between 1939 and 1962, the wages of most married women were aggregated to their husbands’ wages for tax purposes. From 1962 married women were taxed as individuals, although it was not until 1972 that the tax exemption for men with dependants, introduced in 1914, ceased. Similarly, equal pay for public service women was enacted in 1960 and implemented from 1961 to 1963. But equal pay for most women was not enacted until 1972, and it was gradually implemented between 1973 and 1978. Married women automatically received equal payment of unemployment and sickness benefits only from 1979. Such changes were indicative of the unravelling of the male breadwinner wage system in the 1970s. However, the concept of the male breadwinner wage was slowly undermined long before any consensus between the traditional labour movement and the state collapsed. Indeed, women’s wages as a proportion of men’s wages grew more between 1939 and 1960 than they did under any equal pay legislation. In terms of minimum wages, the proportion grew from forty-seven per cent in 1936 to sixty-six per cent in 1947, and continued to rise informally to about seventy per cent. This rise was a significant step on the way to equal pay, especially since equal pay legislation seems to have closed the gap by only a further ten per cent.⁵⁶

Moreover, the concept of the male breadwinner wage was itself undermined over a long period. A “long-term, incremental change” had occurred in public attitudes towards women’s work.⁵⁷ Indeed, we can see the concept of the male breadwinner being remade in public policy contexts from the 1920s to the 1960s. The family allowance, introduced as a means-tested benefit in 1926 and made universal in 1946, undermined the male

55. J.A. Dowie, “A Century-Old Estimate of the National Income of New Zealand”, *Business Archives and History*, 6 (1966), pp. 117–131.

56. Brosnan and Wilson observe that in 1986 the ratio of female to male average earnings was much higher in the centralized arbitration systems of New Zealand (0.77) and Australia (0.82) than in the decentralized systems of Japan (0.57), the United Kingdom (0.66) and the United States (0.69). Brosnan and Wilson, “The Historical Structuring of the Labour Market”, p. 33.

57. Deborah Montgomerie, “The Limitations of Wartime Change: Women War Workers in New Zealand”, *NZJH*, 23 (1989), p. 85.

breadwinner wage by making provision outside the wage to cover the costs of raising children. The extension of full economic citizenship rights to single women through sustenance payments (1936) and unemployment benefits (1938) also undermined the male breadwinner wage by improving women's wage-earning position and denying male workers the right to claim responsibility for dependant wives.

*State's role in the decline of domesticity version 2:
the gender hypothesis*

According to gender accounts the long consensus broke down when women woke up to their real position.⁵⁸ Patricia Grimshaw, Phillida Bunkle and Raewyn Dalziel all suggest that systematic change in women's position did not occur until the second wave of feminism.⁵⁹

Such accounts see women as playing a dominant rather than a marginal role in bringing about change. One example was the small group of vigilant women public servants in the 1950s who, skilled at pressure politics and encouraged by overseas precedents amid a buoyant domestic economy, wrested equal pay from the patriarchal state in 1960.⁶⁰ Motivated by a liberal ideology that stressed women's individualism and their independence from husbands and families, they sought conditions in which women would be valued, could make choices and have equal rights.

Of course uncovering mid-century change might simply modify the current historiography which emphasizes feminist agency in change. That modification would simply see women as enforcing a change in state activity earlier than we hitherto appreciated. As women became more powerful, the state now danced to their tune rather than that of the capitalists and/or organized labour movements. Uncovering feminist activism and social change between the first and second waves is a developing theme in the international historiography.⁶¹

The problem, though, is that there was no one "woman's tune" on domesticity. There was no consensus amongst activists between the suffrage campaigns of the 1890s and the agitation for equal pay from the 1950s about

58. Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p. 273.

59. Patricia Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* (1972; Auckland, NZ, 1987), p. 123. Phillida Bunkle, "The Origins of the Women's Movement in New Zealand: The Women's Christian Temperance Union 1885–1895", in Bunkle and Hughes, *Women in New Zealand Society*, pp. 52–77. Dalziel, "Colonial Helpmeet", pp. 112–123.

60. See, in particular, Roberta Nicholls, "The PSC and the Equal Pay Campaign", in Alan Henderson (with a chapter by Roberta Nicholls), *The Quest for Efficiency: The Origins of the State Services Commission* (Wellington, NZ, 1990), pp. 247–280; Corner, *No Easy Victory*, pp. 35–48; Nan Taylor, *New Zealand People at War: Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War, 1939–45: The Home Front*, 2 vols (Wellington, NZ, 1986), 2, p. 1075.

61. Harold L. Smith, "British Feminism and the Equal Pay Issue in the 1930s", *Women's History Review*, 5 (1996), pp. 97–110.

whether to fight for women's protection and domesticity, or their equality and equal pay. Even today, there are two camps among feminists and reformers. One consists of the liberals, who internationally have dominated recent analyses of women's economic position, and who have as their goal the elimination of significant differences between men and women. The other consists of the gynocentric or communitarian feminists, whose goal is equity not equality; who support women's right to stay in the home as carers; and who value women's career choices as different from men's.⁶² Women have long been divided between those who seek equal rights and those who value difference.⁶³

More problematic is whether a small group of women made the state dance to its tune. Was that how change occurred? When we examine the equal pay campaign, we find that while women's groups in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s orchestrated public opinion in support of equal pay, it was not exclusively a women's campaign. Some male support was crucial in the legislative process. Megan Cook emphasizes that in the 1960s, the educated, middle-class Wellington "militants" were able to mount a critical "cross-class, cross-gender campaign" that found common cause with some unionists, students and sympathetic bureaucrats.⁶⁴ But we also find in the 1960s small but effective groups of officials, especially within the Labour Department, working towards equal pay for women in the private sector. In the 1970s, we find that the state-instituted National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women was critical to the promotion of equal pay. The state was sometimes a partner in change with feminists rather than their main opposition.

*State's role in the decline of domesticity version 3:
the contradictory version*

I have been critical of both the class view which assumed that domesticity was not undermined until the 1970s and its relative, the gender view that assumes that women effectively opposed domesticity, when they were finally able to, in the 1970s. Is there a more positive story to be told then? The "antipodean paradox" has a paradoxical solution: the state's actions were

62. There is a huge literature on this subject. See Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Difference: Women's Politics 1800–1914* (Oxford, 1987); Felice D. Gordon, *After Winning* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1986); Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ, 1990). Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York, 1995).

63. Historians have used various nomenclatures. For a good discussion of the "plethora of names" contemporary feminists have coined to describe the two feminist streams, see Beatrice Faust, Foreword to Rene Denfeld, *The New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order* (St Leonards, NSW, 1995), pp. x–xi.

64. Megan Cook, "A History of the Campaign for the 1972 Equal Pay Act" (B.A. Hons., Otago University, 1994), pp. 3, 10, 24–38.

contradictory. At first glance, it might not seem a “positive story” to argue that the state’s actions were contradictory! First, let’s establish that the state took a contradictory position on women’s domesticity after World War II.

The standard historiography sees the 1940s through to the 1960s as the “high tide” of the family ethos and the idealization of women as mothers. Some claim that women willingly gave their wartime jobs back to the returned soldiers, married them and made homes for them.⁶⁵ Others suggest that the state forced women back into the suburban prison of full-time motherhood after their temporary wartime escape.⁶⁶ All agree, however, that in the early postwar years, state policies encouraged women to return to their domestic roles. The policies were designed to ensure the material wellbeing of families and, in the process, to “uphold the ideal of the nuclear family with a full-time mother and a male breadwinner”.⁶⁷ In the postwar period, the National and Labour parties were locked into an arms race on domesticity, each trying to outdo the other in their defence of home, family and women’s domesticity. New Zealand’s postwar rehabilitation programme was generous by international standards, its centrepiece policies being the return of soldiers to their civil employment and the maintenance of full male employment.⁶⁸ The state reactivated its marriage bar for women public servants and expelled married women from teaching and nursing training schemes. It was pronatalist and refused to countenance birth control. And it did nothing about providing childcare for working mothers.

The state’s postwar social welfare, education and employment policies tell another story. Despite its rhetoric on women’s domesticity, the state encouraged female employment through its social welfare system. State pensions initially encouraged consumerism but the state’s rather parsimonious approach ultimately encouraged married and other domestic women into paid employment. The family benefit, for example, decreased in value from 1946, giving women an economic incentive to enter employment, albeit in the poorly-paid secondary labour market. Through special exemptions, moreover, the state encouraged widows and the wives of beneficiaries to enter domestic work. A provision in the 1950 Act gave the Social Security Commission the discretion to disregard, for pension purposes, the personal earnings up to £78 of a married or widowed woman working in domestic or nursing service in any private home and hospital.⁶⁹

65. Anonymous, “New Zealand Woman’s Life: What We Women Want – After the War”, *New Zealand Magazine* (January–February 1945), pp. 49–51.

66. Helen Cook, “Images, Illusions of Harmony: The 1950s’ Wife and Mother”, *Women’s Studies Journal*, 1 (1985), pp. 86–92.

67. Helen May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women* (Wellington, NZ, 1992), pp. 2–3. Molloy, “Citizenship, Property and Bodies”, pp. 293–304.

68. J.R.M. Thomson, “The Rehabilitation of Servicemen of World War II in New Zealand 1940–1954” (Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1983), p. 335.

69. Social Security Amendment Act, 1950, 49, s. 19.

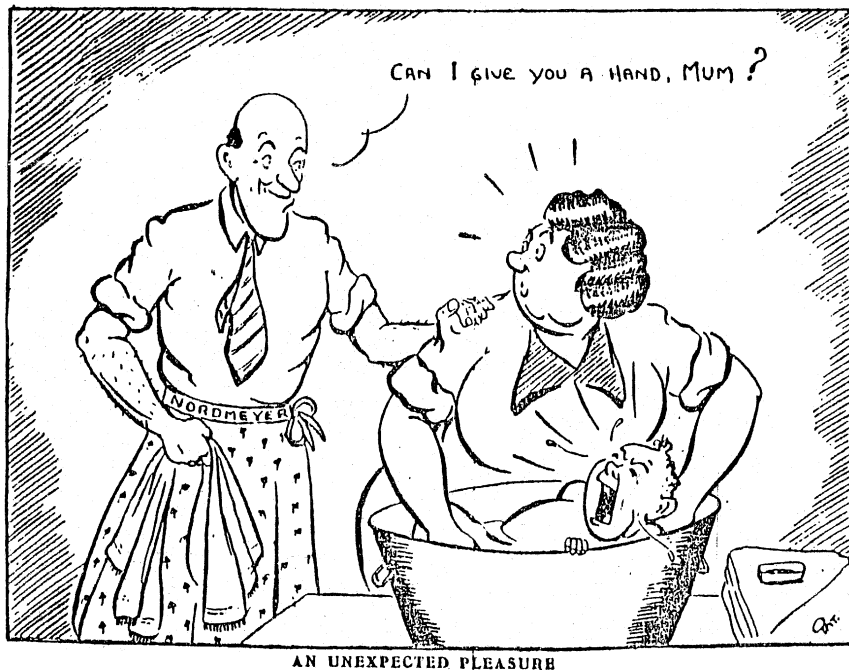


Figure 2. Arnold Nordmeyer, Member of the Labour government asking “Can I give you a hand, Mum?”, An Unexpected Pleasure. The state seemed to be keen to do anything to help New Zealand women be full-time wives and mothers. However, the “state” also helped New Zealand women into paid employment.

Cartoon from the *New Zealand Herald*, 11 October 1945; copyright *New Zealand Herald*, Auckland

Secondly, the state failed to enhance the conditions for domesticity. It turned a largely deaf ear to the entreaties of women’s organizations that it provide domestic servants. From the late 1930s, nearly every women’s organization discussed the issue of “overworked mothers”. Domestic service as an occupation collapsed after the war,⁷⁰ the only increase occurring among Maori women.⁷¹ The state established a Home Aid Service in December 1945 under the Employment Act,⁷² which set out to provide home aids to housewives in emergencies, regardless of their ability to pay wages. But it was puny, with only sixty-six home aids having been recruited by August 1946. It limped along. There were just nine home aids when it was disbanded in 1974. On the other hand, the state did not develop an

70. *New Zealand Census*: 19,189 domestic servants in 1901; 18,795 in 1911; 17,955 in 1921; 23,396 in 1926; 29,262 in 1936; 9,169 in 1945; 8,731 in 1951.

71. *New Zealand Census*, vol. 3, 1936, 1945.

72. *NZPD*, vol. 270 (1945); Employment Bill, pp. 463–465 (A.H. Nordmeyer). Employment Act, 1945, 9, s. 5(3)(b).

aggressive policy on domestic education in the postwar period. It resisted political pressure from nearly every women's organization in the country and from many women teachers for it to introduce compulsory domestic education for girls during the interwar period and into the 1940s. The state recognized that it did not have the power to compel girls and women into domestic education in order to train them exclusively to be domestic servants or housewives. Schools met parents', employers' and girls' demands to teach female students English, mathematics, typing and the like. Young women were making economic decisions beyond the state's control. Employers were offering them more than domestic service ever could. The state recognized that there were significant limits to its power in a democracy over this issue.

Thirdly, the state came to regard married women not as a reserve army of labour, but as integral to its efficiency as an employer. In this regard, it positively encouraged married women's paid employment. The reason is not hard to find. In 1946 the Dominion Population Committee predicted a postwar labour shortage.⁷³ The birthrate had dropped during the Depression, and the school-leaving cohort of seventeen- to twenty-five-year-olds was small.⁷⁴ The prediction proved accurate. At the very time that the public service experienced a major growth (1935–1949) the first Labour government, having introduced the forty-hour week and paid holidays, and extended the arbitration system, found itself struggling to obtain labour in the postwar years. It experienced such acute shortages in the public service, together with teaching and nursing, that it reconsidered the ban on employing married women. The Public Service Commission was so concerned in 1947 at losing valuable expertise through its marriage bar, it revoked the 1913 regulation requiring the mandatory resignation of women upon marriage (which was not being enforced anyway). Given the strength of the marriage bar in the public service in the interwar period, this was a major change.⁷⁵ New accommodations were made, too, for its married female employees. Maternity leave (granted as six months' leave without pay) was introduced in March 1948 in response to PSA lobbying and "to encourage married women to remain in the Public Service".⁷⁶ Pressure-cooker or shortened retraining courses were introduced for married women. More generally in 1962 the government changed its income taxation regime in a deliberate ploy to lure married women back into teaching. It taxed married women as individuals. Between 1939 and 1962, it had been compul-

73. Report of the Dominion Population Committee, *AJHR*, 1946, 1–17, pp. 126–130.

74. "Female Labour Shortage in New Zealand", *The Dominion*, 21 February 1946; 13 March 1946.

75. Jo Aitken, "Wives and Mothers First: The New Zealand Teachers' Marriage Bar and the Ideology of Domesticity, 1920–1940", *Women's Studies Journal*, 12 (1996), pp. 83–98.

76. "Public Service Action to Maintain Adequate Staffing", Report of the Public Service Commissioner, *AJHR*, 1960, H-14, pp. 9–14; *Public Service Journal*, September 1945, p. 52.

sory for married couples to aggregate their incomes for tax purposes if they exceeded a minimum level.

In the postwar period, the Social Security Department did all it could to promote domesticity, while the Health and Education Departments and the Public Service Commission were encouraging married women back into the workforce. The only way we can describe such a position is as “contradictory”.⁷⁷ Indeed, the state’s contradictory position may reflect a wider public ambiguity over women’s domesticity. As the idea of equality has been refined, people have had to choose not simply between equality and inequality but rather among competing types of equality.⁷⁸ Such hard choices reflect the inherent tension between notions of equality based on the individual and those based on the group. The choices faced by women wageearners have reflected the tensions between their rights as individuals and their communitarian role in the family. Although Joan Scott ascribes these tensions to feminists, many people managed to hold the competing views simultaneously.⁷⁹ Institutions could also suffer from these tensions and exhibit contradictory policies.

AN ALTERNATIVE DEFINITION OF THE “DOMESTICATING STATE”

Indeed, it appears that the New Zealand state embodied contradictory tendencies on domesticity – promoting it, bending and stretching it, undermining it. If the state failed to grant equality to women, it also failed to render them completely unequal. Its implementation of domesticity was half-hearted. The state did not regulate women out of employment, nor did it support teaching only domestic science to schoolgirls. Its ambiguity over women in paid labour helped to undermine domesticity. I think we can further argue that the very lack of a coherent policy on women’s position contributed to the degree of equality they received in education, and the relative ease with which large numbers of women entered the labour force. If the state was an oppressive patriarchy, it was an inefficient, inconsistent and bumbling one.

So much for the state’s effects. What of state motivation? What is the

77. For discussions of contradictory threads in state policy, see: Katherine Saville-Smith, “Women and the State”, in Shelagh Cox (ed.), *Public and Private Worlds: Women in Contemporary New Zealand* (Wellington, NZ, 1987), p. 205; Nicholls, “The PSC and the equal pay campaign”, p. 254; Cook, “Images, Illusions of Harmony”, pp. 72–74; May, *Minding Children*, preface, pp. 3, 21, 43; Peter Brosnan, David Rea and Moira Wilson, “Labour Market Segmentation and the State: The New Zealand Experience”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 19 (1995), pp. 667–696.

78. J.R. Pole, *The Pursuit of Equality in American History* (Berkeley, CA, 1978), p. 358.

79. Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA [etc.], 1996), pp. 1–18; Susan Magarey, “Why Didn’t They Want to be Members of Parliament?: Suffragists in South Australia”, in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (Auckland, NZ, 1994), p. 74.

state? There is no simple definition which fits the state I have described. Here, I take my cue from Bob Jessop who is “reluctant to define the state” because “[s]tates are not the sort of abstract, formal object which readily lend themselves to a clear-cut, unambiguous definition”. Jessop criticizes previous work, including his own, for overdeveloping theories of the state rather than “a more basic enquiry into the nature and existence of the state itself”. Instead he suggests researchers adopt a strategic-relational approach to understand the state. That is, the state is a complex “social relation” and “any coherence that exists among its activities is [...] forged in the face of structural tensions and internal political struggles” over time. He gives us a general “cluster” and “historical” definition of the state; it is a complex and conflictual institutional ensemble which is constituted politically.⁸⁰ He does not apply his definition to specific historical accounts but it is useful because it fits the description of a state that was ambiguous because it embodied the contradictory tendencies over domesticity presented above.

Three rationales can explain the state’s inconsistent and ambiguous activities over domesticity.

The “ensemble” view

The state is not a single entity: it is a set of institutions, a complex ensemble of disparate parts which can and do conflict with each other.⁸¹ For example, while politicians were passing legislation to promote women’s maternal role by supporting Plunket in the interwar period, the effect of their policies was being undermined by liberal elements within the Education Department. There is no automatic unity between state agencies. Moreover, they have different relationships with nongovernment institutions and groups. The medical profession might have been fully supportive of domestic education for pubescent girls, but parents wanted industrial and professional opportunities for their daughters through the education system. The state is relational, and domesticity was a site of struggle.

On this view, then, the state has no single voice, for it is a site of contest, and at different stages and in different agencies different factions with their different motivations will have seized the rudder. If so, over time ambiguous and contradictory policy will be our default expectation. Consistent policies would be the surprise demanding special explanation; not the reverse.

80. Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place* (Cambridge, 1990) pp. 340, 341–367.

81. *Idem*, *The Capitalist State: Marxist Theories and Methods* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 2–24. See also Drude Dahlerup, “Confusing Concepts – Confusing Reality: A Theoretical Discussion of the Patriarchal State”, in Anne Showstack Sassoon (ed.), *Women and the State: The Shifting Boundaries of Public and Private* (London, 1987), pp. 108–111.

The “self-interested collective actor” view

The state is not just the tool or puppet of capitalists, patriarchs, feminists and liberals. Nor, in a parliamentary democracy, is it a sovereign oppressor. Nor is it a referee, an apolitical umpire, a mediator of interests. Having said that, I should make two other observations here. First, the state provides the general conditions for capitalism. It is not neutral about class issues or the success of the market economy. Its continued existence depends on its tax collection, which relies in turn on “the prosperity and continued profitability of the economy”.⁸² It intervenes in the economy through regulation and welfare. It ensures the rule of law and the reproduction of labour power through new generations. In the process, it is prepared to negotiate material concessions to ensure social cohesion, the active consent of the population, and a stable capitalist society.

The second point is that the state can favour certain interests, and does show bias. Formal equality can and does mask inequality in resources, power and influence. New Zealand women might have had suffrage, but they did not have formal equality as economic subjects. Yet the nature of domesticity was not determined simply by the relative power of those who stood to benefit from it and the weakness of those who opposed it. To some extent, the state is powerful and can ignore or respond to particular interests to suit itself. Importantly for domesticity, the state has interests of its own. Its responsibilities for maintaining internal social order, as a coordinating institution and as a member of the international community, mean that it has military and police powers.⁸³ Women’s domesticity was simply not high on the state’s list of priorities. In times of crisis, for example during a labour shortage, the supply of labour becomes more important than supporting domesticity. Promoting women’s paid employment became an interest of the postwar New Zealand state because it was a major employer of female labour; a fifth of all women in paid employment were engaged in the public sector. Thus policy on domesticity could sometimes change even when women were not agitating for it. Women’s groups were agitating on behalf of housewives for more domestic servants in 1940s and they were largely ignored! The state, because it was not thoroughly committed to women’s domesticity, was an active force in bringing about change in women’s wage-earning. For at times its own interests relied on wage-earning women.

82. Claus Offe, “Some Contradictions of the Modern Welfare State”, *Praxis International*, 1 (1981), p. 221.

83. Fred Block, “Beyond Relative Autonomy: State Managers as Historical Subjects” in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds), *Socialist Register 1980* (London, 1980), pp. 227–242; Eric A. Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 1–38; Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results”, *Archives Européennes de sociologie*, 25 (1984), pp. 185–213.

The "limits on mediated social engineering" view

There are significant limits to state power in a parliamentary democracy. Policies are constituted politically. This means that domesticity could be undermined even though most state agencies and social interests might support it. The "state" and "society" are not dichotomous, but form a complex economic, social and political relationship. Any unity the state achieves over an issue is gained politically. As a consequence, the implementation of policy is "inexact and uncertain, with many unintended outcomes".⁸⁴ The political process is liable to be affected by contingency, compromise and complexity as the state itself develops. For example, the state introduced the family allowances during a time of economic insecurity in order to shore up the male breadwinner. The state could not control the crisis, but it could compensate for its consequences. In the process, however, it ultimately undermined domesticity because family allowances in 1926 and 1946 were important precursors to the extension of welfare to women in their own right and to the equal-pay campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s.

CONCLUSION

The economic change of overwhelming importance this century for New Zealand women has been that nearly half the female population (aged sixteen to sixty-four) are now in paid employment, compared to one-quarter at the beginning of the period.⁸⁵ In the past, studies of women's declining domesticity took a simple view of the role of the state. State policy resulted from an interest group capturing it or a lobby forcing the state to make reforms. These studies, coming from various directions, risk a charge of functionalism by emphasizing that the state necessarily acted to further labourist, capitalist, patriarchal or feminist interests. I have shown that the state's response to such interests was neither as coherent nor as predictable as is suggested by these approaches, and involved the promotion of both women's breadwinning and domesticity at different times or in combination together. The state did not always uphold domesticity. Yet on occasions it did, especially in the immediate aftermath of wars and during depressions. This is not because of an inconsistent vacillation between different positions, but rather because the state does not have a single immutable policy with regard to women's wage-earning or domesticity. It has its own interests, especially as a major employer of female labour. The state steered a course between promoting and undermining domesticity, sometimes by design, sometimes as a result of feminist, liberal, capitalist or patriarchal pressures, and sometimes by accident. We are able to see its role in changing domesticity continually throughout the century and understand how it was that a

84. Brosnan, Rea and Wilson, "Labour Market Segmentation and the State", p. 670.

85. Davies, *Women's Labour Force Participation in New Zealand*, pp. 25–62.

country whose women were so thoroughly domesticated at the turn of the century became a country whose women, relatively speaking, have done so well.

Such empirical evidence leads us to revise our theory as well as our descriptions of the state's role in domesticity. Most importantly "the state" is probably too crude a category to be useful, along with "women" and "domesticity". By "unstitching" the state or breaking it down into a set of institutions operating in a democratic political environment, we are able to see its ambiguity over establishing a "domestic iron cage" for women. We are able to see its contradictory encouragements thereafter: one part of the state promoting domesticity while another promotes female independence.⁸⁶

86. For an extended discussion of these issues, see Melanie Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State* (Christchurch, NZ, 2000) forthcoming.