

# Oral HISTORY

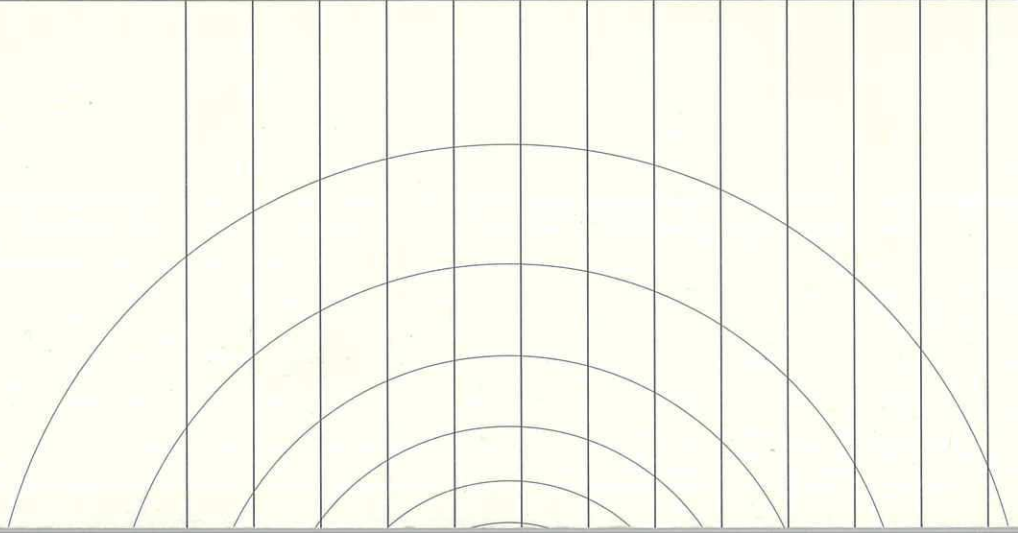
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*Oral History in New Zealand* is an annual publication of the National Oral History Association of New Zealand, Te Kete Kōrero-a-Waha o Te Motu (NOHANZ).

NOHANZ also publishes a newsletter three times a year. Its editors welcome news, letters, notes on sources, articles or reviews relevant to the principles and practice of oral history.

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# Editorial

This issue of the journal contains two articles on divergent themes that demonstrate the value of oral history for both understanding the past and contemporary social policy. The first article by Lesley Hall, explores the relationship between political activism and the family, and in particular the extent to which family responsibilities affected the political participation of women in the Communist Party of New Zealand between the 1930s and 1950s. Hall's article illustrates the ways in which women constantly negotiated the tensions between family responsibilities and political activities in the context of a largely unaware and unconcerned male Party membership. The egalitarian socialist family was far from the experience of many of the women who were either members or associated with the Communist Party during these decades. Few will be surprised at the parallels between these experiences more than half a century ago and contemporary problems faced by women combining paid work and the care of children. Would that oral history also played a greater role in social policy formation on these issues.

The second article, by Janett Levien, explores two unrelated social changes through the lens of oral histories: the deinstitutionalisation of people with intellectual disabilities; and the evidence of 'sea-change' - the movement of people from urban to provincial or rural lifestyles. In the case of the former, Levien argues, oral history provided the means to evaluate the impact of a specific policy initiative from the perspectives of both families and community care staff. In the second case study, that of sea-changers, oral history has the potential to influence the shape future social policy, providing essential information for policy decision-making. In addition to the two major articles, this issue includes a number of oral history reports, most of which are based on presentations given at the NOHANZ conference in Christchurch in July 2005. Jacqui Foley writes of her experiences interviewing people for the New Zealand Antarctic Society's project on expeditions to that continent in the 1950s. Christina Tuapola describes the project she and Erolia Ifopo have been recording with early Samoan immigrants to Christchurch. Dorothy McMenemy's interviews with leprosy sufferers who spent time on Makogai island in Fiji illuminates an interesting and under-studied area of Pacific history, and Guy Spurr's piece on gold miners in Waihi shows us that businesses can be both commercial and civic-minded.

Book reviews complete the journal's contents, and this year cover books published in New Zealand and overseas.



# The personal is also political:

## The relationship between political activism and family life among members of the Communist Party of New Zealand

LESLEY HALL

The theme for this year's NOHANZ conference was reflecting on public events from the 1930s to the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> My doctoral research about gender relations and the role of women in the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ) from 1921 to 1970 contained a wealth of material relevant to this focus.<sup>2</sup> Oral history was chosen as the method of data collection because little written information exists about my topic; it seemed not just the best, but the only, method of collecting substantial information about women's experiences in the CPNZ. The topic I selected for discussion at the conference was the relationship between politics and the family; not only how political activism impacted on the family lives of members of the CPNZ but also how family responsibilities affected (the degree of) women's political involvement. I chose this issue partly because it filled a gap in the diverse range of topics on the conference programme but also because of its contemporary relevance. Work/family balance is currently a topic of some concern for feminists, policy analysts, politicians, employers and, most importantly, family members themselves, as they attempt to juggle often conflicting demands and needs. Perhaps something useful could be gained though learning whether and how earlier generations managed the tension between private and public activities.

After a brief discussion of oral history methodology I will give a brief synopsis of Marxist theory and Soviet ideologies of 'the family', and define the use of the terms 'family' and 'politics'. What then follows is a discussion of some of the ways that politics impacted on the family, and vice versa. Drawbacks of Party membership for the family discussed by narrators included absentee fathers, the CPNZ's needs being prioritised over those of the family, financial hardship, party interference in family lives, police and SIS surveillance and raids, and

public vilification of the CPNZ and its members.<sup>3</sup> Stated benefits of Party involvement for family members included (often lifelong) friendships, meeting interesting and stimulating people; the excitement of being involved in a movement for social change; and being part of a national and international family.

The narratives show that members both gave and received services normally expected of one's extended biological family, such as shared meals, board, advice, and sometimes direction about family problems. When male Party members married it invariably meant that the CPNZ gained two members for the price of one. Women's unpaid work freed men to be publicly, politically active while (most) women/wives toiled meaningfully, purposefully in the background. The arrival of children invariably meant that previously politically active women were severely constrained in their ability to remain involved, and many drifted away.<sup>4</sup>

### Oral history

Traditionally, history and politics have tended to focus on significant achievements and/or events, often to the exclusion of relationships. Helen Irving argues that history has conventionally been mostly a record of public action outside the domestic realm, the stage upon which men have strutted, as if they had no *inner* life, either emotional or domestic.<sup>5</sup> Many feminists have challenged the tendency to separate private and public spheres; such a dichotomy is false, they argue, as each is dependent on the other. One of the purposes of my thesis was to illuminate the relationship between family and political activity.

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One of the benefits of oral history is its potential for recovering those individuals and groups previously hidden from history – marginalised and oppressed groups such as the working class, women, lesbians and, in New Zealand, Māori.<sup>6</sup> Information about women's participation in the CPNZ is, in the written record, generally scattered and sparse, lending support to Marilyn Waring's claim that if unpaid productive labour is invisible, then women remain invisible.<sup>7</sup> I considered oral history to be the only possible route for the 'retrieval of perceptions and experiences' about women's participation in the CPNZ.<sup>8</sup> Previously unknown aspects of the past could be discovered from the perspective of women themselves, not just from the very few women high in the Party hierarchy, but also from 'ordinary' women.<sup>9</sup> The narratives reveal how interwoven private and public spheres were – women's contribution, either directly or indirectly, freed many men to be politically active in and for the Party.

Paul Thompson claims that the most striking feature of oral history is the transforming impact upon the history of the family:

*Without its evidence the historian can discover very little about either the ordinary family's contacts with neighbours and kin, or its internal relationships. The roles of husband and wife, the upbringing of girls and boys, emotional and material conflicts and dependence ... sexual behaviour within and outside marriage, contraception and abortion – all these were effectively secret areas.<sup>10</sup>*

In the oral histories narrators discussed many matters commonly considered, and kept, private and, for the most part, omitted from the official record.<sup>11</sup> However, the research was intended to do more than fill gaps in the historical record; I also wanted to explore if and how practice diverged from political theory. In interpreting women's stories I have tried not to emphasise form over content, to stress deconstruction of individual narratives over analysis of social patterns.<sup>12</sup> However, as Megan Hutching argues, in preparing the oral material for publication I have committed an act of translation.<sup>13</sup> By setting women and men's experiences in social, historical, and ideological contexts, and viewing them through the lens of gender, it is hoped that my translation contributes to our understanding of the apparently contradictory effects of ideology and experience.<sup>14</sup>

## Politics

During the period from the 1930s to 1950s, New Zealand was a society in which sex roles were

distinct and in which femininity and masculinity were clearly delineated. Despite being the first country in the world to allow women the vote, politics was still viewed largely as a male preserve. Women were not the main political players and the first woman MP was not elected until 1933.<sup>15</sup> Traditionally, women have not been viewed as appropriate commentators on political topics because of the perception that they have an inadequate perspective from which to make political judgements, and frequently do not engage in political activities.<sup>16</sup> Until recently this has been the case in New Zealand and women have often been hidden actors in the political process.<sup>17</sup>

But what is meant by the term 'politics'. 'The personal is political' is a well-known feminist slogan that insists that personal or private issues should be subject to political analysis. Nevertheless, issues such as sexuality, the family, and domestic violence, although no longer always perceived as personal, are still largely subordinated to 'important' political issues such as the economy and foreign policy. 'Common sense' understanding of politics is of a public activity associated with political parties, pressure groups and Parliament;<sup>18</sup> political behaviour is often described in the context of a masculine ideal.<sup>19</sup>

In the CPNZ membership numbers fluctuated enormously from less than 10 at the Party's formation in 1921, 61 in 1928, 80 in 1932 to 350 in 1935, 272 in mid 1937, 375 in 1939 (a third of the total in Auckland), 690 in February 1939, 942 in November 1945, plus those in the armed forces.<sup>20</sup> However, there is some dispute about actual numbers. Kerry Taylor, for example, suggests that membership numbers were exaggerated on occasion. Oral testimony confirms research findings that the number of women members of the Party was always a fraction of the total, one or two per branch, occasionally more, supporting Grady's estimation of a female membership consistently round about 10 per cent,<sup>21</sup> figures that are consistent with both the British and Australian Communist Parties.<sup>22</sup>

Narrators claimed that the CPNZ considered the workplace to be the locus of revolutionary struggle and the Party's emphasis on industry, and the desire to be central to it, lasted for several decades. They maintained that many women members were married and, consistent with the social customs of the time, most were not in paid work. Consequently trade union work was almost exclusively the domain of male cadres. Even so, the consensus among those I interviewed was that women were not barred from undertaking any political activity they chose; the



CPNZ offered opportunities to women not available elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> Narrators argued that who did what in the Party was influenced by the possession of individual skills and abilities, traditional stereotypes and attitudes in New Zealand society as to what was appropriate behaviour for women and men, family responsibilities, the male culture of the CPNZ, and individual personality traits such as self-confidence.<sup>24</sup> Those women who engaged in stereotypically men's work often pushed themselves forward; mentoring, as we would describe it today was, it seems, rare. Fred Engels Freeman was one possible exception. During the 1930s he picked 'bright young things' like Elsie Locke, Gordon Watson and Connie Birchfield and moulded them his way.<sup>25</sup> Locke, who later married, then divorced Freeman, commented much later on the wastefulness resulting from men's sexist attitudes:

*One of the things that shocked me was that organisations didn't make use of their women. Women were quite prepared to do a great deal more than they were given the opportunity to do. It was just a fixed attitude on the part of the men. It wasn't a matter of hostility but of custom. It was true of the Party, trade unions and the unemployed (workers movement).<sup>26</sup>*

She eventually came to the conclusion that 'parties are (not) the real politics'; the real politics are 'what goes on with people at the grass roots.' This highlights the belief that politically gender inequality is not only reflected in women's roles, it is also manifested in what politics is defined as, the prioritising of political issues, and who has the power to name – whose definition counts? There is some dispute as to which tasks were considered political work; women generally gave a broader definition than was (and is) commonly accepted. According to narrators most men in the CPNZ did not consider issues such as consumer prices political ones, nor did they think that being actively involved in community organisations such as school boards was important work.<sup>27</sup> Community involvement, such as serving on school committees or at Playcentre, was viewed by many women cadres as Party political work, but not always by the Party leadership.

### What is a 'family'?

There is no universal definition of a family. Nevertheless, when telling their stories narrators discussed the family in traditional Pakeha terms – as consisting of mother, father and children. Others discussed their association with the CPNZ, and/or the international Communist Movement as being

part of a larger family. Connie Purdue expressed this view most clearly:

*The Party always came first, it was my other family, an international family, and one of great importance ... I thought when I was in the Communist Party and working for the Communist Party, I was really working for my family wasn't I? To bring about a world where they could live a complete life without being destroyed by war, and also destroyed in another way by unemployment ... to work for my family, and to work for a Communist New Zealand, were identical objectives.*

Motifs and themes often emerge in oral history and the extract above could be categorised as a narrative that is a 'legacy to posterity'.<sup>28</sup> In the telling of her story Purdue perhaps composed memories that helped her to feel relatively comfortable with her life and identity, in order to give her 'a feeling of composure'.<sup>29</sup> How she felt about the conflict between Party and family at the time, if she indeed felt any conflict at all, is difficult to gauge.<sup>30</sup> However, she claimed that the strong level of commitment expected by the Party was the main reason why her first marriage eventually broke up:

*My first loyalty was to the Party and he must have got lonely ... You see your family should come first, especially your partner, but it wasn't; it was Karl Marx.*

I should have probed further as to what she meant by this. Did she mean that she prioritised Party commitments over marital 'duties'; was this an example of a clash of ideologies? There is certainly an implied reference to what it means to be a good wife and/or good mother and the tension of this with being a good Party man (or woman).<sup>31</sup>

Purdue claimed that, although within the CPNZ they did not discuss marriage in its 'intimate details', the fundamental belief was that the family was a form of exploitation and oppression. Her choice to prioritise the Party over her marriage was, presumably, not a complete surprise to her husband who appears to have gone into the marriage aware of her activities, beliefs and commitment. Purdue's narrative appears to be one of justification rather than one told in the form of self-discovery.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, how Purdue makes sense of the effect of political activism on her husband and family, how she 'shaped her performance' for me and future listeners,<sup>33</sup> should be viewed in the context of my position as a feminist researcher.<sup>34</sup>

Alistair Thomson argues that over time 'we remember our experiences as those public meanings change. There is constant negotiation between



experience and sense, private and public memory.<sup>35</sup> Or as Alessandro Portelli says, there is a difference between 'the time of the events and the time of the telling, the time of history and the time of discourse'.<sup>36</sup> Through the process of remembering and telling their story the historical and narrative subject changes. Purdue's story is an example of this.

Rona Bailey discussed the difficulty of separating the private (family) from the public (party activities):

*There's no doubt about it that, you know, Party work was predominant over personal life. But it's hard to divide that because, that was the excitement, it wasn't a chore in that sense ... I saw it very much in a holistic way, what we were doing.*<sup>37</sup>

Elsie Locke reflected on the tension between political action and caring for a family with considerable insight:

*Now when you ask what are the big problems, I think the thing that bothers you when you're involved in political work and it would apply to any political party where you were doing important or serious or dedicated work, is that you sometimes have a conflict between what the children require and what your party requires. If there is an important meeting or conference on and your child was a bit off colour, or a child said: Oh Mummy don't go out today, I don't want you to this or that. What do you do? You're torn apart. I had some very difficult decisions to make in deciding whether it would be the Party or the child ... it was often very hard to explain to Party people because by and large, again with me you see, they did not understand that commitment to the child and that you were fully responsible ... it was a live human being I was responsible for ... Those were ... conflicts ... in the sort of everyday material things of running your life. But I tell you that I know quite a lot of people, political people, and there's some Labour Party people whose kids would have nothing to do with politics for the rest of their lives. They'd say: It ruined our lives; we didn't have any proper family life. Dad was always out at meetings or Mum was always at meetings. Now, I never held back on the kids, and on that I would have had the full support of Jack.*

She added that within the CPNZ hierarchy, there was little understanding of the difficulties of combining motherhood with political activity.

Like Elsie Locke most of those interviewed assumed traditional gender roles within the family, especially where there were children. As a sexual division of labour existed in New Zealand at the time, in both public and private spheres, it should come as no surprise that this was, generally speaking, replicated within the CPNZ. However, the following

comment indicates that some men, perhaps only a few, and perhaps only with the benefit of hindsight in the context of changing ideologies, shared similar concerns to many women cadres - the level of commitment expected of Party membership often strained relationships:

*From my own health point of view and from my family point of view we had had enough. I was married with 3 boys and that freedom and leisure I enjoyed ... not having to attend all these meetings after all these years was such a relief ... there's a limit ... the Party itself [was] starting to have troubles ... and we'd get instructions ... without being consulted.*<sup>38</sup>

### Ideologies of the family

It seems logical to expect that a radical or progressive political organisation, especially one concerned with the exploitation of one class by another, might challenge societal norms. This is particularly so in terms of family relations because, in theory, CPNZ members had three significant theories or models of the family to draw on. Participation in Marxist study groups was a requirement of Party membership and, in addition to Marxist theory, cadres viewed the USSR as socialism in action. Both Marxism and Soviet ideologies of the family offered alternatives to prevalent beliefs about the family in New Zealand. One would expect that if, for example, socialist theories suggest that women's involvement in paid work is one way women can become liberated, and that cadres understood that Russian women were increasingly participating in industry; one could imagine some support for, or some debate about, married women members taking up paid employment. However, Marxist theory and Soviet ideology notwithstanding, oral narratives suggest that CPNZ men (and some women) were often socially conservative and upheld cultural stereotypes of femininity and masculinity.

Members of the CPNZ had access to writings by Marx, Engels, Bebel and Lenin and a few excerpts from their writings demonstrate the weight these theorists placed on the family changing its form.<sup>39</sup> Marx argued that it must 'be both understood in its contradiction and revolutionised... [It must] be destroyed in theory and practice.'<sup>40</sup> Engels, who published *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in 1884 after Marx's death, has been the person most cited in discussions of Marxist theory of the family. He claimed that bourgeois (middle class) marriage was a form of sexual slavery that was in



effect compulsory for women. He expected there to be changes in relationships between men and women once capitalism had been eliminated; only then could romantic love be possible:

*Full freedom of marriage can (therefore) only be generally established when the abolition of capitalist production and the property relations created by it has removed all the accompanying economic considerations which still exert such a powerful influence on the choice of a marriage partner. For then there is no other motive left except mutual inclination.<sup>41</sup>*

Bebel, whose *Women and Socialism* pre-dated Engels, was critical of self-interested men who did not support women's emancipation:

*There are socialists who are not less opposed to the emancipation of women than the capitalist to socialism. Every socialist recognizes the dependence of the workman on the capitalist, and cannot understand that others and especially the capitalists themselves should fail to recognize it also; but the same socialist often does not recognize the dependence of women on men because the question touches his own dear self more or less nearly. The effort to defend real or imaginary interests, which of course are always indubitable, and unassailable, makes people so blind.<sup>42</sup>*

Lenin, following Engels, committed the party to the principle of communal housework, as he identified women's unpaid labour in the family household as a major barrier to further progress for women.<sup>43</sup> He was, according to Clara Zetkin, disappointed with men's failure to help women with domestic work, because of what he perceived as their deeply entrenched views of men and women's roles: 'They want their peace and comfort. The old master right of the man still lives in secret ... We must root out the old 'master' idea to its last and smallest root, in the Party and among the masses.'<sup>44</sup> Much later Zetkin claimed that Lenin told her: '... scratch a communist and find a philistine.'<sup>45</sup>

Many narrators recalled discussions about 'the woman question', particularly Engels' writings. Ron Smith, when asked whether he could remember any of Engels' key points, said modestly:

*Um, well only in general. I'd have to re-read it again to bring it back to mind – the concept of a matriarchal society a way back and that sort of thing, and the development of family arising out of property relationships, and the need for inheritance and some of those things, and a question of prostitution or something ...*

This summary and the one that follows suggest that criticism that memory is unreliable is arguable.<sup>46</sup> Selwyn Devereux offered the following analysis:

*Engels points out (that) in capitalist society working class women are the slaves of slaves and they have, insofar as they recognise the fact of their slavery, their common slavery, their common position with their male counterparts, they have the responsibility historically speaking, of joining with the men to rid the world of the division, rid the world of the forces that cause society to be divided between classes which have an economic base.*

Some members said that they found Engels exciting and much easier to read than many other texts they were expected to study. However, few people recalled reading much literature about women. Elsie Locke was the exception; she said that reading Bebel in the 1930s made a great impression on her. Alexandra Kollontai, the only woman member of the Central Committee after the Russian revolution, was virtually unknown to narrators. Elsie Locke claimed that her writings were not available then, but she had been promoted in Party circles as an example of 'women can be anything'. Locke also read a 'little book' of Clara Zetkin's, and one of Lenin's about the position of women, but with most, mention of prominent women in the international Communist movement generally drew a blank.

Soviet newspapers such as *The Soviet News* were read in most Party members' homes and its presentation of life in the USSR was utilised as an ideal to which New Zealand should aspire; indeed the USSR was promoted as *the* role model. Good childcare, educational and health facilities were all admired and considered to benefit families. Ron Smith's story attests to members' familiarity with Soviet ideology of the family:

*I've got pamphlets put out by the Soviet Society in Britain I think, Soviet Friendship Society and sponsored here by the Society for Closer Relations with Russia on the family and the Soviet Union, and boasting the fact that they had this childcare on this mass scale, and workplace feeding; restaurants associated with workplaces and that sort of thing, and the collective farms and, you know, the busy times, the harvest times, and that sort of thing; provided similar childcare for the children on collective farms.*

There was general acceptance by narrators that women in the USSR were infinitely better off, and much more respected: 'Russian women tended to be bigger, stronger, physically more competent than women in the capitalist world.' Russian women's involvement in the paid workforce was admired within the CPNZ and most believed that there was equality of the sexes in the Soviet Union. Admiration of Russian



working women notwithstanding, there was little attempt to follow in their footsteps in New Zealand.

### New Zealand Ideology of the Family

Having established that most narrators demonstrated at least some knowledge of Marxist theory and Soviet ideology of the family, what difference did it make to the practice of CPNZ members' family lives? Ron Smith maintains that a few individual men did try to put theory into practice:

*Theoretically, you know, we would argue, and read books and that sort of thing, about the need for liberating women from housework, and assisting them to participate in social struggles, and some comrades made better efforts than others I guess to achieve this.*

However, many women's stories said otherwise, maintaining that most male cadres did not practice socialism in their own homes, and prioritised their Party work over their families. Is Ron Smith's tentative statement an attempt to convince 'particular publics' of the CPNZ commitment to women's equal rights? It certainly seems to support this observation by Alistair Thomson:

*We compose our memories so that they will fit in with what is publicly acceptable, or, if we have been excluded from general public acceptance, we seek out particular publics which affirm our identities and the way we want to remember our lives.<sup>47</sup>*

There was little evidence in the oral histories of any encouragement from the Party for women to get paid work as the first step towards liberation. Elsie Locke, referring to the socialisation of housework, laundries and communal restaurants, as spelled out by Engels, explained why it wasn't tried here: 'It was something that had no practical application to our circumstances. It was just something that would be very nice in the future, when we got there,' after the revolution. Apparently neither Marxist theory nor Soviet ideology of the family had much impact other than in abstract terms.

Rhona Edwards,<sup>48</sup> who read Engels in her first year of joining the Party in Great Britain, claimed to have accepted his arguments, and even discussed them at classes in Marx House in London. However, she still eventually married: 'marriage was the answer.' Although narratives revealed that some couples, like Rona Bailey and her husband Chip, negotiated a division of labour that enabled both to be politically active, most marriages had a traditional sexual division of labour that left many women at home literally minding the baby. Most families were like many

others in New Zealand – Dad was the breadwinner, Mum the homemaker. In various ways Party members rationalised why, in the end, they conformed to New Zealand society's expectations, rather than resisting them. Ron Smith:

*Oh I've been criticised I think ... that I sort of hog the limelight and I suppose I did in the sense (I) didn't give Carmen a chance to develop, but the chance to develop depends on family ties to a substantial extent. I mean I tried to help her develop, maybe it's hard to judge your own subjective attitude on these things, and tried to pull my weight. Who knows, it might have been male chauvinism and I suppose it was, but the facts of life are with six children, as we ended up with, it's just a full time job looking after six children. So she gradually drifted out of it.*

However, he did claim to have been affected by Marxist theory a little:

*Well only I suppose that I tried to draw Carmen into the Party activity and share the work in the house ... but nevertheless I mean the fact is that most of the household cleaning and laundering and stuff was done by her I guess. Yeah, I suppose it affected my attitude in that sense, and I tried to pull my weight more. There was a feeling all the time you know that you had important Party duties to do and so on. And you were the only one that could do it; and this was either to be done from the class struggle sort of thing, so it wasn't exactly that you wanted to be pushing yourself forward, but that it was Party responsibility and the need of the class struggles you know. You tended to hog the work, or allocated the work shall we put it that way, to the detriment of pulling your weight in the family sense.*

Elsie Locke, who in the 1930s had described marriage as a form of capitalist bondage, eventually came to view men and women as having complementary roles in marriage. After becoming a full-time mother, she recognised that economic independence is basic to 'women's right to human freedom' and she later modified her original, more dogmatic position to argue that the caring work that women do is 'a positive role that should be cherished.'<sup>49</sup> Most of those interviewed did not view the sexual division of labour within their families as compliance with cultural norms; they described their actions as a combination of practicality and personal choice. Elsie Locke had this to say:

*You see women couldn't earn enough. We couldn't reverse our situation. When I married Jack and came to live here, Jack was the breadwinner ... when he was at work and I looked after the kids, there was no alternative: I could never have earned as much as him. And we didn't*



*have much to come and go on then, and this would apply to most families ... I was used to managing on small (amounts), I'd had to do it in my own home growing up, and when I was in High School I knew how Mum managed, and I really wanted to bring up the kids myself. It wasn't an issue.*

This passage illustrates why it is so important to understand the context in which narrators lived. As Sangster argues, 'how women explain, rationalize and make sense of their past offers insight into the social and material framework within which they operated.'<sup>50</sup>

### Impact of CPNZ membership on the family

Several narrators claimed that negative media portrayals of Communists often affected families of origin and children. In at least one case public vilification of CPNZ members was given as the reason why one woman left the Party and why, to this day, she does still not talk openly, even to her friends, about her involvement. Flora Gould's story demonstrates how potentially damaging bad press could be. Gould joined the CPNZ some years after her first husband died in the 1930s. She described how the school urged her father-in-law to take her children away from her as her Party membership was evidence that she was not of good character. The children remained with their mother but the oral histories show that this was not an isolated incident.

The vilification of Communists in New Zealand, the general fear of 'reds under the beds', particularly in the post-war McCarthy era impacted, often negatively, on relationships with CPNZ members' families of origin. Rona Bailey, who came from a privileged background, was regularly mentioned in the New Zealand media, and this was the cause of tension between her and her parents, well-known local business people in Gisborne:

*Truth couldn't understand why I, with my background ... they never really understood why I did what I did. My father felt I'd wasted my life and he said so to me ... It was pretty hard for them up in Gissy [Gisborne] you know, when I think about it now. I mean me appearing in Truth every other week wouldn't help the situation you know. Small town New Zealand ... I mean there was never a break with the family although there were some tricky spots.*

Frances Cherry's autobiographical novel also illustrates the strength of negative public perception during the period under discussion:

*To be a Communist is the worst thing you could be. Worse than being a leper. Everyone thinks Communists*

*are trying to take over the world, that they eat babies, cut people up, and make them into meat pies.'*<sup>51</sup>

Several narrators described incidents in which they or their children were discouraged or banned from playing with other children because of the family's Party affiliation. Elsie Locke sympathised with children having to stand up for their parents opinions: 'with which they may not agree, and certainly which they didn't help to form.' Her own son used humour to deal with such situations but years later told his mother that 'it was more painful than he dared to show.'<sup>52</sup>

Given such vilification it is understandable why within Party circles members gained a sense of shared community and belonging. Party activities such as picnics and dances were family affairs and through such functions the public and private intertwined. It is not surprising that the Party became in effect an extended family, one that was indeed a 'haven in a heartless world'.<sup>53</sup> Rona Bailey had this to say:

*When you're surrounded, ... it's a siege mentality, and we felt we were on the right side for progress, for humanity, and for this country, and therefore you don't give fodder to the enemy, because the critics were the enemy in that sense, and you don't give fodder to them... even within your own family, you protect your own family ...*

But even families have rifts. She went on to say: *I was very antagonistic to a lot of the people that left at the time of Hungary but I don't feel I saw them in enemies in the same way some other people in the Communist party saw them as real class enemies ... I can't really say that I feel I [was] wrong to stay and that they were brighter if you like than I, or cleverer, or saw the writing on the wall earlier than I did ... whether I'm fooling myself on this I'm not sure, or whether I'm trying to justify my action, I'm still not quite sure ... I don't regret my staying ... and I don't feel it was wasted.*

Commie-bashing was a source of anxiety for some women and the reason why some claimed they left the Party. Painful memories about this period of their lives continue to cause distress for some narrators, reinforcing the view that rather than preserving literal memories of the past, we 'hold on to the meaning, sense and emotions these experiences provided us'.<sup>54</sup> In my experience feelings or an emotional memory are strong indicators of the meaning people give life events.

The effects of Party membership on family life were often considerable. A few narrators discussed how their husbands were directed into work for which they were less qualified, or less suited, because the



Party needed someone of influence in a particular area. Joy Damousi suggests that in Australia this device was used to 'toughen them up'.<sup>55</sup> Sacrifices expected of Party members, from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective seem inconceivable. A few narrators told of criticism directed at them for spending money on personal things when the Party was in dire needs of funds; one couple was reprimanded for buying furniture. The following example reveals not only astonishing personal sacrifice, but also perhaps, the pressure felt by members to comply with appeals for financial aid:

*I didn't want to part with the things we valued in my family, my father's ring, it had a beautiful diamond in it, and his tie pin with a beautiful diamond and many other things that I got from Mum's side of the family or from Dad ... it wasn't really their worth in pounds that mattered to me, but they meant a lot to me and when we needed, when I say we, I mean the communists; when we needed a new press here in Auckland and we were running things at the Old Trades Hall ... we had no money for the press so what we did we asked all the Party members to give anything that that was of monetary value that they could possibly part with, so the group that met at our place every week just decided that, oh well, if [we] had any jewellery or anything like that we could give that ... Well, they decided you don't need, that can go, that can go, and yes, 'Haven't you got any jewellery from your family', so we all gave, not only us, all the Party members in every group were asked the same and we produced enough money to get, to pay for the press, to pay for the machinery. So I always felt you know, I had felt sad and missed the things and wanted them, it wasn't very willingly, that wasn't a very willing sacrifice on my part ... it was nothing to do with us in the group personally, it was orders.<sup>56</sup>*

Many women, both members and wives of Party members, indicated that parenting was largely left to them; and that children were, for the most part, neglected by their fathers. This is not to suggest that CPNZ men neglected their children more than fathers generally; indeed it was claimed by at least one narrator that Communist men, generally, were 'wonderful fathers'.<sup>57</sup> Elsie Locke was particularly clear about Jack's exceptional parenting skills and his support for her decisions when Party and family demands were at odds. One example of this is when she felt torn between writing (unpaid) for the CPNZ and submitting articles elsewhere in an attempt to contribute to the household income. The struggle was, she claimed, mainly one of time: 'I can only get the time and mental freedom for a slap at substantial work when I am able to employ help in the house for

a few hours'. However, this is also a clear example of the conflict between the family's financial needs and the Party's need for members to provide written contributions for publications.

A number of narrators discussed the role of the National Control Commission (NCC) as a body that confronted members about 'real personal stuff' such as domestic violence, infidelity, or any behaviour that could reflect badly on the Party. Although largely publicly unacknowledged, the Party disapproved of wife-battering and, on occasion, heavy drinking.<sup>58</sup> Contravening the prevalent cultural norm at the time, that a man's house was his castle, the Party intervened in personal matters via the NCC, in effect 'keeping it in the family.' Narratives reveal both positive and negative interpretations of the NCC's involvement in people's personal lives. However, they also demonstrate the difficulty of trying to separate public and private worlds.

## Conclusion

What do the oral histories reveal about the relationship between family and political activism? Marxist theory and Soviet ideology were not entirely absent from the practice of family life. Some couples, where both were active members, negotiated to maintain political and paid work by sharing domestic duties. In other families the wife took the traditional role of unpaid worker at home and fitted political work around her family responsibilities. Unsurprisingly, I found no evidence of a universal New Zealand Communist family, but a gap between Marxist theory and practice was apparent in most cases. Some families were extremely traditional; others were more radical in their practice of family life. However on the whole, Marxist theory of the family impacted little on daily life; New Zealand ideology had far more impact than either Engels' *Origins* or the Soviet example.

What did impinge on family life were negative media portrayals of Communists and direction by the CPNZ on either where, or how, to live and work. Some Party members changed location and occupations at the Party's behest, and at an individual family level this often, in both material and social terms, was problematic. However, such sacrifices were both demanded and often complied with, because the needs of the Communist movement were prioritised over the individual, or the family. Similar motives led the Party, via the National Control Commission, to intervene in intimate personal matters, illustrating, in practice at



least, that public and private spheres were interrelated. In an attempt to present a more acceptable image, the Party in some instances criticised, and attempted to put a stop to, any behaviour by CPNZ members deemed damaging to their negative public profile. Many narrators were very positive about their experiences in the CPNZ; they claimed that shared political beliefs were the cement that kept husbands and wives together.

Wives of male members of the CPNZ were vital to the Party's continued existence. It was women who kept the home fires burning while CPNZ men were in prison for Party-related offences; it was wives who generally cared for children while men attended frequent Party meetings and conferences, or while they served in the military. Men's absence from home – in local, national and international forums – was a barrier to women's active participation in the Party in many cases; to all intents and purposes women often parented alone.

Those women who were more politically active made their own arrangements for childcare, usually with other women, or fitted their political activities around their family responsibilities. Like working mothers today, many found juggling the duties associated with both private and public spheres challenging. The high degree of commitment expected from CPNZ members meant that many women left the Party, or opted not to join, when the prospect of keeping all the balls in the air at the same time seemed too difficult.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This period included a number of significant national and international public events or episodes such as the Depression, World War Two, the Cold War, the election of the first Labour government, the 1951 Lockout, the establishment of what eventually became known as the Family Planning Association and the Parents' Centre and Playcentre Movement. This was also the period during which most oral histories recorded for my doctoral research (from which most of the data for this article is drawn) were members or involved with the CPNZ.
- <sup>2</sup> For the thesis approximately 75 hours of oral histories were recorded during the early to mid 1990s. The length of each interview varied, depending mostly upon the degree of active involvement subjects had had with the Communist Party of New Zealand. In total 35 people provided oral histories about their involvement with the CPNZ, although many others were consulted for information. I deliberately set out to interview not only those who had a high public profile but also those 'ladies in the backroom' (Kedgley, 1972). Of the 35 there were 33 women and 2 men; 26 were members of the Party; 4 were non-members married to male Party members and/or fellow-travellers. In addition, seven children of CPNZ members were interviewed; three of those also became Party members. With the exception of most children of CPNZ members, all but one interview subject were retired from paid work. Most were

residing in their own homes in reasonably affluent areas such as Mount Victoria in Wellington or Titirangi in Auckland; only a minority was living in working class or state housing areas. Most interviewees were in their seventies and eighties – the oldest interviewee was 93 and still working part-time – and five children of CPNZ members were in their thirties, forties and fifties. Most interviewees were Pakeha; three were Jewish by birth or marriage, and one was Asian. In addition to the oral histories I recorded I also drew on relevant recorded material archived at the Oral History Centre, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

- <sup>3</sup> Because of space restrictions only a few of the issues have been selected for discussion here. For further information see Lesley Hall, 'Better Red Than Wed: Gender Relations and the Role of Women in the Communist Party of New Zealand, 1921-1970', unpublished PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2003.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp 341-368.
- <sup>5</sup> Helen Irving, 'History and the 'Insider'' in Susan Magarey with Caroline Guerin and Paula Hamilton (eds) *Writing Lives: Feminist Biography and Autobiography*, Adelaide, 1992, p.105.
- <sup>6</sup> Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998; Joan Sangster, 'Telling our stories: feminist debates and the use of oral history', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998; Alison Laurie, *Lady-Husbands and Kamp Ladies. Pre-1970 Lesbian Life in Aotearoa/New Zealand*; Rachael Selby and Alison Laurie (eds), *Māori and Oral History: A Collection*, Wellington, 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> Marilyn Waring, *Counting For Nothing: What Men Value and What Women Are Worth*, Wellington, 1988.
- <sup>8</sup> Tamara Hareven, 'The Search for Generational Memory' in David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds), *Oral History: an Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2nd edition, Walnut Creek, California, 1996, p.248.
- <sup>9</sup> Extracts from the narratives included here are from both women considered 'exceptional' such as Elsie Locke and 'ordinary' women low in the Party hierarchy. Although some were more articulate than others there were, on the whole, not significant differences in their stories about the relationship between politics and the family.
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past: Oral History' in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, p.25.
- <sup>11</sup> A number of narrators discussed scandals within the party and some references to personal matters are found recorded in CPNZ minutes. For example in Dunedin Ian Jamieson, Party organiser at the time, became involved with Sybil Rockwell, who was the office secretary. This caused concern within the CPNZ (Hynes cited in Hall, 2003, p.319, footnote 27.
- <sup>12</sup> Sangster, p.97.
- <sup>13</sup> 'The Distance Between Voice and Transcript' in Anna Green and Megan Hutching (eds), *Remembering: Writing Oral History*, Auckland, 2004, p.169.
- <sup>14</sup> Sangster, p.91.
- <sup>15</sup> Elizabeth McCombs was New Zealand's first woman MP. She first stood for Parliament in the Kaiapoi electorate in 1928, and was eventually elected in a by-election in Lyttelton in 1933, necessitated by the death of her husband.
- <sup>16</sup> Barbara Nelson, cited in Jane S. Jacquette, 'Political science – whose common good?' in Dale Spender and Cheryl Kramarac (eds) *The Knowledge Explosion*, Hemel Hempstead, 1993, p. 141.



- <sup>17</sup> Helena Catt and Elizabeth McLeay, *Women and Politics in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1993.
- <sup>18</sup> Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Debates: Issues of Theory and Political Practice*, Basingstoke, 1999, p.90.
- <sup>19</sup> Jacquette, p. 142.
- <sup>20</sup> Jonathan B. Hasler, 'New Zealand Communists, 1920-1945', unpublished B.A. (Hons) Research Essay, Massey University, 1983; Kerry Taylor, 'Worker's Vanguard Or People's Voice?: The Communist Party Of New Zealand From Origins To 1946', unpublished PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1994.
- <sup>21</sup> Janelle Grady, 'The Reds Who Made the Beds', unpublished M.A. Thesis Auckland University, 1983.
- <sup>22</sup> Sue Bruley Leninism, *Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain 1920-39*, London, 1986; Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890-1955*, Melbourne, 1994
- <sup>23</sup> Women members such as Connie Birchfield, who were willing to carry out tasks normally carried out by men e.g. public speaking, standing for local and national elections were not barred from doing so. This contrasted with the National and Labour Parties in which women were largely relegated to the 'backroom'. See Sue Kedgley, 'Ladies in the Backroom: A Study of Women Party Activists in the New Zealand National and Labour Parties', unpublished M.A. Thesis, Otago University, 1972.
- <sup>24</sup> Elsie Locke, for example, said that her mother was the original 'girls can do anything', and was a strong influence in giving her confidence in her ability. Her mother, who sneaked out of the house to vote in 1893, the first year that women could vote in New Zealand, taught her to stand on her own feet and never to accept being put down because she was a woman.
- <sup>25</sup> Bert Roth cited in Crosado, 1976:OHC 462-465, interview with Mr.and Mrs. Ted Whitlow.
- <sup>26</sup> Grady, p.33. This is supported by Roberto Rabel, and Megan Cook, 'Women and the anti-Vietnam movement in New Zealand', *Oral History in New Zealand*, 1998, Vol.10, pp 1-5. Their study of people involved in the anti-Vietnam movement of the 1960s drew this response: 'Many of the 'Old Left', such as trade unionists, were 'quite sexist'.
- <sup>27</sup> There were of course exceptions to this. Some men recognized the importance of community involvement but the prevailing view of narrators was that issues to do with unions etc were the 'real' work. One woman, discussing the undervaluation of women's unpaid work said: 'I used to think to myself, Well, we're supposed to be communist with the welfare of the workers at heart, but any other workers except me'.
- <sup>28</sup> Mark Traugott, cited in Anna Green, 'Unpacking the Stories', in Green and Hutching (eds), *Remembering*, p. 14.
- <sup>29</sup> Paul Thompson cited in Green, 'Unpacking the Stories', p. 17.
- <sup>30</sup> Duncombe and Marsden warn researchers not to be fooled into thinking that narrators are able to 'recapture how they 'really' felt at the time' (See 'Can we research the private sphere? Methodological and ethical problems in the study of the role of intimate emotion in personal relationships', in Lydia Morris and E. Stina Lyon (eds), *Gender Relations in Public and Private: New Research Perspectives*, Great Britain, 1996, p.152).
- <sup>31</sup> Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890-1955*, Melbourne, 1994.
- <sup>32</sup> See Damousi, *Women Come Rally ...*, p.210. Damousi claimed that the women's stories she recorded were told more in the form of self-discovery than justification. See also Jean Peneff, 'Myths in life stories', in Paul Thompson and Samuel Raphael (eds) *The Myths We Live By*, London, 1990, p.39 for a discussion of narrative as confession.
- <sup>33</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, Wisconsin, 1997, p.5.
- <sup>34</sup> Feminist oral historians Patai and Gluck have discussed the desire of the narrator to please the interviewer, to tell their stories in such a way that they focus either on the issues important for the research project, or slant them in a way that they think the researcher will find acceptable. When telling their stories a number of interviewees paused to reframe an event based, in my view, on what they thought my feminist analysis of it might be. Because they were relating their stories to someone who had declared herself both a feminist and a Women's Studies doctoral student it is probable that some issues were discussed that might not have arisen with another interviewer, for example sexual harassment; others may have been expanded on in more depth. On the other hand, if the interviewee thought they, or the Party, may have been judged negatively by me (or others) as a result, some issues may have been omitted altogether; another interviewer could have recorded a different story.
- <sup>35</sup> Alistair Thomson, 'The Anzac Legend: Exploring National Myth and Memory in Australia', in Thompson and Raphael (eds) in *The Myths We Live By*, p.78.
- <sup>36</sup> Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia ...*
- <sup>37</sup> Bailey's narrative was less justificatory than Purdue's and was critically self-reflexive. It was clear however that she had commenced the process of 'self-discovery' before the oral history I recorded (See Damousi, p.210).
- <sup>38</sup> Interview with Jock Hunter by Cath Kelly, 27/9/88: OHAB 546, Oral History Centre, Alexander Turnbull Library.
- <sup>39</sup> The sophistication of their arguments is far more complex than I am able to show here. For the purposes of this article I have selected a few key points to show that alternative theoretical models of the family were available to CPNZ members; that they were read and discussed by them; and that they had little impact on the conduct of family life.
- <sup>40</sup> Karl Marx cited in Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression Of Women: Toward A Unitary Theory*, New Brunswick 1983,p.43.
- <sup>41</sup> Friedrich Engels cited in Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, New Jersey, 1988, p.226.
- <sup>42</sup> August Bebel cited in Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Harmondsworth, 1972, p.82.
- <sup>43</sup> Harry Pollitt, *Women and Communism: Selections from the Writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin*, London, 1950, p.120.
- <sup>44</sup> Pollitt, p.103.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> See for example Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories; Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia', in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, p.301.
- <sup>47</sup> My emphasis. Thomson, *ibid.* At the time of the interview Ron was in the final stages of terminal cancer. He may well have seen this as his last opportunity to put the record straight, yet another example of a 'legacy to posterity' narrative.
- <sup>48</sup> Edwards, who first joined the Communist Party in Britain, claimed that the CPNZ in the 1950s was *very* conservative: '(The) Party (here was) more male-dominated ... also in society. (In Britain the Party and society were more equal) ... I felt the male dominance was in the Central Committee of the Party here.' Edwards exemplifies the difficulty of trying

to balance family responsibilities with political activities. Without accessible childcare she experienced conflict between the demands of paid work, the reality of caring for her family as a solo parent, and the expectations of party membership. Consequently, she eventually drifted away.

<sup>49</sup> Elsie Locke, 'Towards the Future' in *A Report on the United Women's Convention 3-6 June, 1977*, p. 61.

<sup>50</sup> Alison Laurie, 'Speaking the Unspoken: Lesbian Oral Histories in Aotearoa New Zealand' in Green and Hutching (eds), *Remembering*, p.62.

<sup>51</sup> Frances Cherry, *Dancing With Strings*, Auckland, 1989, p.15.

<sup>52</sup> This is an example perhaps of the centrality of emotion in the long-term preservation and content of memories'. See Anna Green, 'Unpacking the Stories', in Green and Hutching (eds), *Remembering*, p.17.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged*, New York, 1977.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Scachter cited in Green, 'Unpacking the Stories', p. 17

<sup>55</sup> Damousi, p.192. Damousi also suggests that physical work was identified as a masculine activity. The CPNZ, like other Communist parties overseas, reinforced masculinity in a variety of ways.

<sup>56</sup> Audrey (a pseudonym) and her husband had been directed to move to Auckland in a position the CPNZ deemed suitable for his skills and the Party's needs. She often denies any agency by portraying herself as a victim of circumstance who supported her husband's politics because that was what was expected in her day. However, this particular narrator exemplifies reflecting on past ideology in the present, a 'present-past relationship which is at the core of life history' (See Green, 'Unpacking the Stories', p.15). Dana Jack's advice to listen for 'meta-statements' is relevant here. Audrey is recalling 'an issue involving conflicting values or meanings' (ibid).

<sup>57</sup> Jock Phillips argues that the world of New Zealand men from 1920-1950 was quite different from the needs and expectations.

*All interviews are held by the author.*



# Looking back to the future: A role for oral history in policy formation

JANETT LEVIEN

This article explores the potential of oral history (particularly when coupled to a grounded theory approach to analysis) to inform and shape policy. In order to demonstrate the potential of oral history to enhance policy decisions I first look back to a past project that sought to understand the impact of a specific set of policy decisions. This project was a longitudinal study of deinstitutionalisation of people with intellectual disability, and in particular the experience of their families in the process - from the time their family member entered an institution, through the process of being deinstitutionalised and rehoused in a community setting. And then I look forward to a totally unrelated trend that signals a developing challenge for policy makers. This is the emerging pattern of 'sea-change' where people make significant life-style changes through moving from urban centres to provincial rural or beach settings. In looking back at the deinstitutionalisation study I am able to illustrate the potential of oral history to inform specific policy developed in response to a perceived need in society. In considering the emerging issue of the trend to sea-change I examine the likely potential of oral history to contribute to the understanding of how more general policy influences individuals. Understanding also of how this might indicate future needs, as well as providing crucial insight into how to formulate more specific policy to meet those needs.

First a brief examination of the relationship between social research and policy sets the scene.

In April 2005 the [NZ] Social Sciences Reference Group reporting to the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology pointed out that the social sciences, 'have an important role in examining, questioning, challenging and informing public debate on matters of public concern.'<sup>1</sup> Despite this, in the same report it was

noted that, of the science system funding, only 2.3 -3 percent was going to the social sciences. The Reference Group also reported several gaps that needed addressing, commenting in particular that social research too often had a short term or narrow focus, that there was a need to strengthen the link between research and policy, and that interdisciplinary research (especially where social science played a full role with the physical sciences) needed to develop further. The report pointed out that the effectiveness of social science research was directly related to the extent to which policy-makers were able to understand the significance of research and evaluation for formulating policy.

A month later, in a report to social scientists, the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Committee (SPEaR) echoed many of the themes identified by the Reference Group in their report to the Ministry.<sup>2</sup> In addition to identifying the need to establish long-term research platforms and addressing the policy/research interface, SPEaR also referred to comments from Saville-Smith who pointed out the importance of including community in research agendas.<sup>3</sup>

Despite claims by the Social Science Reference Group that there has been considerable progress since 2001, the figures and issues are remarkably similar to those being discussed a decade ago when, for example, Ian Pool pointed out that in New Zealand in 1995-96 research for social policy was allocated only 2 percent of funding from the main government funding agency.<sup>4</sup> Pool suggested several reasons for the limited use of research in policy. There is a likelihood

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that policy-makers do not understand the findings as they frequently appear complex, have uncomfortable implications, or seem critical of policy. Pool went on to say that policy advisors may be more comfortable with ideologically driven initiatives that they present as if based on sound research (or conversely as 'common-sense').

At the same time Cheyne et al were pointing out that there was a need for a rigorous examination of the values inherent in the visions of society and social relationships that politicians and policy-makers pursue in developing policy.<sup>5</sup> While this may appear critical of government policy it points to the issue of whose vision of society and social relationships should inform policy. Oliver, for example, alerts us to the extent to which those at whom policy is aimed are marginalised not only through policy-maker's undervaluing of research-based knowledge, but also through the research approaches taken by those who seek to inform policy.<sup>6</sup>

If these concerns seem to echo those raised in the recent reports, then Pettigrew, Ferlie & McKee complete the picture with their observation that,

*Few studies allow the change process to reveal itself in any kind of substantially temporal or contextual manner ... where they limit themselves to a snap-shot rather than a time series they fail to provide data on the mechanisms and processes through which changes are created.*<sup>7</sup>

Does oral history, especially when coupled to a grounded theory analysis, have the potential to address these persistent issues in the interface between social research and policy development? I am taking oral history to be, as defined by Fyfe and Manson,

*... a record of information gathered in oral form, usually by electronic means, as a result of a planned interview. ... It is primarily a record of perceptions of the person interviewed whatever that person's position, occupation or circumstance. Oral history is a record of language and eyewitness accounts giving insights into society, its changing values and attitudes. In many instances, oral history gives a voice to those previously denied a chance to contribute to the recording of history.*<sup>8</sup>

Ingersoll and Ingersoll say that (compared to most sociological research) oral history is more personal, experiential and cumulatively productive of insights.<sup>9</sup> They go on to suggest that grounded theory may present a way to focus the data gathered through oral history methods. Grounded theory analysis as described by Charmaz consists of:

*... a set of inductive strategies for analysing data. That means you start with individual cases, incidents*

*or experiences and develop progressively more abstract conceptual categories to synthesize, to explain and to understand your data and to identify patterned relationships within it. ... Then you build your theoretical analysis on what you discover is relevant in the actual worlds that you study within this area.*<sup>10</sup>

The aim of grounded theory is to focus on the analysis of processes rather than to produce static analysis. This form of analysis is greatly enhanced by rich or 'thick' data. The data produced in oral history is thus ideal for grounded theory analysis. However, where oral historians may gather rich data to produce 'thick' description, grounded theorists do so to develop emergent theory, and in so doing focus on the meanings and values their respondents place upon social relations and events. Furthermore, oral history allows researchers to investigate ordinary people as well as exceptional ones.<sup>11</sup> Oral history, especially when used with grounded theory analysis may enhance the ability of the researcher to give 'voice' to those at whom policy is aimed, presenting an analysis that arises from the understanding of individuals rather than that of the researcher. Such research should also bring into focus the values and beliefs of those involved, and the likely impact of these. Studies utilising oral history also have the potential to provide a longitudinal view which, together with the focus on process of grounded theory, can provide a time series of change that avoids the limiting snap-shot approach.

Looking back at a major study of deinstitutionalisation in New Zealand (the closure of Mangere Hospital, the major residential care centre for intellectually disabled in the greater Auckland region) the potential of oral history coupled to a grounded theory type analysis emerges. Deinstitutionalisation in New Zealand has been the result of both deliberate policy initiatives, and converging policies, that those implementing the specific policy have been able to use to shape and drive the changes. While the Mangere project began in 1989 and took over six years to complete, the last such institution – Kimberly – is still in the process of closure.

My interest in the Mangere project focussed on the experience of three key groups in the process, the families of residents, the residents, and the staff. In particular I was interested in the impact of the policy of deinstitutionalisation and the implementation of this policy on these key groups. The project formed the basis of my doctoral thesis.<sup>12</sup> The research did not set out to develop oral history, neither did I fully utilise all aspects of the grounded theory method of analysis. A variety of data collection methods were used, however



the main component of the research was a survey of 46 families. For this I conducted semi-structured interviews with families at two points in time. The first shortly after their family member was moved from the hospital and the second about 12 months later. Interviewing began in January 1990 barely six months after the deinstitutionalisation process began, and ended in 1995 when the closure of the hospital was complete (with the exception of a small group of residents remaining in the hospital setting pending a resolution of their families' intentions to provide a sheltered village as an alternative to the group homes offered through the hospital board.) The data collected eventually covered a 35-year period from the opening of Mangere hospital in the 1960s to its closure in the mid 1990s. The general aim was to discover what the issues were for families, how these issues were (or were not) resolved, what this meant for families in their experience of the new community-based system of care, and what the current issues were for families.

I used general principles of the grounded theory method to guide the processing of the data. In this process I began with open coding of the data in which I asked a series of questions such as: What is this data a study of? What category does this incident indicate? What is actually happening in the data? I then carefully analysed the data line by line, noting ideas as they arose before moving to selective coding in which core variables were identified. Coding then turned to identifying those conditions and consequences that related to the core variable being developed. Finally I sorted the ideas in an attempt to integrate categories and core variables in a way that would relate categories to core variables, and core variables to each other. By conducting follow-up interviews I was able to focus on categories and variables that I had identified in the initial data collected, to confirm my understanding of what families were telling me, and to extend the information to the present situation for families.

In the first interview with each family I attempted to gain retrospective information about the family's experience prior to their relative being moved to the community setting, that is, to gain data about the hospital experience for comparison with the community based experience. By asking about families' experiences in the past I generated an oral history of each family. It was in pondering the analytical question, 'What is this data about?' that I discovered I was uncovering the experience of families from the point of the birth (and sometimes prior to the birth) of their intellectually disabled relative through seeking assistance, the placement of

that person in an institution, and the experience of deinstitutionalisation, the present community care situation, and stretching to ongoing concerns about future care arrangements. In fact it was an oral history of families' experience of the process of coping with a relative with intellectual disability in New Zealand across a period of up to thirty-five years.

A number of interesting categories were developed from the data, each representing a particular process in families' experience, and each related both to other categories and to some specific variables. For example the first category was the process of 'handing over' whereby the family came to place their relative in the hospital. This involved one of three possible 'paths of entry'. The first was 'voluntary surrender' in which the family made a conscious decision in the face of the strains they were experiencing, their perception of the level of support available to them, and the prevailing policy. 'Well, I couldn't see myself being able to cope. It was best in the circumstances.'<sup>13</sup>

The second, 'sliding in', was a more gradual process whereby the family accepted some assistance through having respite care at the hospital for specific periods but later, in the face of the strains they were experiencing, the apparent ease with which their relative settled in the hospital, and prevailing social beliefs, gradually let the stay lengthen and get more frequent until it became a full-time, permanent arrangement. 'Before he [their son] was admitted as a long-term patient he was going to day-care at the hospital.'<sup>14</sup>

The last I termed 'forced entry' where the family had little or no say. Medical 'experts' or welfare agents decided either for the family's or the individual's sake that institutional care was necessary. 'No, it [placement in Mangere Hospital] was inappropriate for her parents as well as for Nickie – the decision was not ours.'<sup>15</sup>

The second category was the experience of 'fractured care'. This related to the experience of coming to terms with having 'given up' their family member and no longer having day-to-day responsibility or ongoing contact. The experience became one in which families saw staff as providing instrumental or practical care and attention, leaving the family to provide ongoing emotional support for their relative. One mother said, 'I always separated the time. When he is in Mangere they [the staff] cope – when he is home I cope.'<sup>16</sup> A father said, 'They [staff] told me not to worry, but I could see – they can't sense his moods and reactions – while I can, his mother and I can – you can sense it.'<sup>17</sup>



The categories of 'handing over' and 'fractured care' were connected and were influenced by a number of variables. Foremost was the prevailing policy at the time families were experiencing these processes, and the values and beliefs inherent in these policies. For example in the 1950s and 60s the prevailing policy was based on the 'pathological' model of intellectual disability which placed all responsibility with the medical profession who naturally saw the appropriate environment for care as being hospital based with medical personnel as 'experts'. There was almost no support available in the community and the hospital became the obvious and only source of relief. For these families the hospital staff appeared as experts in care-giving and families tended to see themselves as incapable. They were therefore grateful to the staff and accepted the experience of fractured care as inevitable. As one father explained,

*When it happened [they discovered their child had an intellectual disability] I'll tell you what, I thought I was going to lose my missus too – it was that hard. So we went and got professional advice and they said, 'Look, put him away and forget about him.' So I said to Mother, 'Right, you forget all about it and I'll do it'.<sup>18</sup>*

While this family appear demonstrate 'voluntary surrender', many families through this period experienced forced entry under the influence of the medical profession.

From the 1970s the beliefs and values inherent in policy changed, although actual policy initiatives tended to remain the same. There was a slight increase in the range and level of support within the community but the hospital remained the main system of care and relief. The prevailing model was now the psychological/educational model in which it was presumed that with sufficient 'training', the individual with intellectual disability could be prepared for life in the community. Families were viewed as simply being under extreme stress which with support they could overcome. These families were more likely to have experienced sliding in. For them fractured care was seen as a necessary component of having their relative 'trained'. The hospital staff was seen less as medical experts and more as educational or training experts. Given the poor resourcing of the hospital and the lack of a means by which to achieve preparation for community living, these families often expressed disappointment and anger and had less respect for the expertise of the staff. The comments of two families illustrate this. Both statements were made with a sense of bitterness in the speaker's voice. 'I let Ken go to Mangere because I couldn't teach him anything. He

was not even toilet trained [at age eleven].<sup>19</sup> 'The idea of the whole set-up there [at Mangere Hospital] was that they should be trained. That was the promise, in fact!<sup>20</sup>

Another significant category that was identified was that of 'learned ignorance', which was the result of a coping process many families developed once their relative entered the hospital. The hospital was an unwelcoming environment and staff had control over both residence and families. As one family said, 'It paid to get on with staff. We've always helped out where we could.'<sup>21</sup> Visiting was stressful and difficult and families responded in ways that quickly reduced their knowledge of their relative and that individual's life. Typical of families comments was the parent who said, 'We didn't ask and we didn't really want to know.'<sup>22</sup> Many families reduced or ceased visits, this was most common in those who had experienced forced entry, in the era of the pathological model, or who were from lower socio-economic groups who had less resources with which to cope. Some other families visited regularly but always took their relative out for duration of the visit, thus avoiding contact with the staff and hospital. 'We only went there to pick him up, we never stayed.'<sup>23</sup> These families often expressed the greatest level of fractured care and more often came from the era of the psychological/educational model. They generally had the greatest personal and material resources and had experienced sliding in.

It became clear that these past processes had a marked impact on families' experience of the change process when the hospital was devolved into community housing, and on their acceptance of, and involvement in, the community-based care arrangements. For example, where families had experienced the policy of the pathological model, had voluntarily surrendered their relative, had accepted fractured care because the staff were considered experts and the need for their involvement was obvious – then the level of 'learned ignorance' was generally quite high. One consequence of this was that these families both resisted the changes (since the move to community houses would have no such expert assistance available) and were unable to be effective in articulated their needs or those of their relative since they knew so little about their relative's capabilities, needs or interests. As one family observed, 'Well, we couldn't manage him in a small home so how would he cope in that [community house] situation?'<sup>24</sup>

The policy of deinstitutionalisation and in the specific form of community houses for the care of people with intellectual disability was predicated on



the expectation that families of the clients would be involved as advocates, as support for the staff, and as quality control monitors. Staff at the community houses soon began to express concern that families were not providing ideas for activities, or entering into the system of care at the level they expected. The extent of this issue was expressed by a supervisor in the new Group Homes who realised that families themselves needed help.

*There is a lot of work to do now with parents. Those issues of grief, letting go, giving their child independence have never been faced. These changes are bringing them up and they will need to be dealt with. They will arise even more when we attempt to give the IH people increasing levels of independence.<sup>25</sup>*

The new policy and this particular initiative that resulted, had failed to take into account the effects of past experiences for families.

One interesting aspect of the research was that I was able to attend a series of meetings between staff and families at which I presented some of these findings. Both parties (including management) found the findings easily understood, non-threatening, and possible to act upon. As a result a number of small measures were taken to bring the two groups together and to encourage families to become more involved. For example, families were more isolated from each other once the hospital setting was devolved into dispersed community housing. Management was able to recognise the impact of this for families and offered to provide resources and a space for families to organise themselves into a support group for the staff in the new group homes. This move was successful in increasing the level of support staff experienced from families.

The outcomes of this project indicate the potential for the deliberate bringing together of oral history and grounded theory around the area of policy. In particular the findings of the study did not appear to raise uncomfortable feelings for those who implemented the policy; neither did they necessarily present a threat to the policy-makers. Instead they provided insight at a level that appeared almost common-sense and in a way that was easily understood and related to effective action. The research was able to explore the values and beliefs implicit in policy across time and in particular to present a view of its implications and meanings for families, thus allowing the researcher to present the views of those at whom the policy was targeted, rather than that of the policy-makers. Ward makes the point that research driven by the community of interest is more effective because

it encourages greater self-reliance and increases the likelihood that the actual needs of those involved will be met.<sup>26</sup>

The Mangere research also provided a focus on process in the context of a time series, that is, the present situation was contextualised and given meaning through the linking of related events across time. This allowed a greater understanding of the meanings and processes involved in the policy changes, indicting ways in which the resulting outcomes might be improved, and suggesting possible ways to handle change in the future. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that both the policy and the specific initiatives that arose from it could have been more effective had we known about families' experiences before rather than after the policy formation and implementation.

The deinstitutionalisation study demonstrated the potential for oral history, especially when coupled to grounded theory, to inform policy and overcome a number of the issues social scientists have identified in the link between research and policy. In this instance we were concerned with policy that was targeted at a specific issue, and developed to meet a specific need. The policy – both past and present – was deliberately developed for a specifically defined group and purpose. Can this approach be applied to other issues that might be anticipated as matters for policy-makers in the future? Can we contribute understanding of issues, and for groups that have not been the specific targets of deliberate policy around a known issue, but rather are responding to policy or policies of a more general nature? Could we provide critical information before policy is formed and in a form that represents the values and experiences of key communities in easily understood, non-threatening, reliable in-depth studies? In an attempt to explore these questions I now turn to an emerging phenomenon quite different to that of deinstitutionalisation. This phenomenon may have significant implications for future policy and is almost certainly the result of past, and current, more general policies.

In the past decade in Western societies a new trend has been emerging. Commonly referred to as 'sea change' but more broadly 'downshifting', it is the trend whereby people make voluntary long-term lifestyle changes that involve accepting significantly less income and consuming significantly less. This may be achieved by such changes as working shorter hours or taking less stressful and lower paid employment. Sea-changers are a subgroup of down-shifters whose lifestyle change involves leaving their career and



moving house (often to smaller coastal settlements or rural districts) in pursuit of a simpler life.<sup>27</sup> A survey in the United States indicated that 19 percent of adult Americans had down-shifted over the past decade<sup>28</sup>, in the United Kingdom the figure for those between 30 and 59 years old was 25 percent over the past ten years<sup>29</sup>, while in Australia the estimate for the same period and age group was 23 percent.<sup>30</sup> In New Zealand, a *Reader's Digest* article, based on market research conducted in May and June, 2004 by The Leading Edge, suggests that up to 80 percent of adult New Zealanders dream of making a sea-change.<sup>31</sup> While statistics are not available on the percentage that eventually do make radical life-style changes, it is likely to be similar to the trends in Australia, the USA and the UK.

The implications of this trend are potentially significant in several respects. First the trend suggests the development of an as yet unidentified group (or class?) who are actively rejecting consumerism and who also are largely silent, that is, they have not and do not raise complaints or concerns about their situation, or the prevailing values that they are choosing to reject. Second, some areas in New Zealand seem likely to experience a marked shift in population as the sea-change subgroup of down-shifters moves out of the cities to the coastal and rural areas that are seen as most attractive. Questions that arise include those of what the newer arrivals' expectations are, what skills and aspirations do they bring? How do the established communities view the newcomers? What are the potential strains for the community, and what might the advantages be? How can the community capitalise on those possible advantages? What is the impact on the communities the sea-changers leave? What is the experience of the process of making the change and how does this influence adaptation?

It also seems likely that this trend is a direct response to emerging social values and the impact of previous and ongoing policies. Bernard Salt (described as a social commentator) is quoted in the *Reader's Digest* article alluding to this,

*In the 1980's there was a corporate culture of get there and get there at any cost. [Baby] Boomers did all that, but when their marriages failed and their contemporaries started dropping dead, they decided to make a fundamental change in the way they lived.*<sup>32</sup>

In the absence of more academic New Zealand studies we can hypothesise from Australian, British and American data. For example a number of possible motives for such decisions have been identified in the Australian study and include a desire for a more

balanced and fulfilled life, more time with family, a less materialistic and more sustainable life, or possibly the change follows a sudden event such as severe illness, death of someone close, marriage breakdown.<sup>33</sup> In fact the decision more often follows a much longer process of questioning and those involved stress that they are not dropping out of life. Dr Claudia Bell also quoted in the *Reader's Digest* article points out that, 'This is all part of the feeling that we had increased rights to mental and physical wellbeing.'<sup>34</sup> In the deinstitutionalisation study the beliefs, values, expectations and decisions of families were shaped by the values, promises opportunities and restrictions of past and present policies around the care of people with intellectual disability. General policies also shape the beliefs, values, expectations and behaviours of the wider population – sea-changers are demonstrating this same relationship in the context of less specific and less targeted policies.

Moodie in discussing 'collective memory' points out the importance of the groups to which we belong and rely upon for social acceptance in terms of our identity, and in forming the narratives of our lives.<sup>35</sup> Do sea-changers continue to refer to the groups they have left and how and when do they form new reference groups? If, as Moodie points out, 'The way we learn to remember and narrate the past also influences the way we think and act in the present,'<sup>36</sup> (a proposition that was confirmed in the deinstitutionalisation study) then understanding the histories and narratives of both the newcomers (sea-changers) and the existing communities would seem crucial to understanding the process by which they can become integrated into community, and remain productive and contributing members of society.

In Australia there have been some initiatives for Future Planning in 'Sea-change Regions' that involve a range of research approaches, from community surveys, community consultation, preparation of regional profiles, monitoring of actions taken, to identification of regional issues. In the same report the Future Path Canterbury project in New Zealand is also mentioned, and although this region is not necessarily experiencing population shift due to sea-change trends, the project does contain elements of the projects in Australian regions that are experiencing marked population shifts.<sup>37</sup> In Future Path Canterbury, community consultation, and resident surveys, together with profiling each district, form a major part of data collection. These approaches are unlikely to gain the rich in-depth data that, with skilled analysis, would point to policy initiatives before policy was



mooted, and that would give an understanding of the change process that communities and groups of interest are experiencing. Most especially an oral history approach would capture the connections to past experience, loyalties, and narratives, that influence values and beliefs. If down-shifters spend considerable time questioning before their decision, then there is a process and connection across time that is crucial to understanding their motives and needs, and that must be captured.

A well-designed oral history project could capture the experience and process of a range of communities involved in the sea-change phenomena. A grounded theory approach to analysis of data would reveal underlying assumptions, values, beliefs, motivations and ambitions. Connections could be found between the past (including policies) that gave rise to the decision to make changes in life-style, and how the consequence of those changes are experienced and managed. The 'texture' of communities in which sea-changers arrive could be brought into focus, and likely pressure points economically and socially anticipated. Policy could be developed in response to emerging identified issues, and introduced from the perspective of the communities impacted.

The Mangere de-institutionalisation study has illustrated in a practical example the potential for bringing together oral history and grounded theory to understand the impact of a specific policy initiative. The exploration of sea-change as a completely unrelated and different social trend, that has the potential to generate policy issues in the future, suggests that the approach can be applied to social issues before policy is developed, with a view to providing insight for policy-makers to base their decisions around, rather than evaluating the impact of policy once it has been implemented.

While oral history and grounded theory have not generally been promoted as vehicles for addressing the gaps in the interface between social research and policy, both have important features that lend themselves to addressing not only the issues that tend to reduce the use of research by policy-makers, but also the issues of providing research that empowers those targeted by policies, and addresses the values and beliefs of those involved, in a manner that contextualises policy across time.

By bringing these methods together we can provide valuable ongoing research-based information that is focussed on providing policy-makers, and those who are their targets, with an understanding of the reasons for and implications of their values, beliefs

and behaviours. This information need not threaten existing political systems, nor be incomprehensible to either party. Instead, as was demonstrated in the deinstitutionalisation research, it can be personalised in a way that makes sense to those involved, and can lead to practical action towards ongoing improvement in people's experiences and conditions.

One of the greatest challenges to researchers seeking to facilitate these ends is to have our work drawn upon before policy is formulated and implemented. This will require imagination, perseverance and sensitivity. We should be ready to demonstrate the value of oral history in developing policy, and willing to anticipate social issues that are likely to become matters for policy-makers in the future, rather than wait until policy arises and evaluation of its impact is all that is left for us to tackle.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>15</sup> Family 3, interview May, 1990, tape 3 side A.
- <sup>16</sup> Family 3, interview May, 1990, tape 3 side B.
- <sup>17</sup> Family 6, interview May, 1990, tape 6 side B.
- <sup>18</sup> Family 8, interview September, 1990, tape 8 side B



- <sup>19</sup> Family 21, interview November 1990, tape 21 side A
- <sup>20</sup> Family 38, interview December 1990, tape 38 side B
- <sup>21</sup> Family 35, interview January 1991, tape 35 side B
- <sup>22</sup> Family 45, interview March 1991, tape 45 side B
- <sup>23</sup> Family 12, interview April 1990, tape 12 side B
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# The Trans Antarctic and International Geophysical Year Expeditions oral history project: Reflections on a fascinating journey

JACQUI FOLEY

The Trans Antarctic Expedition (TAE) and International Geophysical Year Expedition (IGY) took place between December 1956 and 1958. The TAE and IGY expeditions were separate and each had their own objectives, the members of both expeditions lived at Scott Base. Of the men who wintered over in 1957, five were on IGY expedition and eighteen were on TAE.

The objective of the oral history project was to record the experiences of people associated with the expeditions. These included TAE leader, Sir Edmund Hillary, expedition members, wives, the architect and the construction foreman of Scott Base, and the official press correspondent for TAE. The project was commissioned by New Zealand Antarctic Society and financed by grants from the Lotteries Grants Board. It began in 1997. The first ten interviews were carried out by Julia Bradshaw, I recorded a further fourteen people in 2004-05.



The New Zealand Trans Antarctic Expedition and International Geophysical Year wintering over parties, Scott Base, 1957. Courtesy Jacqui Foley

The initial role of the New Zealand TAE was to assist and support the British TAE, led by Sir Vivian Fuchs. In the tradition of Sir Ernest Shackleton, the British party's aim was to cross the Antarctic continent from Shackleton Base on the Weddell Sea,

to Scott Base, via the South Pole. The British travelled by massive 'Sno-Cats', while Hillary and the members of his team known as the 'tractor party', travelled on modified Massey Ferguson farm tractors with open cabs. The tractors were constantly being repaired and adjusted en-route by the two ingenious and innovative mechanics, Murray Ellis and Jim Bates. The tractor party completed their requirements for the British on 15 December 1957 at Depot 700. They then took the controversial decision to travel on to the South Pole, reaching it two weeks before Fuchs's Party. This achievement, which was never in the original plan, caused a mixture of consternation and excitement in New Zealand and around the world.

While the tractor party was engaged with its work, other members of TAE were out in the field carrying out extensive mapping, surveying and geology work. Travelling hundreds of miles over the summer months with dog teams, they traversed country that was largely unexplored.

At Scott Base, the five members of the IGY Expedition led by Trevor Hatherton, carried out scientific work. They were part of an international project aiming to gather scientific information about the Earth's natural phenomena, including meteorological, seismic, tidal, solar, auroral and ionosphere activities.

The first stage of the oral history project involved extensive research. I used books, film footage, photographs, archive material and museum displays associated with TAE and IGY. I also spent some time reading books by the old explorers, Scott, Shackleton and one of the youngest members of Scott's expeditions, Apsley Cherry-Garrad. I was fascinated to later learn from several interviewees that they had met Cherry-Garrad as an old man. To me this direct link back to Scott was truly exciting. In spite of reasonable communication, air support and a lot of help from the Americans at McMurdo Base, TAE seemed to belong



to the historic and heroic expeditions of earlier times.

The Antarctic Society selected the interviewees for the project, although I asked for the inclusion of a couple of extra people whom I felt to be important. I liaised with one person from the society, who was both supportive and helpful. Apart from this contact, management was left entirely to me and having been used to managing my own projects, this arrangement suited me. Julia Bradshaw had interviewed most of the expedition members and my role was to pick up on those who had not been recorded and to interview some of the wives and others associated with the expeditions.

The first interview was with the senior geologist on TAE, Dr Bernie Gunn. In a long interview of seven hours, Dr Gunn provided wonderfully descriptive details of the expedition, the landscape, the camaraderie between the men, including what he described as the 'surreal sight' of a man wearing a top hat, playing the piano out in the open at Scott Base. He talked also about the difficulty of settling down after TAE and the horror of seeing his dog team shot at the end of the expedition. At times, this was a challenging interview and one of the many occasions I was glad to have a solid body of research behind me.

The next interviewee was Sir Edmund Hillary. Needless to say, I was somewhat daunted by the prospect of interviewing such a public figure. However Sir Edmund put me at ease and I found him to be approachable, down to earth and charming. I was quite satisfied with the interview but in hindsight, I now feel it would have been better towards the end of the project. By then I had additional detail from other sources, including interviewees, and I feel this would have extended and enhanced the interview. It was a great privilege to meet and record him.

Another interviewee was Peter McDonald, a member of the IGY team. He talked about using equipment which was first used by Scott. Apart from his work, Peter also gave wonderful descriptions of life



The three modified Massey Ferguson farm tractors and one Weasel, known as 'The Tractor Party', head south from Scott Base under the leadership of Sir Edmund Hillary. Courtesy Jacqui Foley

at Scott Base - the men's duties, hair cutting, washing facilities and communication with home. Randal Heke was construction foreman overseeing the building of Scott Base. He talked about the base first being put up in Wellington. Fortunately I had found some wonderful archival film footage of this trial which enabled me to visualise the materials and buildings that Randal described.

Other interviews, particularly those with the wives of expedition members, were especially interesting. The content of these not only documents TAE and IGY but also picks up on social history and attitudes of the 1950s. The expectation seemed to be that the women would just get on with running the home and looking after the children while their husbands were away. Some women talked about the difficulties of adjusting when the men came back, drawing comparisons with war experience. All talked about communication with the men by letter and phone, the latter was described as being poor to good. There were some amusing stories of misunderstandings when the lines were not clear, such as one man hearing that his fiancée had bought 'diamond pairs' instead of 'dining room chairs'! Surprisingly none of the women had worried about their men, all had faith in their abilities and in the overall expedition. Most women referred to sending fruit cakes and knitting down to Antarctica when they could. Many also took part in radio broadcasts, sending greetings for Christmas and other occasions. Some women recalled that when the men returned to New Zealand, they were not always included in the official celebrations. One interviewee told a lovely story about the men being whisked to Government House in Wellington by limousine. Meanwhile the women walked up Cuba St. one struggling along in the pink stilettos that she had 'blown all her house keeping money on'. In some of these interviews there was still some caution about discussing the tractor party's unscheduled trip to the South Pole.

The most rewarding experience for me overall was an interview with a man who had initially been very reluctant to be recorded. I spent some time persuading him as I felt his story to be very important. I had based my questions on a book he had written about TAE published in 1963, however I found at the interview that he was unwilling to talk about this material. In hindsight this was understandable: he did not want to revisit old ground or possibly risk making errors about events from over forty years ago. It was somewhat nerve-wracking, however, to conduct an interview in another direction entirely from what I had expected.

Fortunately the end result was a wonderfully fresh and important interview and we were both very happy with it. I received a lovely thank you card from him some weeks later.

I learnt (again) that as oral historians, we must sometimes be flexible and not try and control interviews exactly as we want. It was also a lesson to base questions on as broad a range of material as possible. Again, that body of research stood me in very good stead and I was able to cope with a change in direction.

This project has been a fascinating journey. I would like to acknowledge and thank the interviewees for the generous telling of their stories and to thank the New Zealand Antarctic Society Inc. for giving me the opportunity to record the material.



# Recording the experiences of leprosy sufferers in Suva, Fiji

DOROTHY McMENAMIN

Leprosy is caused by a bacillus affecting the body's nervous system by attacking the nerves under the skin, causing a loss of sensation so that injuries are unfelt which lead to infections and disabilities. It was not until the late 1940s that an effective treatment was discovered, sulphones. This project was commissioned to record the oral histories of leprosy sufferers whose lives spanned the era preceding and following the new treatment.<sup>1</sup>

From the 1920s Ben Pratt in Christchurch, New Zealand, provided leprosy sufferers, isolated at Quail Island, with goods and Christmas cheer. In 1925 they were transferred to the island of Makogai, Fiji, where a leprosarium to service the Pacific islands had been established in 1911. After the death of Pratt, Patrick Twomey's innovative fund raising schemes gained the support of most New Zealanders, earning him the nickname 'The Leper Man', the name originally given to the charity. Today this term is avoided to disassociate leprosy from the stigma of ostracism. Sulphones ended the need for isolation, leading to the closure of the leprosarium in 1969. Instead a hospital was built in Suva, named the P. J. Twomey Memorial Hospital where eleven patients, and four leprosy sufferers living in Suva, were interviewed.<sup>2</sup> Contacts were made through the leprosy trust in Christchurch, now known as the Pacific Leprosy Foundation, who continue to care for leprosy sufferers in the south Pacific region.

## The leprosarium at Makogai 1911-1969

Initially there was opposition to the establishment of the leprosarium because of its proximity to Suva and the belief that leprosy had increased due to the British banning the practice of clubbing victims to death. A French order of nuns volunteered to run the leprosarium and a boat was procured to convey leprosy sufferers from the islands to Makogai. By 1918 there were over 300 patients, rising to 800

inmates at any one time, with a total of 4185 admissions and 2343 patients discharged.<sup>3</sup> The interviewees said they were very sad to leave their homes, expecting to die at Makogai because earlier patients had seldom returned, but many looked forward to leading normal lives on the island as stories about life at Makogai had filtered back.

The Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary dedicated their whole lives to the care of patients and the leprosarium, their commitment evoking a strong camaraderie. The matron and resident doctor's decisions were law, whilst spiritual comfort was offered at the Catholic and Methodist chapels and Hindu shrines.<sup>4</sup> Severely afflicted patients had separate wards, whilst the more able built their own homes. Staff lived in what were termed 'clean' areas, and strict rules prevented contagion between the areas, such as changing shoes and clothing. Islanders built their own villages where they grew vegetables, fished and sold their produce. Women were segregated, living in a dormitory with cooking and washing facilities. The interviewees said they did not object to segregation as it assisted assimilating back into society if and when discharged.

The patients were paid for their services, and so could buy luxuries from a shop run by the sisters.<sup>5</sup> Apart from nursing, the sisters organised schooling, sporting events, postal and banking services, weekly films, and even operated a dark room to develop photographs. The interviewees said the sisters were their 'mothers' and Dr. Austin, who lived and worked at Makogai from 1930-53 praised their work.<sup>6</sup> Patients attended regular clinics, including daily checks of hands and feet for little injuries, and were taught to care for themselves. Subsequently the interviewees said that this was an important reason for their successful reintegration into society.

The tremendous spirit at Makogai is characterised by Ernest Wolfgram. From Tonga, Ernest was sent to

New Zealand for education, and aged 17 was diagnosed with leprosy, isolated at Quail Island then transferred to Makogai in 1925.<sup>7</sup> Ernest immersed himself in learning metal and woodwork from other skilled patients and together these men set up workshops and trained other patients as carpenters, plumbers, painters and mechanics. Ernest built engines, boats, lighting equipment and the open air theatre, as well as organising a band and concerts.<sup>8</sup> The leprosy trust funded such projects and after his death in 1948, established the Ernest Wolfgram Technical Institute.<sup>9</sup> Asked for biographical details, Ernest simply wrote 'I dream of building a fast hydroplane – but unfortunately most of my small earnings go to help my old father who is unable to work and my two little sisters. Mother died the year after I got here. I think she and I were the best pals that ever lived'.<sup>10</sup> In their own ways, the patients interviewed impressed me with similar qualities of courage and resilience.

In response to my questions about the arrival of the new treatment, the interviewees did not remember details. They remembered the sadness of leaving their families, their pleasure after arrival and the friendships formed on the island, but their focus was on their present circumstances. Nevertheless they clearly recalled the tremendous difference made by sulphones, compared to the previous painful injections of chalmogra oil taken from trees grown on the island imported from India. Sister Stella gives an account of the arrival of the first batch of sulphones. Patients were asked who should receive these as there would be a delay before the next supply. 'The decision was unanimous...on the very ill... Within a week of starting treatment a remarkable change had taken place... All the sores dried up, and the smell which used to be so bad from the wards of the very sick, was gone in a week.'<sup>11</sup> The rapid improvement in their bodily condition was so great that Dr. Austin scarcely recognised his patients.<sup>12</sup>

#### Visit to P. J. Twomey Memorial Hospital

Twelve leprosy sufferers were in residence and although most could speak some English, some chose to use ward sisters as interpreters. Concrete floors, tin roofs and tropical rain made the environment noisy for recording, and humidity caused tapes to stick, requiring a close eye and occasional tap to keep tapes revolving! Most hospital interviewees were older patients who had contracted leprosy prior to the new drugs, and their weakened systems now needed medical care; others, especially those with amputations, came to

Twomey to avoid burdening their families. The younger ones returned for specific reasons, diabetes, amputations or eye operations. A significant finding was that despite years on Makogai, patients had reintegrated into society, as evidenced by the interviewees living in the community. Only three of the males remained single and childless. All the women, whether married or not, had children or adopted them and raised these children successfully with the help of families and the leprosy trust.

What became apparent during the interviews was the quasi-political agendas of patients who hoped their requests would reach board members back in Christchurch. All the patients expressed regret that the Sisters of Mary had retired and that the hospital had been given to the Fijian government. Many patients recalled assurances following the closure of Makogai, that Twomey hospital and the trust would provide their lifetime needs. Although the basic needs of the dwindling older generation were provided, focus had moved to supporting those living in the community. The lower incidence of leprosy meant that wards were increasingly being used for tuberculosis patients. With the emphasis of care moving away from leprosy, there was concern about being neglected. Patients no longer received small wages for laundry, gardening and kitchen duties which previously enabled them to buy small presents. Personal requests were mentioned, such as assistance to build new or rebuild cyclone destroyed homes, facilities to run home businesses, wool, sewing thread and tools for the men's workshop. Thus I was seen as a conduit for many agendas and to honour these confidences, a report listing the messages was sent to the Pacific Leprosy Foundation.

Three interesting themes emerge from the oral histories:

- (1) Despite the ravages of leprosy and incarceration at Makogai, patients picked up the threads of their earlier lives and led normal lifestyles.
- (2) The Sisters showed no interest in gaining religious conversion, but their humanity gained the undying love and respect of the patients.
- (3) Despite the heart rendering separation from family and fear of 'going to Makogai to die' the leprosy sufferers looked forward to living 'normal lives' on the island and look back to those years with joy.

In conclusion the patients asked that their gratitude be conveyed to everyone who helped them in the past and continue to support them today.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Oral histories were commissioned as part of the International Leprosy Association project, funded by the Nippon Foundation, based at the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, Oxford University, England.
- <sup>2</sup> Jane Buckingham of the History Department, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, and the author wish to thank the staff and patients at P.J. Twomey Hospital, Tamavua, Suva, for their warm hospitality and friendly cooperation during our visit in August 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> Sister Mary Stella, SMSM, *Makogai – Image of Hope: A brief history of the care of Leprosy patients in Fiji*, Christchurch, Pegasus Press, 1978, pp. 50 and 171.
- <sup>4</sup> Stella p. 85.
- <sup>5</sup> In 1960 unskilled patients received 4s. 2d. per day, with accommodation and medical expenses free, whilst in Fiji labourers were paid about 10s. per day. See Stella p. 127.
- <sup>6</sup> A. L. Austin *So Many Good-Byes: The Memoirs of A. L. Austin 1928-53*, Christchurch, Pegasus Press, 1984, pp. 139-40 and also Stella pp. 102-3.
- <sup>7</sup> This is one of the many extraordinary lives on Makogai described by Sister Stella. See pp. 104-8.
- <sup>8</sup> Stella p. 105
- <sup>9</sup> Stella p. 81
- <sup>10</sup> Stella p. 105

# The migration stories of Samoan pioneers to Christchurch: Alofa atu I Kalaisetete

CHRISTINA TUAPOLA

## Samoa (Centre of the Pacific)

A culture rich in history,  
A land rich and plentiful, laden with coconuts and taro,  
surrounded by clear waters with the freshest delicacies of  
the ocean to fill the bellies of the extended families,  
the warm summer nights with the parasol of gentle winds  
stroking dusky bodies,  
the rhythmic sounds of the cicadas and toads,  
One day stretching slowly into the night,  
reluctantly creeping into a new dawn,  
It is the love for you Samoa,  
Ode to my island paradise,  
That keeps my memories firmly entrenched in my  
heritage,  
It is with this blessing that I share with you Christchurch,  
Ensure to enrich my life with the treasures I bring forth to  
your red and black plains,  
Never forget my first love,  
but share with me my passion, my dreams, my Samoa.

C. S. Tuapola

The seeds for the Alofa atu I Kalaisetete project were planted at a dinner held by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. The highlight of the evening was the Pacific Waves awards presented by Gary Moore, the mayor of Christchurch, to Pacific people who had contributed to the development and well-being of the Pacific Island community, in Christchurch.

The first to receive the paua shell awards were the 'pre-migration' wave of Pacific Island people, who arrived during the 1950s. That many of the Samoan 'pre-migration' recipients had passed away was apparent as their families stepped up to receive their award.

There are few first generation Samoans in

Christchurch still alive today, and in light of a new century it seemed important to provide future generations with a historical account of Samoan emigration to New Zealand.

This project helped us understand why our interviewees migrated to New Zealand, and why they chose Christchurch. The overall expectation of this project was at best a lovely postcard description of life as a long-term tourist (permanent resident or illegal alien), however, we were not prepared for the creative *umu* of tasty anecdotes and songs. It was great to be surprised at the actions carried out by the then-young interviewees, which were definitely not common place for anyone in that day and age

The Samoan pioneers arrived in Christchurch



Malelega Ifopo (nee Ioasa) and Solomonua Ifopo. Cathedral Square, Christchurch, 1950s. Private collection



from the late 1940s (a time when Pacific peoples comprised 0.1 percent of New Zealand's population) until the 1950s and '60s. Travelling by sea and air, from the main Samoan islands of Savai'i and Upolo, their destination was the very epitome of an English colonial city. Compared to village life in the islands, conservative Christchurch was a culture shock. Yet this intrepid group deliberately chose to live there, while the majority of Samoans opted for the warmer climate of Auckland or the capital, Wellington. The link with New Zealand was forged after the First World War when the New Zealand government was sent to Western Samoa (now Samoa) as part of an agreement that Samoa's former colonial ruler, Germany, relinquish all ownership rights and military ports throughout the world.

The New Zealand presence in Samoa allowed the citizens of Samoa to seek future economic growth for their extended families. The choice to migrate was not seen as optional, but rather a survival tactic for the extended family, and ultimately Samoa. New Zealand was viewed as the new provider for steady economic support and growth in Samoa, and many Samoans envisioned New Zealand as the land of 'milk and money'. The interviewees left Samoa on the *Matua*, a banana boat that carried cargo around the islands, and they adapted to the climate and lifestyle of Aotearoa.



Going to the siva (dance) - Malelega Ifopo (nee Ioasa), Uncle Uipo and Saofaina Teonea (nee Siave). Christchurch, 1950s. Private collection

The oral history interviews were carried out with prominent Samoan leaders and founders of this tight-knit community who attended Trinity Congregational Church which became the spiritual home and the foundation of the Pacific Island community.

The project focused on Samoa's oratory history. During some of the interviews this process allowed the interviewees to return to the stories of their parents and grandparents, and demonstrate an oratory skill which they had been taught by their elders. This format has provided an ideal basis for ensuring their stories have been appropriately recorded, in a manner which have been approved by the interviewees. The beauty of the interviews in part was recording their voice, especially in song. The interviews have given us an insight into the early political and social activities of the Samoan community in Christchurch. With the permission of the interviewees, excerpts from the Alofa atu I Kalaisetete project have been presented in the performing arts arena in Samoa and Wellington.

It seems fitting to finish with these words. Storytelling has a great tradition in Samoa. For generations it has been the medium for keeping history and myths alive and also for pure entertainment. Here is a Samoan proverb: 'The offspring of birds are fed on fruits and berries but the human offspring is fed on words and stories.'

*The Alofa atu I Kalaisetete Project would like to thank:*

- *the interviewees for their contribution to the project and appearing at the NOHANZ conference in Christchurch 2005*
- *Judith Fyfe, Megan Hutching, Linda Evans*
- *the Australian Sesquicentennial Gift Trust for Awards in Oral History for grants in 2003 and 2004*

The Alofa atu I Kalaisetete Oral History Project team is Christina Tuapola, Sarah Hunter, Erolia Ifopo.

# Mining for real gold: A new kind of treasure is unearthed in Waihi

GUY SPURR AND KIT WILSON

Gold was discovered in Waihi in 1878 and has been mined there almost continuously ever since. At its peak the famous Martha underground gold mine employed a workforce of 1500. The original Martha Mine closed in 1952, but reopened as a new open pit operation in 1987. While this is scheduled to close sometime later this year, a new underground operation named Favona is currently being constructed and is due to come into production shortly afterwards. Gold mining was a primary reason for the settlement of Waihi and is of major significance in the economic and social history of the town.

In the same year that Martha Mine reopened the first Waihi Miners' Reunion took place. Sponsored by the mining company, the Miners' Reunion is an annual event and a highlight of the year for many of the early miners. The day involves a site visit to a particular area of interest followed by a luncheon, and the chance to catch up with old friends and workmates and exchange stories.

Despite the enormous popularity of the event, each year fewer and fewer of the early miners attend. Many are now well into their eighties. Death and ill health are taking their toll, and the organisers realise that many of the rich stories being told will be lost unless prompt action is taken.

Newmont Waihi Gold External Affairs staff put a proposal to company management for funding to record interviews with some of the early miners before their stories were lost. Funding was granted, and what is simply known as the Oral History Project commenced. Twenty interviews were carried out in 2005 and a further twenty are planned for this year. In addition, twenty interviews of current mine staff are proposed prior to the second closure of Martha Mine.

So why would an overseas mining company fund the recording of oral histories? Newmont's philosophy of 'earning a social licence to operate' partially

explains this. The company believes that operating in a community means being part of that community and demonstrating a commitment to it. This means being involved in sporting, educational, cultural and social programmes. The oral history project is a reflection of that commitment and community involvement. In addition, the project also demonstrates a sound strategic 'fit' with Newmont's philosophy of helping to develop a sustainable future for the town of Waihi post mining.

Interviewees are selected by Newmont Waihi Gold External Affairs department staff. While the majority of interviewees have been associated with the early mining industry in some way, several other 'old identities' have also been interviewed. The aim is to construct a detailed first hand account of what life was like in Waihi when the original Martha Mine was operating.

Three key people are involved in the project. Doreen McLeod has been employed by the mine for over twenty years. She is a local, and has a very good understanding of the town and district. She is a life member, and a former archivist, of the Waihi Art Centre and Museum. Guy Spurr is the Education Officer at Newmont Waihi Gold. He holds a Masters degree with first class honours and studied oral history with Anna Green at Waikato University. He too is a local, and comes from a well known Waihi family. Kit Wilson provides the technological expertise.

Guy or Doreen research and frame appropriate questions prior to each interview. Each interview usually takes place in the interviewee's home and takes the form of a relaxed and friendly chat. Interviewees are encouraged to tell their stories and take as much time as they wish. Technology is kept to a minimum to avoid intimidating the subject.

Interviews are recorded on DVCam digital video at broadcast standard. The master tapes are archived. Archival copies are kept on DVD at the



highest possible resolution. Copies are provided for interviewees on either video or DVD. While some interviews have taken less than 30 minutes, others have approached two hours. Most interviews are conducted in the morning, and where the interview looks as if it will be lengthy it is split over a number of sessions. Sometimes we have returned with additional questions after reviewing the tapes. NOHANZ ethical guidelines have been followed and informed consent gained through use of a standardised letter of permission.

A number of interesting themes have emerged as the interviews have progressed. Amongst these is the social conscience demonstrated by a number of the mine managers. School leavers from needy families, while strictly speaking too young to work underground, were regularly given employment, as were and older and/or partially disabled miners who had given many years loyal service to the company. Also, despite being a fully functioning heavy industry, the Martha Mine was an adventure playground for children of the town. The 'myths' surrounding the loss of fingers or thumbs by miners in 'accidents' have also been thoroughly explored.

The company now has a growing digital library of oral history material. To date none of this material has been used for any specific purpose, and the obvious question must be, 'What is all this material for?' We don't have an answer to that yet, but we do know that if we don't gather this material now we will never be able to. As the library grows ideas for possible use of the material are emerging, but for now the focus is on acquisition.

While the company 'owns' the material there is no thought of restricting access or use. In the longer term we would anticipate DVD copies of the material also being available at the local museum, or edited highlights showing at the Golden Legacy mine information centre. Some of the material gathered will be used by Doreen in a paper entitled 'Through Local Eyes, Five Generations of Gold Mining in Waihi' to be presented at the New Zealand Society of Genealogists annual conference in Hamilton this coming June.

As well as the gold it has yielded, the Martha Mine is now producing another treasure in the form of these oral history interviews. Being part of the capture of this material is what Newmont's philosophy of effective and appropriate community involvement is all about.

# Reviews

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Mere Whaanga, *A Carved Cloak For Tahu*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2004, 268 pp, paperback

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Reviewed by Rachael Selby, Massey University, Palmerston North

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In this beautifully presented book, Mere Whaanga relates the history of Iwitea marae and its people. The framework, which she utilises, is the whakairo of Te Poho o Tahu. The stories, which surround the hapū of Ngāi Tahu Matawhiti and the carving of the whare tupuna, Te Poho o Tahu are inextricably linked and woven together within the book. The whare was previously an undecorated house, which the kaumatua decided to “dress” with traditional carvings. This process provides a stimulus for the book.

Mere Whaanga arranges the book in three sections: Mana whakapapa, Mana whenua and Mana tangata. The first section, Mana whakapapa, are the stories of the tipuna, the second section are the stories which relate to the history of the ancestral land and Mana tangata are the stories of the tangata whenua. This division and arrangement work particularly well for this publication. Each

section is then arranged logically to reflect the journeys the hapū has made over time and in order to manage the projects undertaken by the hapū.

Mana Whakapapa provides a background to the whareniui, its use as a meeting house for hui such as wānanga, weddings, shareholder meetings and tangihanga. It includes a beautifully succinct description of the symbolism of the meeting house and marae, a contribution from Wi Kuki Kaa on Women and Manu korero, the historical traditions of tūpuna such as Tahu Pōtiki, Porourangi and Paikea. For the descendants of these tūpuna, this is a gem and will be relished by both the hapū and the iwi as well.

The stories are embellished with waiata, which again will be appreciated and valued by the descendants of the tūpuna discussed in the book. Mere Whaanga also outlines the bodies of oral literature used by Māori to keep names, histories and beliefs alive. She sprinkles the text with customs, traditions and whakapapa, which are of particular value to Ngāti Kahungunu and descendants of Takitimu.

The section on Mana whenua provides the general reader with an overview of concepts, which emanate from a Māori worldview. Non-Māori readers will enjoy this section as much as those who are familiar with the concepts. The Māori creation stories are presented, the Māori relationship with the environment, land rights, the changes shaped by colonisation, and the impact of huge numbers of immigrants landing on the shores of Aotearoa in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The historical section is useful

for all readers. The impact of the Native Land Court is visited, the alienation of land in a very short period at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in particular the history of the land blocks of particular interest to the hapū and iwi in the Wairoa area. For shareholders in these blocks this is a valuable chapter. A chapter is devoted to the sheep and cattle station, Anewa and another to Te Whakaari Incorporation. The thousands of shareholders in these blocks will enjoy the care with which these chapters have been presented.

Mana tangata is a section, which pays tribute to the tangata who have been leaders of these people, leaders in the spiritual realm and in the hapū and iwi. It also draws together the threads of Ngāi Tahu Matawhaiti, also known as Te Toki a Tapiri. Mere Whaanga ties the threads together with a discussion about the hapū as it is today, highlighting new issues and concerns.

The book is illustrated with quality photographs, maps and diagrams and is set out in a way which enables the reader to delve into sections of particular interest or to read the book as whole. It is a gift to the descendants of Takitimu and to the bookshelves of New Zealanders. Mere Whaanga has drawn on oral histories and traditions to enhance the content of the book and the arrangement of the material. As a member of the iwi she has had access to a wealth of information which she has used well to present a valuable history of the land and the people.



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Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A history of ideas about the mind*, Cambridge University Press [1995] 2000, 241 pp, hardback; and Douwe Draaisma, *Why Life Speeds Up As You Get Older: How memory shapes our past* Cambridge University Press [2001] 2004, 277 pp, hardback.

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Reviewed by Anna Green, Auckland University of Technology

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Douwe Draaisma, Professor of History of Psychology at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands, has won a number of scientific and literary awards for his research and writing on the nature and conceptualization of memory. Authoritative and accessible, both books contain a wealth of information of interest to the oral historian.

In *Metaphors of Memory* Draaisma explores the ways in which memory has been conceived throughout human history, and in particular focusses upon the figurative or metaphorical cast of everyday language about remembering and forgetting. Each chapter is written around a central metaphorical image of memory, for example: 'The Mystic Writing-Pad', 'A vast labyrinth', 'A mirror with a memory', 'The holographic memory', 'An enchanted loom', and so on. Draaisma argues that these metaphors, whether they originate in nature or technology, 'create their own perspective of memory'. As an example, he compares the way Socrates, when 'discussing the reliability of memories with Theaetetus', concluded that 'memory was like a wax tablet, whose wax was too soft and liquid'; in contrast, Freud drew upon the metaphor of a 'magic slate to suggest that

even when there are no traces of memories on the surface, there are bound to be deep layers of memories indelibly stored underneath.'

To what extent did the advent of psychology as a professional discipline in the late nineteenth-century change the language of memory? From about 1885 onwards, the experimental and quantitative approach to memory represented a significant shift towards scientific methodology, but this was not accompanied, according to Draaisma, by a revolution in understanding. Indeed, he suggests that he was struck more by the 'continuity and consensus' with metaphors of the past.

Over the course of centuries, memory was represented through a range of metaphors - 'a wax tablet, codex or magic slate, then again an abbey or theatre ...' - and the metaphors acquired a progressively technical slant, up to and including the recent metaphor of memory as a computer. Memory, Draaisma suggests, 'came to look like the technologies it was modeled on.' The changing metaphors are misleading however: in practice the same ideas often resurfaced in different guises. The problem, he concludes, is with the memory of psychology itself, which suffers 'from a memory loss that borders on the pathological'. Indifferent or unaware of earlier conceptual traditions, he argues, psychology constantly 'rediscovers' the same ideas even if represented in different metaphorical clothing. One concludes that Draaisma wishes psychologists were less fascinated by new metaphors, and more knowledgeable about the history of the discipline.

I found it interesting that Draaisma excluded the work of

Frederic Bartlett (1886-1969); Bartlett was the first professor of experimental psychology at Cambridge in 1931, and between 1914 and 1939 his investigations into perception and memory broke new ground in a variety of ways. However, Bartlett's conceptualization of memory was not particularly metaphorical, and he focused more upon the imaginative and constructive dimensions of remembering. It could be argued these aspects of memory - filtered through the writings of later authors - have exercised a greater influence upon contemporary oral history theorization concerning memory and remembering.

In Draaisma's second book, *Why Life Speeds Up As You Get Older*, the subject is autobiographical memory. I was unaware that psychologists only defined the term 'autobiographical memory' - as a specific area of memory research - in the early 1980s. Draaisma explains this relatively late entry to the field as the consequence of psychology's preference for subjects or questions amenable to experimental and quantitative methods. The result was a vast gulf between mainstream psychological research into memory and the way memory functions in everyday life, creating a lacuna that has only been addressed relatively recently. Draaisma considers what psychologists have learned in the last twenty-five years or so about autobiographical memory, and the book is structured around these findings, with chapters on, for example, first memories, flashbulb memories, Déjà vu, the savant syndrome, trauma and memory, and reminiscences.

There are interesting insights

about the nature of memory that illuminate oral histories: the picture images of first memories; the importance of smell, or emotions such as fear or humiliation; that more long-term memories are laid down between roughly 15 and 25 years of age, followed by a reminiscence bump after 60 years of age. Nonetheless, in a review of the book published earlier, Steven Rose concluded that he felt a profound sense of dissatisfaction - not with the author of this book

- but with the inability of his profession, 'despite the millions invested and the sophistication of our techniques, to understand better the peculiarities of memory.'<sup>1</sup> This may explain the gap between the questions and approaches of experimental psychology researching memory, and the analytic/interpretive approaches of oral historians that tend to rely more upon social contextualization and the narrative composition of remembering. Research into

autobiographical memory, therefore, continues in parallel universes. As one way to breach these disciplinary walls, Draaisma's book provides a valuable introduction to the findings of psychologists interested in autobiographical memory.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Steven Rose, 'You must remember this', *The Guardian Weekly*, January 14-20, 2005, p. 24.

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A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms: Australia's invisible migrants*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2005, 388 pp, paperback

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Reviewed by Megan Hutching,  
Ministry for Culture & Heritage,  
Wellington

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More than a million British people emigrated to Australia in the post-war assisted immigration scheme. They paid £10 and in return had to work in Australia for two years (or pay back the balance of their fare). It was not only single people but families who migrated, and a significant number remained in Australia.

Using letters, diaries and photographs, and many in-depth oral history interviews with both those who stayed and those who returned, Hammerton and Thomson give us a rich and nuanced account of why people

made that huge decision to leave their home country for the other side of the world.

We read that the reasons for that decision changed over the years of the scheme according to the circumstances of life in the United Kingdom. For some, especially unmarried migrants, the move was never going to be permanent, rather it was the opportunity for a working holiday with the fare almost paid. For others, especially families, and particularly in the early years after the end of the Second World War, emigration to Australia was an opportunity to make a better life for themselves and their children. Australia was portrayed by the Australian government as a rich, sunny land of promise for those who wished to work hard and take advantage of what was on offer.

The reality was often different. Interviewing people about their experiences allows Hammerton and Thomson to tease out the reasons for emigration from the United Kingdom, and to show

in depth their experiences once they arrived in Australia. There are some truly sad and moving stories here as well as accounts of triumph over despair that would make the stuff of great novels.

This is not just an account of experiences though. Hammerton and Thomson have used their material to draw conclusions about Australian society and about the impulse for migration in general, as well as feelings of nationality and identity.

The book is divided into three parts: the emigration process which covers such things as reason for migration, knowledge of Australia, leaving home, and the journey from the United Kingdom. The six chapters in the second part cover the experiences of settlers once they arrive, and reasons for return to Britain. The final part deals with the issues of migration, memory and identity.

It was interesting to see the similarities in these accounts with those which I did for my work on the similar scheme run by the



New Zealand government during the same period.

The oral history technique works particularly well for studies such as these. It would probably be possible to come to the same conclusions by using questionnaires, and reading newspaper articles, diaries and letters, but the richness of the material from the interviews adds so much to our understanding of people's motivations and

experiences. The transcription which allows us to see the hesitations and contradictions in the accounts works well in the short extracts used by the authors. I also particularly liked the use of personal photographs in the book. The cover is a stunner. It shows a young girl, dressed in winter clothes, sitting by herself on a deck chair on board ship in Sydney harbour, writing on a pad. Behind her is the opera house

with a crane. It is 1963. It is both engaging as an image and also indicative of the stories that are told inside. It shows a country where amenities were still being built, the loneliness that migrants could endure, the fact that Australia is not sunny and warm everywhere and always, the desire to keep in touch with family in the UK, and that pervasive hope of building a substantial future.

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Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, *Keeping a Low Profile: An oral history of German immigration to New Zealand*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2002, paperback

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Reviewed by Eveline Dürr,  
Auckland University of Technology

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This book makes an important contribution to migration studies in New Zealand and Germany first by covering migrant groups which have not been analysed at full length before and second by treating them with detailed scrutiny and over a broad swathe of history. The study documents and analyses six periods of German immigration to New Zealand (1936-1996), and is primarily based on 102 life history interviews (60 women and 42 men), which were conducted between 1996 and 1997. Bönisch-Brednich uncovers the migrants' strategies as they

coped with this major event in their lives and she investigates the social meaning behind their stories and subjectivities. She is also interested in the techniques individuals use to create autobiographies in interviews (p. 11). This is a promising research outline for both migration studies in privileged countries in general and oral narrative methodologies in particular.

In order to develop her arguments and to present the huge amount of collected data systematically, the study is divided into two major parts. After a brief history of Germans in New Zealand providing relevant and useful statistical information, part one scrutinises the 'arrivals' of different migrant groups to New Zealand. The reasons for leaving Germany and the perception of the biographic journey, which finally brought the migrants to South Pacific, are compared and contrasted. Starting with 'the refugees' as a specific category

of forced migration between 1936 and 1940, the book refers to the German and New Zealand political contexts in different time periods. Chapter two discusses migration patterns after World War Two and is metaphorically entitled 'emigration from a Germany in ruins'. It is followed by a chapter on 'young work migrants' in mid 1950s to mid 1960s. Completely new categories of migrants are presented in the subsequent chapters, which comprise samples of individualistic migration decisions and distinct motivations. Bönisch-Brednich refers to 'rebels', 'academics', 'lovers' and 'yachties'. In this vein, chapter five reflects on the 1980s as a period when Germans searched for 'peace and paradise' in New Zealand. Chapter six finally details a new set of middle-class migrants emerging in the 1990s, living a mobile and transnational lifestyle.

Together, these accounts show vividly the way in which life-stories are embedded in the wider

societies in both Germany and New Zealand. It also demonstrates that they are inextricably linked to the migrants' perception of their individual past, present and future, which is shaped by specific social, political and economic conditions. The author carefully reflects on the context and relates the individuals' circumstances to the narratives in a convincing way. This enables the reader to imagine the life worlds of the interviewees and their constraints, potentials and challenges during different periods of time. In addition, social and political change in Germany and New Zealand and its consequences for the decision making process to migrate become transparent. The diachronic approach of this study illustrates clearly that specific circumstances in Germany and New Zealand create distinct groups of migrants and it also shows how migration experiences are conceptualised retrospectively.

The second part of this monograph is closely related to part one and divided into four chapters. Bönisch-Brednich shifts the focus now to crucial emigration themes and key stories in the migrants' lives. The first topic addresses the social meaning of 'being foreign' by discussing the migrants' first impressions, deceptions and hopes. This is followed by a chapter comparing and deconstructing stereotypes and static perceptions of national identities in New Zealand and Germany. The third chapter refers to emotional narratives of longing and belonging, which are expressed symbolically in food and festivals. The last topic comprises gender issues and observes that men and women use different dominant narrations. While men tend to focus more on

facets of vocational opportunities, professional career aspirations, success and failure, women emphasise homesickness and the emotional impact of their migration experience (p. 313). The conclusion of the book is in large parts a summary of the insights already mentioned in the various chapters. Even though the author stresses the importance of participant observation and theories in combination with applied methods and long-term experience in the field on the last two pages (p. 316, 317), these comments point to the methodological and theoretical shortcomings of the book.

I certainly agree with the author when she states that postmodern theoretical approaches analysing migration flows, concepts of hybridity and ethnoscares need to be referred to the lived experiences of concrete individuals (p. 12). I also acknowledge her decision to direct the focus of her study not so much on theory but on 'contents and results of the comparison itself' (p. 208). However, this does not justify the limited development of a theoretical framework for migrant experiences. This is particularly unfortunate given the richness of the empirical material presented. Bönisch-Brednich does refer to theories, for instance in chapter 7 when Simmel, Park and Schütz are quoted in regard to 'the marginal man', 'the alien' and 'the foreign' (p. 159f., 206, 282), or when reference is made to Wittgenstein and intercultural contact and cross-cultural communication (p. 176) or when Barthes' implications for food selection is mentioned (p. 254). But none of these approaches are explored in depth nor are they related systematically to the

empirical data. Unfortunately, the potential of the rich life history research to contribute to migration theories or other analytical approaches, for example by conceptualising the emergence of transnational spaces, bi-national lifestyles or multiple cultural identities, has not been developed.

This study is framed as oral history and therefore it seems understandable that the focus is almost exclusively directed on interview material and narratives. However, the author refers to her study also as ethnographic analysis (p. 13) and places emphasis on the importance of fieldwork including participant and non-participant observation. The 'field' in social anthropology is constructed by the complex relationships between the researcher, the participants and the context of their interaction. During the fieldwork process, the relationships develop their own dynamics and the quality of these relationships is constantly shifting. Critical reflection on these processes is key if the reader is to put the collected data into perspective and distinguish ethnographic methods from other qualitative approaches. This becomes evident when the author tells us that there is a reason why she got quite detailed information about food, but not about sports, which she explains with gender issues (p. 284). However, this is one of the few instances in the text where Bönisch-Brednich as person becomes visible and her specific relationships with the participants are mentioned. Even though the study offers plenty of opportunities to reflect on participant observation and social interactions, for example during visits at the knitting club,



these are not used as part of an integrated methodological research tool. The theoretical and methodological explorations remain rather limited and not fully applied to analyse this collection of rich narratives.

The strength of this monograph lies in the assiduously collected and well presented narrative data on German migrant experiences in New Zealand. Bönisch-Brednich draws

a detailed but still clear picture of different sets of migrants with reference to the historical, social, political and economic context in Germany and New Zealand. She neatly captures the variety of migrant experiences ranging from prosecution to transnationalism. In this regard, the book provides a valuable source for scholars of all disciplines interested in migration and the relationship between Germany and New Zealand.

# NOHANZ ORIGINS

The National Oral History Association of New Zealand  
Te Kete Kōrero-a-Waha o Te Motu (NOHANZ)  
was established as result of the first national oral history seminar  
organised in April 1986 by the Centre for Continuing Education of the  
Victoria University of Wellington and the New Zealand Oral History  
Archive, a professional organisation then based in the National Library  
that worked on major oral history projects.

## Objectives

- To promote the practice and methods of oral history.
- To promote standards in oral history interviewing techniques, and in recording and preservation methods.
- To act as a resource of information and to advise on practical and technical problems involved in making oral history recordings.
- To act as a coordinator of oral history activities throughout New Zealand.
- To produce an annual oral history journal and regular newsletters.
- To promote regular oral history meetings, talks, seminars, workshops and demonstrations.
- To encourage the establishment of NOHANZ branches throughout New Zealand.
- To compile a directory of oral history holdings to improve access to collections held in libraries archives and museums.



# Code of ethical and technical practice

National Oral History  
Association  
of New Zealand  
Te Kete Kōrero-a-Waha o Te  
Motu  
PO Box 3819  
WELLINGTON

[www.oralhistory.org.nz](http://www.oralhistory.org.nz)

**NOHANZ**

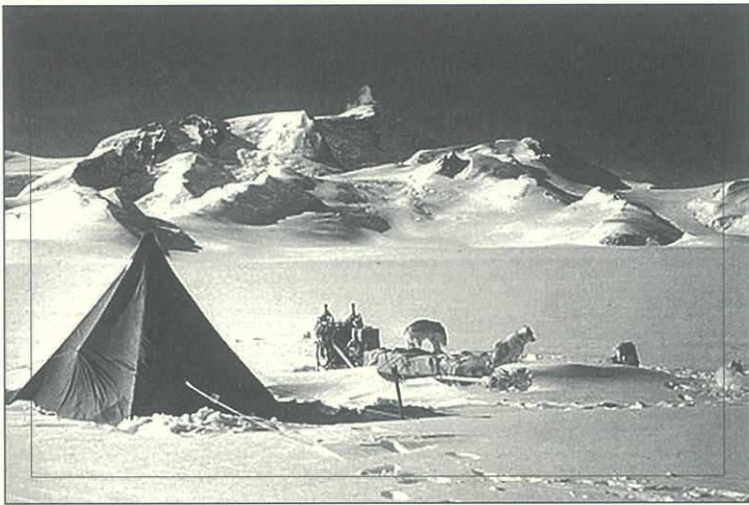
This Code exists to promote ethical, professional and technical standards in the collection, preservation and use of sound and video oral history material.

Archives, sponsors and organisers of oral history projects have the following responsibilities:

- to inform interviewers and people interviewed of the importance of this Code for the successful creation and use of oral history material;
- to select interviewers on the basis of professional competence and interviewing skill, endeavouring to assign appropriate interviewers to people interviewed;
- to see that records of the creation and processing of each interview are kept;
- to ensure that each interview is properly indexed and catalogued;
- to ensure that preservation conditions for recordings and accompanying material are of the highest possible standard;
- to ensure that placement of and access to recordings and accompanying material comply with a signed or recorded agreement with the person interviewed;
- to ensure that people interviewed are informed of issues such as copyright, ownership, privacy legislation, and how the interview and accompanying material may be used;
- to make the existence of available interviews known through public information channels;
- to guard against possible social injury to, or exploitation of people interviewed.

Interviewers have the following responsibilities:

- to inform the person interviewed of the purposes and procedures of oral history in general and of the particular project in which they are involved;
- to inform the person interviewed of issues such as copyright, ownership, privacy legislation, and how the material and accompanying material may be used;
- to develop sufficient skills and knowledge in interviewing and equipment operation, e.g. through reading and training, to ensure a result of the highest possible standard;
- to use equipment that will produce recordings of the highest possible standard;
- to encourage informative dialogue based on thorough research;
- to conduct interviews with integrity;
- to conduct interviews with an awareness of cultural or individual sensibilities;
- to treat every interview as a confidential conversation, the contents of which are available only as determined by written or recorded agreement with the person interviewed;
- to place each recording and all accompanying material in an archive to be available for research, subject to any conditions placed on it by the person interviewed;
- to inform the person interviewed of where the material will be held;
- to respect all agreements made with the person interviewed.



Field parties camped out during the summer months, carrying out geological, surveying and mapping work, and travelling hundreds of miles by dog sled.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF JACQUI FOLEY



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**NOHANZ**

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