The Limitations of Wartime Change.
Women War Workers in New Zealand

DURING the Second World War the role of women became a matter of public concern. At a purely practical level, the scale of the war and the demand for labour associated with it forced policy-makers in all belligerent countries to draw more extensively on their human capital. The increased reliance on paid female labour was seen by many New Zealand observers as problematic because of its potential to threaten women's traditional role in society. In July 1942 the editor of The Mirror, a local monthly magazine, warned his readers that World War II was likely to have long-term repercussions on the position of women. 'During these critical days, women are going through a severe apprenticeship that will qualify them for most of the work that was performed by men in peacetime. If the war stands for anything, therefore, it stands for the emancipation of women. With every day the war lasts, women step towards "equality", and though every step may mean the loss of an equivalent amount of privileged feminine security, this privilege is surrendered — during wartime, at any rate — cheerfully and willingly.'\(^1\) Another, more flippant, commentator remarked on the way women’s wartime activity was diverting them from domestic activities: 'In fact, it is difficult nowadays to find a sphere in which woman is not prominent. If this trend develops it will indeed be a proud man who can boast that he has really kept his wife at home. He will be the envy of all the married "bachelors" who have to mend their own clothes and do their own cooking while their better halves are out winning the war on the home front. Even the single man has difficulty in fixing a date with his best girl these days.'\(^2\)

Historical interpretations of the effect of World War II on the female work-force fall into two groups. The first group has largely taken contemporary comments about women’s wartime roles at face value and characterized the period as one of radical change in the position of women. In New Zealand this type of analysis is illustrated by Margaret Kane’s history of equal pay. Kane has described World War II as shaking the foundations of New Zealand’s social heritage. She sees the period as one in which a large-scale entry of women into the paid work-force challenged the concept of the male bread-winner and made

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1 The Mirror, July 1942, p.18.
it socially acceptable for married women and women with children to work outside the home.\textsuperscript{3} Michael King has also represented the period as one of opportunity for women, when important precedents were set for the employment of women in areas previously reserved for men.\textsuperscript{4} There is, however, a need to be cautious in making too simple an assessment of the impact of the war economy on the lives of New Zealand women. Recent British and American studies have questioned the extent and duration of wartime change in the position of women,\textsuperscript{5} substantially revising earlier interpretations by social historians such as Arthur Marwick and William Chafe.\textsuperscript{6} In Australia a challenge has been mounted to the assumptions of established historians such as Paul Hasluck.\textsuperscript{7} I will argue that an examination of the experience of New Zealand women during World War II supports revisionist arguments which emphasize the limitations of wartime change.

Increased female participation in the paid work-force and female entry into male spheres of employment carried a potential challenge to social definitions of gender-appropriate behaviour and to the sexual division of labour within the family. However, the impact of wartime changes on ideological definitions of femininity was mediated by the way in which these changes were presented. There is a wide difference between increased economic participation by women, perceived as a temporary expedient to solve a labour shortage, and the same increased economic participation being seen as a move toward a more equitable position for women within the work-force. The radical potential of wartime conditions to produce lasting change in the position of New Zealand women was undermined by three major factors. The first was the context of the war itself; the second was a readjustment of the sexual division of labour, which amounted to a limited reinterpretation of what was ‘women’s work’ without a significant change in the inferior status of that work; and the third was the continued strength of pronatalist ideas about women’s role. While it is true that the war provided an occasion for a reassessment of gender roles, it did so within definite boundaries.

The war was seen essentially as a period of emergency. The increased employment of women — and in particular the use of women in traditionally male spheres of work — was often presented as a temporary measure, analogous to the working of extended overtime or the rationing of consumer goods. Many


of the positions women held during the war were strictly temporary, and seen by employers as such. In November 1941 the Conference of the New Zealand Manufacturers’ Association resolved to give immediate attention to the ‘temporary and wider utilization of women in industry as a wartime measure’. The Labour Legislation Suspension Orders issued by the government to facilitate employers’ actions on this resolution were ‘for the duration’ or ‘for the duration and six months after’. For example, the Grocery Trade Labour Legislation Suspension Order 1942 allowed employers to take on female shop assistants for the period of the war and six months thereafter at less than award wages. It was common for women taking wartime public service appointments to be required to sign a declaration acknowledging their temporary status.

Formal rehabilitation planning determined the temporary status of many women workers. The Occupational Re-establishment Emergency Regulations of 1940 required employers to reinstate service personnel at the end of the war. This provision gave many employers a decided preference for women as replacements for servicemen precisely because they perceived them as easily expendable. In addition, employers avoided the risk of incurring extra obligations under the Re-establishment Regulations because temporary female staff would not be called up. The Auckland Electric Power Board, for example, discussed problems arising from wartime appointments in April 1940. As the Chairman of the Board put it, ‘when a man left for overseas the board was bound to give him his position when he returned . . . an awkward position arose when the man employed as a substitute also joined the military forces.’ He proposed that ‘where possible such replacements should be made with girls . . . and this would relieve men for military duties’. Although this proposal did not pass unquestioned, the objection to it came from a board member who maintained that it was the board’s duty to employ family men, not from any champion of women’s rights.

High priority was given to the rehabilitation of servicemen in New Zealand. Government planning began shortly after the outbreak of war and capitalized on a broad consensus supporting state involvement in welfare issues. Jane Thomson’s study of rehabilitation found that the effort put into rehabilitation in New Zealand was unsurpassed in the British Commonwealth. A climate of opinion that accepted the need to protect the rights of servicemen contained the danger that any wartime gains made by women, particularly in the area of paid employment, would be seen as being at the expense of servicemen. Indeed, it was not uncommon for those concerned with the welfare of servicemen to argue that women should enter the work-force in conscious defence of the jobs of servicemen.

8 New Zealand Herald (NZH), 22 November 1941, p.12.
9 Serial No. 1942/33, Government Printer, Wellington, 1942.
11 NZH, 2 April 1940, p.8.
Sir-
If we women of New Zealand expect our men to go away to keep us free, should we not fight at home then to keep others from profiting by their absence? We should do their work, not take their work... When a young man joined the Army, we could fill his position from our ranks... when the war is over, the girls would get their discharge the same as the men, and then, in the majority of cases, the men would be given preference when applying for positions, with the result that, with an assured position, they would probably marry, and the army of discharged women would become an army of wives and mothers.  

The wartime context also affected the status accorded to women’s work. Warfare involves a hierarchical division of labour and carries with it its own doctrine of separate spheres. There is a sharp distinction between combatants and non-combatants, between soldiers and civilians, between the fit and the unfit. Much of the lower value accorded to women’s work in the war effort derived from their non-combatant status. Not only were women defined as non-combatants, but their position as such was often included among the set of values the war was seen to defend. According to Winston Churchill, in an article published in New Zealand in 1940, the use of women in combat roles was unthinkable.

Churchill stated the position explicitly. In other places the links made were implicit and related to the association of femininity and higher moral purpose. In April 1943, Queen Elizabeth addressed the women of the Empire in a radio speech. Women were ‘keeping their homes for their men against the blessed day when they would come back... Women of the nation must be deeply concerned with religion and our homes provide the place where it should start. The creative and dynamic power of Christianity can help us to carry the moral responsibilities which history is placing on our shoulders.’

Certain types of military service were often seen as being at odds with the essentials of femininity. In The Press one serviceman argued that ‘war is negative and, to any woman worthy of the name, duty in connexion with it should...’

16 NZH, 13 April 1943, p.4.
17 ibid., p.2.
be revolting. . . Having digested the above they will place emphasis on the values that count most in this life, namely self-sacrifice and charitableness. Women, by virtue of their non-combatant status, were consistently cast in supporting roles in the theatre of war. Even servicewomen were often seen as backing up a more important war effort by men, rather than as directly contributing in their own right. An appeal from the New Zealand Prime Minister for female recruits to the armed services called for volunteers to replace men ‘required for harder war work’. The slogan on one of the more common Women’s Auxiliary Air Force recruiting posters ran: ‘They serve . . . that men may fly.’

In New Zealand the hierarchical distinction between non-combatants and combatants was further exaggerated by New Zealand’s geographical isolation and by cultural factors that inflated the status of military service. The Anglo-Boer War and World War I were key events in the formation of masculine identity in New Zealand. In the inter-war period the ANZACs came to represent a prototype of certain masculine national ideals. New Zealand’s remote and dependent position within the Empire also worked to raise the status of servicemen because military service was one of the few ways in which New Zealand could improve its standing within the Empire. Even after the outbreak of war in the Pacific many New Zealanders still had a strong sense of being on the periphery. The ‘real’ war was going on elsewhere. Pat Bird was in the WAAC during part of the war, joining because of what she termed ‘patriotism and ego’. As she said, ‘I just felt if I could get overseas I could do more for my country or something’.

The feeling of being removed from the centre of conflict was not exclusively female, nor necessarily civilian; men serving in the Pacific also felt peripheral to the ‘real’ war in the Middle East. But for women it was aggravated by the combination of non-combatant and predominantly civilian status, and by a general perception of women as secondary or ancillary contributors to the war effort.

Similarly, New Zealand women suffered in comparison with their British counterparts. The British women’s war effort was well publicized in New Zealand, both in newspapers and magazines. The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly was its most assiduous reporter, running a regular column about the effect of war on British women, as well as regular features on specific aspects of women’s war work. Obvious differences existed between the degree of sacrifice required

19 NZH, 2 July 1942, p.2.
20 NZH, 2 February 1943, p.5.
23 Interview with Pat Bird, 20 March 1986.
24 D. Collier, ‘New Zealand Volunteers of World War Two’, work in progress, University of Auckland.
from New Zealand women and that demanded of British women. The British experience was often used to argue that New Zealand women should be allowed greater scope for their war effort. Not only did war bring much greater disruption to civilian life in Britain, but the ‘degree of emergency’ which existed there also forced the British government to make much more extensive use of the female population. Mobilization of British women peaked at the end of 1943, when over 80% of all single women aged between 14 and 59 were employed in industry, civil defence, or the armed forces. In the 18-40 age bracket, the figure reached 90%, and even among married women and widows in that age group, 81% of those without young children were mobilized. Single women were conscripted into the forces after December 1941. In New Zealand women were never conscripted into the armed forces. Industrial conscription did not begin until March 1942 and covered a much narrower age group. Women with children were not eligible for direction to essential work, nor were women directed to part-time work.

If the war were to deal a substantial blow to the sexual division of labour, it had to do more than provide the opportunity for women to enter new areas of employment. An attack had to be made on sex segregation in the labour force and a re-imposition of new forms of sex-typing had to be prevented. To produce fundamental change the process of reassessment had to go outside the structure of the paid work-force to question the sexual division of labour within the family, and the primary association of female roles with the domestic sphere and child-rearing responsibilities. An examination of the way in which women workers were integrated into previously male-dominated spheres of work during the war shows clear evidence that in many areas the war did not break down the sexual division of labour within the work-place, or change stereotypes about women workers.

Comparison of the 1936 and 1945 censuses shows that there was some movement in the industrial distribution of women workers (Table 1), but these shifts were not significant enough to substantiate the claim that the war radically improved opportunities for women workers in New Zealand. There was an increase in the employment of women in secondary industry, principally in food processing, footwear and textile manufacture and, most importantly, clothing manufacture. The number of women working in domestic service declined dramatically, although female employment in poorly-paid and low-status service jobs in restaurants, tearooms, and hotels increased. Opportunities for women in white-collar work expanded, but this was as much an acceleration of a process of feminization of certain types of clerical work as the product of the

26 e.g. The Dominion, Wellington, 7 September 1939, p.7, where a call was made for the creation of a women’s land army along British lines.
28 Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR), 1946, H-11A, p.133.
30 Census of Industries and Occupations, 1936, 1945.
Table 1

INDUSTRIAL DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN WAGE-EARNERS 1936 AND 1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1945</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>6,515</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>27,751</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and communication</td>
<td>2,279</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce and finance</td>
<td>24,673</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration and professional</td>
<td>27,062</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic and personal service</td>
<td>44,482</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>6,165</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total actively engaged</strong></td>
<td>138,927</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1945 Census

At the end of the war, more women were employed in the transport and communications sector, but they were concentrated in a narrow range of occupations. Forty-four per cent of the increase can be accounted for by an increase in the number of female telephonists. Another 46% of the new jobs in communications were in the post office, sorting and delivering mail and telegraphs.

Moreover, not only did the industrial distribution of women workers retain much of its pre-war character, but occupational segregation on the basis of sex also remained a feature of the paid work-force. While some women were given the opportunity to train as herd-testers, tram conductors, railway porters and in a few other occupations, the number of women directly substituted for men in these areas was very small. Nor were many women employed in heavy industries created by the war. The New Zealand war effort was geared to the production of food and clothing, not armaments. The war redistributed women within female-

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32 Census of Industries and Occupations, 1936, 1945.
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dominated areas of employment; it did not break down the sex segregation of the
work-force. Furthermore, the introduction of industrial conscription in 1942
artificially inhibited the diversification of the female work-force. The majority
of women under National Service Department direction were not ‘manpowered’
in the sense that they were called in for an interview and then directed into a ‘war
job’. Most women were in their ‘war job’ when the regulations came into force
and were ‘manpowered’ when that industry was declared essential and their
freedom to leave the job was restricted.33 As far as active direction was
concerned, the industries which had high priority claims on directed labour were
conventional employers of women; clothing manufacture, food production,
hospitals, and catering.34

Much of the continuity can be attributed to the influence of existing gender-
typing of jobs. Generally women had not been trained in the skills required to fill
‘male’ vacancies. There was also significant opposition to the training of women
to fill these gaps. For example, the Butcher Trade Labour Legislation Suspension
Orders of 1943 permitted women to work in butchers’ shops as shop assistants.
Prior to the war, a small number of women had worked as butchers, but women
could not, under the existing industrial awards, be employed by butchers as shop
assistants. Of the women returned as butchers in the 1936 census only a small
proportion — five out of a total of 27 — were unmarried, suggesting that the
majority were probably employed in family businesses. If one looks at the duties
of women in butchers’ shops, it is possible to see a clearly defined, and almost
laughably detailed, division of labour between male butchers and their female
assistants. The basic division, as might be expected, was one of skill. Men
handled knives and women handled money, customers, and precut meat. The
Labour Legislation Suspension Order requested by the employers from the
Industrial Emergency Council went to great lengths to specify precisely the type
of work the women could do. Women could pack display trays, dress windows,
do pricing and ticketing, and weigh, wrap, and serve meat and small goods
prepared for sale by males. They could also take cash, tie but not prepare rolls
of fresh meat, roll sausage meat in breadcrumbs, and do light cleaning. The
Secretary of the Master Butchers’ Association stressed that the variation in the
award was wanted only for the duration of the war and that the employers did not
propose to use the women to replace journeymen butchers.35 While the provi-
sions may have protected the jobs of journeymen butchers, they also made it
difficult for women to acquire the skills that would allow them an equitable
position within the trade. Although practices would have varied from shop to
shop, employers seem to have taken the job description in the Suspension Order
fairly seriously: they applied for a separate order to allow women in Auckland

33 Report on the Work of the National Service Department, 1943, Prime Minister’s Department
22/1/8, National Archives, Wellington.
34 AJHR, 1944, p.41; 1945, p.75: see Montgomerie, ‘A Personal Affair Between Me and
Hitler?’, chs. 5, 6, for a detailed discussion of the effect of industrial conscription on New Zealand
women.
35 L.M. Mountjoy to Industrial Emergency Council, 4 September 1942, Labour Department (L),
4/5/1141, National Archives.
butchers' shops to sew prepared rolls of meat, rather than simply tie them, and to link sausages.  

The use of women in the Public Service illustrates the way in which women could be incorporated into the paid work-force without challenging stereotypes about women workers. Women had been employed in the pre-war Public Service on a very unequal basis. In 1921 the Public Service Commissioner had made women ineligible for permanent appointments or cadetships. By the end of the 1941-2 financial year the Public Service had lost 6054 officers to the forces from a total male staff of around 14,000. Although there was some streamlining of the functions of the service, extra duties associated with the war meant that there was little overall reduction in the volume of work. Thousands of women were employed in temporary positions 'for wartime duty' to cover the shortfall in staff and hold jobs open for returned servicemen. At the end of the war some women were retained in responsible positions, but there was also a review of the division of labour within the clerical staff which disadvantaged women. The practice of using 'well-qualified [male] clerical cadets on comparatively routine tasks' became a target of criticism. While the 'well-qualified' younger officers had proved themselves capable of taking more responsibility in the Armed Forces, 'less qualified', temporary female employees had not only shown that they were competent in routine office work but were also found to be 'more reconciled to this class of work'. The creation of a new permanent post, the clerical assistant, was recommended to relieve cadets of routine work. 

The employment of women by New Zealand Railways provides a further example of the way in which sexist stereotypes and job reclassification operated against women. Early in the war, Railways management, anticipating the loss of large numbers of male staff to the Armed Forces, began investigating the possibility of employing women as replacements. Initially, concern focused on reorganization of the clerical staff. The approach to the wartime utilization of women was cautious. The General Manager emphasized that the object of the exercise was to free men for transfer to higher priority work, not to improve the position of women employees. Female office assistants did not inherit all the duties of the cadets and clerks they replaced, suggesting that a process of job reclassification and dilution of skills was taking place. Women were not permitted to take over outside duties and there was opposition to the placing of women in jobs where they would come into contact with men employed on manual work. The Christchurch District Transport Manager rejected the possibility of employing women at several stations, because too great a burden

38 AJHR, 1942, H-14, p.1.  
40 AJHR, 1946, H-14, p.12.  
41 Locomotive Engineer, Wellington to General Manager, 15 December 1941, Railways Department (R) 501/81/7, National Archives; Wellington District Transport Manager to General Manager, 5 January 1943, R 501/81/6.
would be thrown on to the Station-master.42 At some stations the employment of women was rejected because of a shortage of local accommodation, or because the accommodation provided for male staff was not considered suitable for women.

Staffing problems were not confined to the Railways clerical divisions. In April 1942, the New Zealand Herald announced to its readers that women were to be employed to replace porters ‘entirely as a war measure’.43 Women also replaced men on the cleaning staff. As the Timaru Herald informed its readers in 1943: ‘If the travelling public has noticed the extra polish on carriage fittings, it is entirely due to the feminine touch with the mops and dusters.’44 Though little opposition seems to have been aroused by the use of women cleaners, the employment of women on platform duties was more contentious. The Railways had deliberately reclassified the porters’ jobs which women took over, restricting the type of work that women could do and calling them station assistants rather than porters or assistant porters. The major components of the station assistants’ work were ticket-checking, assisting in the luggage room, cleaning the station premises, and general platform duties. The women were required to be within the 21-35 age group, and hiring policies gave preference to the wives of overseas servicemen. The women started on a wage of £3.0s.0d. per week. Males in comparable positions as junior porters began on a lower wage of £2.8s.4d. at the age of 16, but by the time they reached 21 they could expect to earn £4.8s.4d. per week.45

Again the restrictive job description seems to have been taken fairly seriously. At least one District Transport Manager attempted to use the station assistants on a wider range of duties than those initially specified. The General Manager’s response to the news that Auckland station assistants were driving lorries was simple — get them off.46

The employment of female station assistants caused some concern in the labour movement. In August 1942 the Secretary of the Riccarton Labour Representation Committee wrote to the General Manager and the Minister of Railways to express his committee’s disquiet about women railway workers. Female station assistants were doing a man’s job at a lesser rate of pay, creating ‘a difficult situation when the men come back, to take over these jobs at a much greater rate of pay than is now being given to the women doing the work’.47 In defence of their employment, the Minister, Robert Semple, pointed out that the women were only doing a portion of the porters’ work: ‘The great majority of the station assistants at present employed are adults but they will not be called upon to perform the full range of duties undertaken by adult porters, or even by the

42 Christchurch District Transport Manager to General Manager, 21 February 1942, R 501/81/7.
43 NZH, 17 April 1942, p.2.
44 Clipping from Timaru Herald, 24 February 1943, R 501/81/6.
46 General Manager to District Transport Manager, 23 June 1942, R 501/81/6.
47 A. Biggs to Minister of Railways, 15 August 1942, R 501/81/6.
higher paid junior porters; for instance it is not intended to employ station assistants on such duties as shunting, signalling, piloting, unloading wagons of bulk goods, and certain types of heavy cleaning work.\textsuperscript{48}

It is difficult to be sure whether the restrictions placed on station assistants were the product of a conservatism within the Department or managerial sensitivity towards the attitude of the unions and the general public. In view of the cautious approach the Department also took to the employment of women on clerical work, it is likely that innate departmental conservatism was a factor, interacting with external prejudices against women.

Despite its care to restrict the work of women station assistants, the Department did not manage to escape controversy over their employment. A mis-captioned photograph in \textit{The Press} produced protests that were heard at ministerial level. Centring on key issues of skill and male priority in the work-place, the controversy serves as a useful illustration of common objections made when women entered areas of male employment. The offensive photograph appeared in July 1942 and claimed to show one of the new station assistants signalling a train. A letter objecting to the employment of women in this capacity was withheld from publication by the Chief of Staff at \textit{The Press}, and forwarded to the Minister of Railways for comment. The letter-writer objected to the replacement of guards by women on the grounds that they did not have the seniority and training usually required before an appointment was made to this position. The use of women was described as ‘a grave injustice to the men who have stuck loyally in their posts in the past years’.\textsuperscript{49} In response to the unlucky photograph, the District Manager in Christchurch quickly arranged for a retraction to be printed in the Christchurch papers. The women were disassociated from guard’s duties and the public assured that the picture was taken on the ‘offside’ of the train without the knowledge of a responsible member of staff.\textsuperscript{50} Semple assured the press later in July that ‘women would have nothing to do with dispatching and signalling trains — a highly specialised work’.\textsuperscript{51}

Despite proof that women could do responsible jobs, the war did not remove the basic distinction between male and female jobs in the railways. Women continued to be seen as suitable for different kinds of work, usually of the most routine nature, and as temporary employees. In 1945, the Secretary of the New Zealand Railways Officers’ Institute wrote to the General Manager of the Railways to inquire on behalf of anxious female staff about their post-war prospects. The General Manager replied that the department had not, as yet, formulated a policy, but that there were two categories of women employees to consider: ‘a) Those performing duties recognised as being essentially women’s work, e.g. shorthand-typists, book-keeping machinists, teleprinter operators, exchange attendants, and employees engaged on machine and other classes of

\textsuperscript{48} R. Semple to A. Biggs, 4 September 1942, R 501/81/6.
\textsuperscript{49} Bill Sykes to \textit{The Press}, 9 July 1942, R 501/81/6.
\textsuperscript{50} General Manager to Mitchell, Private Secretary to the Minister of Railways, 21 July 1942, clipping Star-Sun, 10 July 1942, R 501/81/6.
work in the Chief Accountant’s Office. b) Those engaged as a wartime measure to replace male staff released for service in the Armed Forces.”

A year later Sawers, the General Manager, received a deputation from the Institute, again motivated by concern among its female members. In the interview he elaborated on the status of women working within the Railways. He felt that mechanization of clerical work would continue, creating an ongoing demand for female staff, ‘because of their eminent suitability for such work’. As far as he could see there was no question of dispensing with these ‘girls’, though there was ‘naturally an ebb and flow as women took up matrimonial duties’. Women were being moved into a few positions previously held by men because those positions had been found to be unsuitable for men. An example was given of a station-master in an area where there were few opportunities for women: he was taking on women in preference to cadets, because the women, unlike the cadets who were in career positions, would not be transferred out of the office. Furthermore, ‘another point in regard to careers for boys was that there were some jobs which became rather tedious and the girls took to them better than the men and they were better fitted for certain jobs’.

It is possible that private firms may have been more flexible than the public sector. They were less concerned with public opinion and, particularly in smaller firms, under great pressure from staffing shortages. While it is dangerous to generalize from the evidence available (there being no detailed monographs written on the effect of the war on work processes in New Zealand industry), it seems that many private employers, especially those in male-dominated industries, kept women segregated within the production process, usually in jobs requiring less skill. For example, a representative of the Colonial Ammunition Company, a major New Zealand ammunition manufacturer, discussing the effect of the National Service Emergency Regulations on the company’s staff, conceded that women were an expendable part of the firm’s work-force because they were confined to simple, repetitive tasks: ‘Training female operatives at once to meet an emergency in staffing did not offer a very serious problem. In mass production, hands were soon trained to perform one operation. The male section trained in precision work and tool-making would be much more difficult to replace, but the regulations preventing men from leaving a job for another with possibly better wages should ensure that there was no trafficking in labour.’

Employers were also hesitant to place women in physically-demanding jobs and were likely to get a sympathetic hearing from the Manpower Appeal Boards when appealing for men in these positions. The Minister of National Service was informed that in the baking trade, ‘the employment of women except in a very minor degree would not be practicable. Work in the bakehouse would be too heavy for the average woman and now that deliveries are made only to retailers

52 General Manager to Secretary, New Zealand Railways Officers’ Institute, 30 July 1945, R 501/81/7.
53 Extract from a report of an interview of the New Zealand Railways Officers’ Institute with the General Manager, 11 July 1946, R 501/81/7.
54 NZH, 15 January 1942, p.6.
the rapid handling of bread is considered beyond the physical capacities of women.\textsuperscript{55}

Naturally there were exceptions. J.G. Power, the factory manager of the Latex Rubber Company, told a reporter from \textit{The Press} that in his factory women were operating hydraulic presses. ‘These jobs were never before given to women, and though they are pretty strenuous the women are standing up well to the heavy work. Often they pick up the work more quickly than the men.’\textsuperscript{56} However, in the same article one of Power’s fellow employers illustrated the re-defined sextyping of operations in his factory. The majority of female workers there were engaged in making cast-iron moulds. As he told the reporter, ‘this is a particularly suitable job for women. They might well be in a kitchen making a batch of scones, except instead of nice, clean flour they use dark sand and oil.’\textsuperscript{57} A domestic analogy was also used by the representative of a company making switches for radio equipment to explain the segregation of women within the production process: ‘The process of putting the various parts together was a tedious job on which it was difficult to maintain any degree of speed. It had been found that men put on such work could not adapt themselves to the monotony as well as women, to whom it was much in the nature of knitting or crochet work. Men were inclined to grow restive after a few hours of the constant repetition and their production suffered.’\textsuperscript{58}

The persistence of traditional definitions of femininity inhibited the extent of wartime change. To focus on women’s paid employment without reference to women’s domestic role would be to distort the nature of the historical change in this period. Patricia Grimshaw, reviewing the historiography dealing with women and the family in Australia, has noted that recent studies in women’s history fall into two camps, the first emphasizing broad changes in family structure as the key to the changing position of women, and the second more concerned with changes in women’s social, economic, and political position outside the domestic sphere. Grimshaw argues that the tendency for histories of Australian women to concentrate on the public position of women has led to an exaggeration of the subordination of Australian women.\textsuperscript{59} Applying Grimshaw’s distinction between emphasis on women’s familial role and emphasis on their public role to a discussion of New Zealand women during World War II, the temptation for historians is not to overstress subordination, but to focus too narrowly on extra-familial changes and to exaggerate the liberative effect of the war on the position of women. There are, of course, limits to the shifts in fundamental values that can be expected to occur in a short time-span, even when that time is one of dislocation and change. However, even if one acknowledges the resilience of gender-typing, the restricted immediate impact of wartime

\textsuperscript{55} Director of National Service (DNS) to Minister of National Service, 20 April 1942, \textit{Memos and Reports 1942}, National Service Department Series 2, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{The Press}, 14 January 1943, p.2.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Weekly News}, 2 February 1944, p.5.

changes in women's roles on ideas about gender-appropriate behaviour was remarkable. Women's work remained strongly identified with the unpaid domestic sphere. In fact, some evidence suggests that the war may have actually produced a conservative response in some circles, as the new opportunities opened to women created fears that women would abandon their traditional roles.

War intensified pronatalist ideas that linked population increase and national defence. Seven months after the outbreak of war, the *New Zealand Herald* ran a lead article outlining the peril in which the nation was placed by the low birth rate. According to the *Herald*'s columnist, Hitler's demand for *Lebensraum* had not gone unnoticed in Asia. Under these circumstances the use of contraception was not simply a matter of personal conscience; it was a question of national interest. In July 1943, Cyril Harker, an opposition MP, campaigning with the backing of the Catholic Church for restrictions on the availability of contraception, questioned the Minister of Health, Arnold Nordmeyer, about government policy regarding the import and manufacture of contraceptives and abortifacients. War had given new urgency to the matter, the 'heavy death-rate arising out of the war making it doubly important that race suicide should not be made easy'. Nordmeyer was in agreement with Harker, replying that pharmacists had been asked not to sell contraceptives to young people and that, if necessary, the law would be amended to restrict access to contraception. The following year the Health Department began a campaign to discourage abortion, arguing that the practice not only endangered lives, but was also a crime against the nation.

Since population growth was coupled with national defence, motherhood became something of an essential industry, if not the fundamental patriotic duty of female citizens. Dr H.M. Wilson, in an address to the local Rotary Club in Hastings, dwelt on the duties of the female citizen. Wilson believed it was essential for the country to develop a more national spirit.

It is to our women we must turn for help.... The men defend a country and the women give the children. The future destiny of the child is always the work of its mother. In future we will have to look more to our national security.... The fall of nations was brought about by killing off its virile members in wars and the failure of women to give children.... The men were giving up much to defend the country and so we were fortified in appealing to the women to do their bit by giving their country the best of all gifts, children. Our future, our national existence, depended on them.

Wilson was not the only medical man blowing the pronatalist clarion. Philippa Smith's study of the state and maternity in New Zealand 1920-35 has identified the medical establishment as one of the leading pronatalist lobby groups. Medical support for policies favouring population increase continued

60 NZH, 19 March 1940, p.8.
63 NZH, 8 April 1943, p.4.
during the war. Professor Hercus, the Dean of the Otago Medical Faculty, in his Wilding Memorial Lecture of 1940, went so far as to propose a Ministry of Population. He denounced birth control as a ‘baneful practice’, undermining society, and called for economic and educational measures to encourage a change in the typical family from the ‘two-child to a four- or five-child pattern’.\textsuperscript{65} Hercus’s speech received editorial praise in the \textit{Herald} and opened a debate about family limitation. Correspondents concentrated on the relative importance of financial and selfish motives in the decision to use birth control. Several women defended their right to limit their families because of economic pressure, reacting angrily to the suggestion that a selfish desire for personal freedom was behind the desire for smaller families.\textsuperscript{66} The paper also ran a lengthy interview with a colleague of Hercus, Dr Douglas Robb, reporting his approval of the speech. In some ways Robb was milder in tone than Hercus. The professor had maintained that ‘love of selfish ease’ led the majority of women to use birth control. Robb considered selfishness and laziness important, but he also mentioned economic considerations.\textsuperscript{67} The two were equally ready to encourage women to have children — Hercus calling for ‘life motives of a worthier sort’, and Robb preaching biological fulfilment. Robb’s view was that ‘having and rearing children is one of the most fundamental functions of man’. \textsuperscript{68}

In 1941 Dorothy Quentin, the agony columnist in the \textit{Mirror}, addressed the question ‘Are War-babies Wise?’ Her answer was an unequivocal yes. Babies were an essential commodity in a country at war.\textsuperscript{69} As the title of a \textit{Listener} article of March 1942 put it, bearing a child in wartime was ‘a fine way of saying “Yah” to Hitler’.\textsuperscript{70} A sequel to this article, ‘And “Yah” to Hirohito Too!’, published in May, dealt more directly with the anxieties of New Zealand women having children in wartime. The sketch portrayed a situation where two women in a maternity hospital discussed their mutual fears while in the early stages of labour. The older woman was able to comfort her companion with the knowledge that her fears for the future of her child were shared, and advised her that just as they would find the courage to give birth, God would give their children the ability to face the crises of the future. ‘God meant us to have children. And He meant us to trust Him to look after them.’ Bearing children during war was not taking women away from more important work; it was a statement of continued faith, a war effort and a peace effort combined.\textsuperscript{71}

One of the obvious reasons for the religious overtones of many of the discussions of women’s war work and its relation to the place of women in the family was the stand of the established churches on the issue. Perhaps the most vocal was the Catholic Church. The pages of \textit{Zealandia} and \textit{The Tablet} during the war were sprinkled with articles about women, the home, and the importance

\textsuperscript{65} NZH, 12 August 1940, pp.6, 9.
\textsuperscript{66} NZH, 24 August 1940, p.15; 27 August 1940, p.10.
\textsuperscript{67} NZH, 14 August 1940, p.6.
\textsuperscript{68} ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} The \textit{Mirror}, July 1941, p.44.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Listener}, 20 March 1942, p.18.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Listener}, 1 May 1942, p.16.
of motherhood in the spiritual welfare of the community. On women’s issues, one of the key concerns of the Catholic Church was the need to ensure that women continued to take primary responsibility for the care of their children. For example, a Zeitlandia article, ‘Will The War Change Women?’, cited a statement by a British woman parliamentarian, to the effect that women would expect child care to continue to be available after the war, as evidence that ‘the present wholesale employment of women in men’s work spells the break-up of the family and home life’. The article called for Catholic Maternity Guilds to be set up to encourage women to return to their proper sphere. These Guilds would be supported by Committees for the Christian Family and women’s study groups. Accompanying the article was a picture of a woman holding an infant, captioned ‘A greater joy than “economic independence in the factories or in the Services”’. The concluding sentence of the piece stressed the need for a return to the pre-war situation: ‘Women may now be driving trucks, punching tickets, delivering parcels, but they must remain women, and when the war is over return to their natural sphere.’

Protestant churches were also alarmed by the social repercussions of the war. In the latter half of 1941, in direct response to the war, the National Council of Churches launched a campaign aimed at influencing social development. This Campaign For Christian Order was essentially an effort to assert the continued strength of a value system or, as the 1942 pamphlet Christian Order phrased it, a set of ‘convictions and standards’ rather than a ‘detailed scheme for the reform of society’. The corner-stones of this value system were God, family, work in God’s service, and a belief that the government of the country should reflect Christian values. One of the stated aims of the movement was an increase in the birth rate. Implicit also was the conviction that the majority of women were best employed in the home, and that most women could expect to marry and leave the paid work-force. The fourth pamphlet published in the Christian Order Series by the National Council of Churches advocated a system of community service for girls in their late teens: ‘With the womanpower so released the problem of domestic help could be adequately tackled, with benefit to both “maid” and “mistress”, the former gaining valuable experience that would help her in her own home later on.’

At times the attack on women’s extra-familial role became quite explicit. In 1943, the Very Reverend Dean Cruikshank addressed a meeting in Oamaru in conjunction with a Christian Order rally. He pointed out that ‘if New Zealand was to progress as a nation . . . women must realise that their greatest function was motherhood and their primary place the home’. Women, according to the Reverend J.A. Thomson, had a higher spiritual role, which made it inappropriate

72 Zeitlandia, 26 November 1942, p.4.
75 Joan and Bruce Cochran, Love, Sex and Marriage, Christian Order Series No.4, Christchurch, 1943.
76 The Press, 29 July 1943, p.6.
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to involve them in ecclesiastic government: 'It is the gift of a woman to be a mother, and she is exercising an influence on an infinitely higher plane by the use of her motherly gifts than by the ruling and administration of church affairs.'

This value system, with its stress on the moral imperative to bear children and the patriotic dimension of motherhood, was an important framework for the choices made by women. Those arguments gave motherhood a positive status and encouraged women to see themselves as having a special reproductive and social destiny. Women were discouraged from developing a consciousness of themselves as important and long-term members of the paid work-force. Few people were willing to defend the rights of the working mother or to argue for an expansion of child care facilities on the basis of greater personal freedom for the mothers of children. A small number of people argued that working mothers were a fact of life, because of economic conditions, the exigencies of war, or feminine irresponsibility, and that child care should therefore be provided for child welfare reasons. However, there was little improvement in the availability of child care facilities during the war. The New Zealand government chose to work through the strongly pronatalist Free Kindergarten Association, refusing financial assistance to other organizations interested in setting up day-care centres. The Kindergarten Association was reluctant to encourage mothers to take paid work, believing that it was a 'most undesirable' development. In a handful of industrial areas kindergartens were extended to provide full day-care, but the overall provision of child care remained limited. In 1944 there were kindergarten places for only 10% of New Zealand's four year-olds.

In a generalized form the issue of war-work and motherhood became a question of the relationship between women's domestic role and their place in the paid work-force. The potential for conflict between women's wartime work and their domestic responsibilities received considerable attention in the press during the war. Between mid-1942 and the end of the war in August 1945, the majority of the country's magazines, with the interesting exceptions of the New Zealand Woman's Weekly and the New Zealand Home Journal, ran articles or major editorials speculating on the effect the war would have on women's attitudes to the home. All but one of the articles held that, for whatever reason — 'natural' predilection, pure practicality, or the failure of men to take their share of the burden — women would continue to be primarily responsible for

77 The Press, 6 May 1944, p.4.
79 e.g. 'Nurseries v. Grannies', Listener, 5 June 1942, p.17.
80 J. Robertson to Assistant Director of Education, 2 April 1943; Mrs O. McKenzie, Secretary, Orakei Creche Movement to Prime Minister, 10 March 1943; Auckland Trades Council to Director of Education, 23 March 1943; New Lynn Creche Committee to Director of Education, 8 June 1943; Mrs C. Barton to Director of Education, 15 June 1943; Mrs Linda Willis to Director of Education, 12 December 1943, Education Department, 16/1/23, National Archives.
81 G. O'Halloran, Secretary, Auckland Free Kindergarten Association to Director of Education, 1 March 1943, E 16/1/23; see also NZH, 27 February 1943, p.2.
83 Official Yearbook, 1946, p.130; 1947-9, p.143.
domestic matters. The one exception, an editorial in *The Mirror*, ‘Women’s Warmade Equality’, expressed the editor’s conviction that a redivision of economic and political power would follow from the war, but conceded that ‘many women naturally prefer to work in their own home’.*84 The *New Zealand National Review* held that biological destiny would out, but that men would also have to go some way towards improving the housewife’s position: ‘God made man and woman to be different. Natural instinct will rouse in women the desire for home and family, but men will have to make those homes more attractive.’*85 The *New Zealand Magazine* took several opportunities to look at the subject of women workers and the home. The article which faced the issue most squarely, ‘Back to the Home? Women War Workers and the Future’, was pragmatic about the situation: ‘No doubt a few women will take advantage of war-time experience to hold jobs that provide full scope for their special talents or knowledge. Concerning the others, as an American commentator points out, unless we can persuade the returning soldiers and men in general to stay at home and mind the baby or sit around on unemployment-relief allowances, a great many working girls are going to be forced to beat their lathes into egg-beaters and their trip-hammers into vacuum cleaners.’*86

Marie Fanning combined arguments about practicality and natural instincts in a *Better Business* article of June 1943. She described a family where a role reversal had occurred in order to highlight for her readers how absurd she found the concept: ‘In years to come, we may glimpse inside the happy home Mother, feet resting on the mantel, pipe between her teeth, engrossed in the daily paper, while Father, apron round his waist, takes his turn at cooking the dinner and getting the children to bed.’*87 The *Woman’s Weekly* noted that there was no point in a woman’s pursuing a career if she intended to marry, but that if war casualties made marriageable men a scarce commodity, women might have to consider their career options: ‘The solution [to the post-war husband shortage] might come with the custom of a woman only taking up a serious career at the age of thirty. By then she would know pretty well whether or not she wanted to or would marry. If not, she could tackle the career without the silly thought in the back of her mind, “why am I spending all my youth studying when really it is only filling in time until I marry?”’*88

The war raised questions of equality between men and women and questions about gender-appropriate behaviour. In general, conservative answers were found for these questions. Rather than representing a turning-point in the pattern of women’s labour-force participation, World War II fits into a process of long-term, incremental change in public attitudes towards women’s work in New Zealand. Between 1926 and 1961 there were three main trends in female labour-force participation. There was a gradual increase in the proportion of women in

84 *The Mirror*, July 1942, p.18.
86 *NZ Magazine*, November - December 1944, p.53; see also, ‘What We Women Want — After the War’. ‘Do Glamour Girls Make Good Mothers?’, January - February 1945, pp.49-51, 52.
88 *NZWW*, 26 April 1945, p.19.
the paid labour-force, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of married women working outside the home (partly due to younger and more universal marriage), and little change in the range of female occupations. Although the years 1939-45 saw a short-term increase in the number of women, particularly young married women, in the paid work-force, the war did not bring a major revision of ideas about 'women's work', either in the paid work-force or in the home. Wartime conditions generated a considerable amount of discussion about the position of women, and opened some previously male fields of employment to them. However, the wartime context affected the way change was perceived. Many changes were seen simply as temporary expedients, not precedents for reorganization of the work-place. This limited the impact of wartime changes in women's paid work on traditional views of women's role. The restructuring that took place tended to reinforce the sexual division of labour in the paid work-force. At the end of World War II, most women worked in stereotypically female areas of employment, had difficulty combining a career and marriage, and were more likely to give up paid work in favour of home-making and child-rearing than to insist on their right to equal opportunity in the work-place. Furthermore, the domestic ideology remained essentially intact, acting as a powerful constraint on change in the position of women in the paid work-force.

Waitangi Tribunal, Wellington

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