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**Women's suffrage movement
in New Zealand: social, cultural and gender
perspectives (1840-1893)**

Ruch na rzecz praw wyborczych kobiet w
Nowej Zelandii. Podejście społeczne,
kulturowe i genderowe (1840-1893)

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This is for my precious family.

Teddy, Emma, Gabryś and Ollie

Thank you for your
patience, support and encouragement.

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Introduction

As Gerda Lerner states in her seminal work *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, the establishment of patriarchal systems predates the formation of Western civilization and is “therefore, built into all mental constructs of that civilization in such a way as to remain largely invisible” (Lerner 3). That is also the reason for the easy acceptance of social and political inequalities between genders, not only among men, but for a majority of women as well. What is more, according to Lerner, due to lack of educational and economic opportunities some women have been complicit in the creation and the perpetuation of the status quo based on discrimination, predominantly by becoming active participants in the process of exclusion of members of their own gender who differ from them by race, class or religion. In consequence, they upheld the system which robbed them of freedom by placing them in a subjugated position in the society. The main reason behind this situation is found in cultural conditioning and the educational principles as Lerner notices:

Throughout historical time, women have been discriminated against and disadvantaged economically, politically, legally and sexually. They have, depending on their class, race and ethnic affiliation with men also participated in disadvantaging and exploiting men and women different from themselves by race and class and religion. In short, they have, while being victimized by patriarchy, continued to support the system and helped to perpetuate it. They have done so because their consciousness of their own situation could not develop in a manner commensurate with their advancement in other aspects of their aspects of their lives. (280)

Therefore, patriarchy, defined as the supremacy of male gender in most social and economic aspects of life, lies at the basis of the foundations of wide variety of feminist theories aimed at addressing as well as rectifying the imbalance that exists in societies because of gender differences. The concept of patriarchy is a general term used to express the totality of oppressive and exploitive relations which affected women throughout centuries and different feminist theories focus on different aspect of this phenomenon (Humm 200-1).

The political and social systems that grew on the foundations of the patriarchy did not allow much scope for equal participation of women in any significant sphere of public life. Britain, which was the home to a majority of mid-nineteenth female emigrants to New Zealand, could not be perceived as an exception to that rule as the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie between 1780-1830 saw the development and, eventually, firm entrenchment of the definition

of women as primarily relating to home and family. According to Catherine Hall, the emerging middle class did not define itself solely in opposition to the working class, but also to the well-established gentry and aristocracy. Moreover, the definition itself was not limited to the spheres of politics and economy but included aspects of culture and ideology. Central to these ideals was the redefinition of the role of women as primarily domestic beings focused on their duties of wives and mothers, supported by the Evangelical emphasis on the creation of a new life-style and a new ethic which, in turn, provided the framework for the emergence of the Victorian bourgeoisie (75).

This ideal of femininity restricted to the confines of the private sphere was popularised and offered as the most desirable model of behaviour, especially for women of upper and middle classes. Victorian women were perceived as “Angels of the House” (a designation originally derived from the poem by Coventry Patmore), who, according to an immensely influential author of etiquette manuals, Sarah Stickney Ellis, should work hard to “bring down every selfish desire, and every rebellious thought” as it was “the right of all men, whether ill or well, rich or poor, wise or foolish, to be treated with deference, and made much of in their own houses” (Ellis 25). What is more, both the Christian doctrines and Charles Darwin’s ideas of evolution seemed to reinforce the divisive stereotypes as being divinely or biologically ordained, rather than the result of social engineering. Under the influence of all these powerful ideas, Victorian British society developed a perfect model of patriarchy expressed in all areas of life, from domestic through economic to political.

What made the position of middle- and upper-class women who were dissatisfied with their subordinate position in the society even more difficult was the fact that the belief according to which it was “one of the self-evident laws of nature that men were superior to women – mentally, physically, and morally” (Strachey 16) was a pervasive force as both men and women.. The society generally accepted that it was at least inappropriate, if not outwardly unacceptable, for a woman to venture unnecessarily into the public sphere. Therefore, there was no real need for any provisions when it came to comprehensive education of females. Instead, women were supposed to be cosseted and protected firmly within the boundaries of their homes, which, for many of them offered a desirable measure of security and sense of order.

This kind of perception shaped both the way women were brought up and their self-perception and comportment in society. As they were deemed to be fragile and easily overwhelmed by work and responsibility, the theory was that they must be sheltered, protected and indulged. In consequence, women were automatically defined exclusively in relation to men and encouraged to cultivate the traits and skills that would be useful in their roles of

daughters, wives and mothers. Therefore, regardless of the fact that the expectations of individual men were not entirely uniform, it was the matter of a general consensus that ambition, achievement and independence were unbecoming to a woman. Instead women were expected to cultivate obedience, humility and unselfishness. One of the most far-reaching consequences of this status quo was the fact that a majority of women subjected to such treatment grew accustomed to the false safety offered by the lack of responsibility to such an extent that they did not only disregard the fact that it took away their freedom and independence, but went as far as insisting on bringing up their daughters in total compliance to the rules of the patriarchal social structure (Strachey 16-17).

For all these reasons, even the initial, tentative emergence of the female suffrage campaigns in the 1860s and 1870s was met with shock and abhorrence on the part of not only privileged men, but also a large section of the female population as well. In fact, one of the most inflexible and formidable enemies of the attempts to break out of the rigidly confining code of Victorian womanhood was one Mrs. E Lynn Linton, an English novelist and essayist. Her scathing criticism of the very idea of any possibility of women becoming legitimate participants in the public sphere resulted in the creation of the concepts which quickly became lasting elements of the rhetoric used by both sides of the conflict. Mrs Linton described a typical supporter of the female suffrage as a brutish and uncivilised “Girl of the Period” who, by challenging the patriarchal social order, lost her “natural” femininity as she tried to “become hard and fierce and self-asserting” (231). As the enfranchisement campaign dragged on, the “Girl of the Period” matured into a “New Woman”, who Mrs Linton deemed to be “a neurotic, immoral, senseless creature as ignorant of needlework as a Hottentot” (237). The novelist is also credited with coining the disparaging term “the shrieking sisterhood” for the suffragists, the name which has been used liberally and repeatedly by their opponents ever since.

While the efforts of the suffrage organizations in the United Kingdom were repeatedly ridiculed and thwarted, on the 19th of September 1893, the governor of New Zealand, Lord Glasgow signed the new Electoral Act into law, and the former furthest outpost of the British Empire became the first self-governing country in the world to grant all its female citizens the right to vote in parliamentary elections. What is even more surprising, both the campaign promoting the enfranchisement of New Zealand women and the legislative process itself were peaceful and, predominantly, conducted in the atmosphere of a rational debate. That accomplishment stands in stark contrast to the voting rights campaigns in the United Kingdom or the United States where suffragettes, such as Emmeline Pankhurst and Alice Paul, were

forced to resort to the creation of militant organizations that enlisted women ready to participate in what can be classed as acts of terror (see Pankhurst, *Freedom or Death* 11-12).

Thus, the question that arises at this point pertains to the reasons behind these differences in the reactions of the (male) establishment in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand, faced with the idea of allowing women to take an active part in the political life of their communities. This diversity is especially striking when it comes to societies which share a similar cultural background, such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom. It is the purpose of the present study to explore the following questions. Was the New Zealand system of government more democratic and representative than in the other two countries and, thus, the politicians find it easier to give franchise to women than in Britain and in America? Or are the underlying causes of a social rather than political nature? Was the position of women in New Zealand society different than in the other two? Was it only the extraordinary power of the arguments used by the leaders of the New Zealand movement that gave New Zealand suffragettes their victory? Did the New Zealand suffragettes manage to break out of the bonds of the stereotypes imposed on society by the patriarchal order and create a prototype of an egalitarian system which attempts to distribute power and privilege equally between the genders? Within the limits of this study, I will focus on the comparison of the NZ and UK contexts, even though I am aware that including the history of the American women rights movement could bring other valuable insights.

It is possible to assume that the comparatively more peaceful and swift success of the female organizations in New Zealand can be put down to significant differences between the former colony and the United Kingdom. In the 1890s, the New Zealand political scene was witness to a tense rivalry between the Liberal and Conservative parties, as they strove to win Parliamentary elections. One of the most straightforward explanations for the suffragists' success in their campaign for the voting rights is the skilful way in which the leader of Women's Christian Temperance Union New Zealand, Kate Sheppard and her associates presented women's enfranchisement as a potential factor which could tip the balance in favour of one of the parties. However, the present thesis will argue that the enfranchisement of 1893 was not solely a result of the suffragettes' campaign, nor the goodwill of the authorities. My hypothesis is that the success of women's rights movement in New Zealand was due to a combination of political, demographic, economic, social, and cultural factors. The present thesis argues that the relatively early and easy character of the process of enfranchisement of New Zealand women was, apart from the skilful use of the political situation by the women rights movement, due to a combination of the effects of the harsh economic conditions in the new colony on its emerging

society, the disproportions in the numbers of men in women in New Zealand as compared to European societies, and the quality that characterized British society during the reign of Queen Victoria and which historian of the period, Thomas Dixon dubs “a Victorian invention of stiff upper lip” (67), that played the most significant role in the enfranchisement of New Zealand women. Combined with a competent, ingenious, and persuasive campaign by the New Zealand Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the organization that stood at the forefront of the enfranchisement effort, these factors contributed to making the early and process of enfranchisement of New Zealand women relatively easy and fairly uncontroversial.

The campaign that eventually led to the granting of the voting to all women in New Zealand was based on petitions and garnering popular support for the cause. The leaders of the women’s movement framed their demands and the supporting arguments very carefully not to aggravate either the liberal nor conservative parts of the political scene and the society. For example, as they realized that New Zealand communities were still not ready for the possibility of women to stand in elections, therefore, this postulate was never a part of their demands. On top of that, any arguments or ideas, such as the idea of temperance, which met with a reluctant or sceptical reaction, were dropped from the agenda.

The campaign, however, would not have the same effect if it had not been for a specific historical context. In the mid-nineteenth-century New Zealand, as the furthest outpost of the British Empire, was perceived as both, the land of new opportunities and a challenge for potential immigrants. In 1825, New Zealand Company was founded with the express purpose of putting into practice the theory of systematic colonization, which required European labour force of both genders. (Macdonald 65). This demand for workforce had a natural, equalizing effect on both the class divisions and the gender dynamics in the colony. “Mistresses were much more involved in the day-to-day management of their homes, commonly working alongside their servants and undertaking a large section of the household work when servants were unavailable or left unexpectedly” (MacDonald 98). The hard work female pioneers put into shaping of the new communities resulted in them feeling responsible for the future of the country and gave rise to the conviction that women should be allowed to voice their opinions about social and political matters. This, in turn, created a receptive audience for the arguments of the suffragists and, in the end gained the leaders of the movement a remarkably large following in a relatively short period of time.

The next element which contributed to the success of the peaceful female enfranchisement campaign was connected with the demographic situation in New Zealand. While in Britain the census of 1851 showed the surplus of unmarried women ranging from five

hundred thousand to a million, in New Zealand the situation was reverse: in 1864 there were 162 men for every 100 females. Moreover, in order to persevere in the harsh realities of the colony the men who had decided to leave their homeland behind needed not only companionship, but also a sense of hope for the future which could be achieved through an opportunity to set up a family. Consequently, all single women who arrived in New Zealand, from quite well-educated middle-class “redundant women” crossing over from the United Kingdom, through large groups of Irish orphans to ex-convicts recruited in Australia, could be sure to find a host of matrimonial opportunities in the new land, which offered them a degree of choice many of them had never experienced before. As a result, women started to develop a sense of self-worth and confidence which, pretty soon, led to the development of ambitions exceeding the confines of the domestic sphere.

On the other hand, many of New Zealand men tended to appreciate the role women played in the community much more than their British counterparts, which meant that they were willing to accept their increased presence in all spheres of life more willingly. For example, unlike in Britain where women had to go through a long and arduous fight for the access to secondary and university education, in New Zealand the newly created educational system did not discriminate against the females gender at any level. These educational opportunities opened the professional world of medicine, law and local government, which was an achievement unprecedented in the British Empire. As a result, women were given an opportunity to prove that, despite the patriarchal stereotypes, they were more than capable of facing the challenges of public life which, in turn, made the idea of female enfranchisement easier to accept for New Zealand men.

Another factor analysed in this thesis that can be perceived as equally crucial for the peaceful enfranchisement of women in New Zealand is connected with the development of a set of attributes referred to as “stiff upper lip”. The roots of this cultural phenomenon can be traced back to the application of social Darwinism to the realities of the growing British Empire. Apart from significant social and economic changes, the rapid expansion of the borders of the British Empire also gave rise to a of cultural values and predispositions known as “stiff upper lip”. As the upkeep and management of far-flung colonies required a steady supply of a veritable army of governmental officials a complex educational system was put in place “for conditioning their boys into becoming upright, manly characters who did not cheat, sneak, or whine, and who could lead without being needlessly cruel to animals or servants” (James 145). The women accompanying their husbands to the furthest and most exotic outpost of the British

Empire were also expected to uphold similar values and act as symbols of British resourcefulness and steadfastness.

It is another of the hypotheses of this dissertation that this kind of systematic shaping of generations of young Victorian girls to be model colonial wives had an unintentional empowering effect on them, which, in turn, had an impact on the enfranchisement campaign in New Zealand. Many of the leaders of the suffrage movement were born and raised in the cultural realities of the United Kingdom, which meant that they had been exposed to the middle-class ethos of steadfastness and adaptability, as evidenced in the way they chose to approach the discussion about the rights of women in their new country. The New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union was, the organization created in 1885 with the express aim of trying to influence the government to introduce laws which would limit or even ban the consumption of alcohol in New Zealand. However, Kate Sheppard and Amey Daldy, the leaders of the movement realized very quickly that temperance was extremely unlikely to gain them popular support. Even some of the educated and politically aware women such as Elizabeth Yates, who in 1893 became the mayor of Onehunga, were sceptical when it came to banning alcohol. That is why the NZWCTU's leaders decided to change the tactics in order to achieve a wider goal of gaining the passive electoral right to be able to – indirectly - influence political decisions shaping the realities of everyday life. Especially Kate Sheppard, who was very skilful at reading and anticipating public reactions, advocated the initiation of a campaign aimed at female enfranchisement. In their writings, Sheppard and her colleagues, were careful not to aggravate men and the conservative section of the female population, but instead played on the elements of the well-known patriarchal stereotypes combined with comments on the realities of the New Zealand and the vital role women played in the new communities. What is more, they used humour, gentle sarcasm and even elements of reverse psychology to convince the politicians and general public of the non-confrontational character of the movement which turned out to be the right approach to gain them the eventual victory.

The simultaneous convergence of all these elements made women's enfranchisement in New Zealand into a uniquely peaceful and swift cultural process. Even though New Zealand society was based on the patriarchal model, the aforementioned factors resulted in the gradual redefinition of the social roles of women in the communities. As the emancipation of New Zealand women grew thanks to their educational advantages which gave them more skills to be active participants of the political and cultural discussions, males looked more favourably at their forays into the public sphere. The contribution of women to the new country was more readily noticed and appreciated and their position in the dominant gender discourse in New

Zealand was, consequently, much stronger than in the United Kingdom. In the enfranchisement campaign the leaders of the suffrage movement devised a convincing and appealing rhetoric, which brought unprecedented success. The peaceful process of women's enfranchisement in New Zealand can be interpreted as part of a gradual modification of the values of patriarchy, in an alternative to an open conflict and violence embraced by suffrage movement in other countries.

Even though the New Zealand suffrage movement was pioneering and unique across the globe, the research devoted to it and to the entirety of the female experience in the former British colony has been relatively limited and, predominantly, focused on the historical and political perspectives. The most notable scholars who have investigated the framework and various aspects of the New Zealand female history include Patricia Grimshaw and her seminal work *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* (1972), Charlotte Macdonald with her work on the female colonist in *A Woman of Good Character* (1990) and Barbara Brookes with the comprehensive *A History of New Zealand Women* (2016). However, there still exists a wide scope for research in the area, as evidenced by the fact that even the most prominent members of the enfranchisement movement have not been investigated extensively. For example, there exists only one comprehensive biography of the leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Kate Sheppard, written by Judith Devaliant, and her work does not analyze all the aspects of Sheppard's career, especially when it comes to the full impact of her writings.

In addition, even though the issue of reasons behind the early enfranchisement in New Zealand has been discussed by the scholars for over a hundred years, there is no study which would take into account the full complexity of the socio-economic and cultural factors which came together to make the granting of voting rights to women possible. On the contrary, especially the contemporary historians, politicians and commentators tended to take a very one-sided view attributing the success of the New Zealand suffrage movement to a single cause which fits the agenda they try to prove. Opinions as to the reasons behind the enfranchisement of New Zealand women started to circulate immediately after 1893. Both the supporters and the opponents of the female suffrage tried to find their explanations. For example, William Pember Reeves, a New Zealand politician and an amateur historian, claims that women owed their victory to a lucky accident and the mistakes of the incompetent government. As a result, as he concludes "one fine morning of September 1893, the women of New Zealand woke up and found themselves enfranchised" (67). This kind of approach met with the outraged reaction on the part of Kate Sheppard, who called Reeve's claim "lamentable" and "utterly misleading". According to her, the success of the Women's Christian Temperance Union can be attributed

to “a well-organized, hard-fought campaign that had a great deal of public support” (Lovell-Smith 89). Both Reeves’s and Sheppard’s interpretations found their stalwart supporters and became entrenched in the opinions of general public but, in the following decades, were challenged on the account of their short-sightedness or incompleteness.

The scholars analyzing the history of the burgeoning feminism, from 1910 onwards, tend to focus on the political aspects of the whole process. Feminist writer Edith Searle Grossman sees the involvement of large groups of women from different social classes in the activities of the WCTU as a triumph of the feminist ideology which strove to “free women from artificial or barbaric restrictions” and “give them fair opportunities and equal legal and political rights”. In addition, she attributes the early success of feminism in New Zealand to the fact that “many of the artificialities and conventionalities of an old civilisation were shaken off among the uncompromising realities of early colonial days” (43). These sentiments are supported by others, for example, Andre Siegfried in *Democracy in New Zealand* pays tribute to “a group of men and women determined to realise the idea of woman suffrage” who “managed to overcome the indifference of the many and the opposition of the few” (76).

In the 1970s, however, a new generation of scholars, inspired by a renewed interest in women’s suffrage that emerged due to the stirrings of second-wave feminism, put forward a host of more diverse and complex theories. The political angle was explored by, for example, Coral Lansbury who argues that the women in New Zealand, Australia and some American states were perceived as a potential leverage in the world of politics and granting them the right to vote was nothing more but a “temporary political advantage which had little to do with a desire to equalize the roles of men in the community” (8). On the other hand, in *Women’s Suffrage in New Zealand*, Patricia Grimshaw tries to outline the complexity of the underlying causes behind the enfranchisement of women by trying to establish the connection between the more liberal tendencies of a pioneer society, the economic crisis which New Zealand experienced in the 1880s and the growing popularity of female suffrage ideals among the New Zealand women. Even though it is one of the most comprehensive attempts at explaining the causes of the early female enfranchisement in New Zealand it fails to make the connection between the Victorian mentality and the way the suffragettes conducted their campaign. Still, other researchers, like Raewyn Dalziel, interpret the New Zealand suffrage in a different way: in her 1977 article, “The colonial helpmeet”, she sets out to prove that the vote was granted in recognition of not women’s equality in society, but rather of their special role within the society which was, to a large extent, in keeping with the standards typical for the patriarchal values.

These studies fail to account for the complexity of the processes that were in play in the lead-up to the petition of 1893. As Megan Hutchinson stated in her 2010 work *Leading the Way. How New Zealand women won the vote*: “there is no simple answer” as “it was a variety of reasons, combined with circumstance that resulted in New Zealand women being enfranchised in September 1893” (98). However, the studies of the New Zealand suffrage movement are either too limited and take into consideration a narrow scope of factors or fail to analyze in-depth the cultural ties between the United Kingdom and New Zealand. No conclusive answer has been offered so far as to why New Zealand suffrage movement was so peaceful and managed to achieve its goals two and a half decades ahead of the rest of the British Empire. It is the aim of this dissertation to expand on the existing explanations by combining all the socio-economic and political factors with the cultural elements typical for the Victorian period in order to depict the full complexity of the enfranchisement of New Zealand women.

The analysis conducted in this dissertation is of qualitative nature and based on, predominantly, primary sources which will include memoirs, diaries, autobiographies and biographies, letters, contemporary newspaper articles, interviews and reports as well as political pamphlets, address, minutes of Parliamentary sessions, reports written by witnesses of historical events taking place in the United Kingdom and New Zealand between 1840 and 1893. This portion of material is predominantly but not exclusively found in the anthologies of original published to celebrate the centennial of the enfranchisement of women such as *The Woman Question. Writings by the Women Who Won the Vote; The Vote, The Pill and The Demon Drink. A History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand, 1869-1993* and *‘My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates: The unsettled lives of women in nineteenth-century New Zealand as revealed to sisters, family and friends*. The timeframe in which the texts were written encompasses the period from the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi when British sovereignty over New Zealand was established and organized European settlement began to the moment when women were enfranchised in 1893.

In addition, in order to be able to address the issues of the contemporary gender relations in the most comprehensible way possible the dissertation also analyses other primary sources which will include visual art such as satirical cartoons, paintings and photography, as well as contemporary handbooks for women. While situated within the field of cultural history, this dissertation makes use of a combination of research methods. Close reading is the main method of studying primary sources as the analysis focuses on personal accounts of women who experienced the hardships of emigration, activists campaigning for the enfranchisement and supportive and critical commentators of the suffrage movement. Their frequently emotional

depictions and interpretations of current events, give us the most comprehensive insight into the entirety of the conditions in New Zealand around the time of the unprecedented decision to grant women the right to vote. In addition, elements of hermeneutic analysis is used to interpret the meaning of a variety of excerpts especially those from the texts describing historical experiences on a personal level. This method allows to interpret and analyze frequently subjective perspective expressed in the primary sources in a way which offers platform for unbiased conclusions. Proper analysis of source texts also requires the use of elements of narrative analysis and discourse analysis. Finally, elements of rhetorical analysis are employed in the study of the source texts in order to outline the differences between the strategies adopted by the New Zealand suffragists and their counterparts in the United Kingdom.

The dissertation is divided into the introductory part, five chapters and conclusion. Chapter One “The development of the ideology of European suffrage movement: from the Levellers to militant suffragettes” is devoted to the presentation of the creation, development and progress of political movements aiming at the enfranchisement of women. The focus is placed on Britain as the centre of the British Empire and the cradle of cultural and ideological processes that aimed at finding alternatives for the traditional model of a patriarchal social system, however, references are also made to French history and feminist ideology in order to emphasise the uniqueness of New Zealand suffrage. It is especially important in the light of the fact that New Zealand suffragettes drew from and built on the previous achievements of activists from other countries.

In Chapter Two, “A social and cultural history of New Zealand”, attention is turned to New Zealand. A short overview of the early history of colonisation of the islands is followed by a brief account of the conditions in nineteenth-century New Zealand, when it comes to social structure, economy, everyday life, leisure, as well as the possibilities for social and economic advancement. The main purpose of this section is to study the relations between the conditions of living in New Zealand and the construction of gender roles and stereotypes.

The following three chapters are devoted to the analysis of the primary source texts, divided into thematic sections. These include diaries, letters, articles and memoirs of the female immigrants and their immediate descendants showing various aspects of life in the early New Zealand society. As most of the colonists were shaped by the British Victorian cultural values, the social changes that made the early enfranchisement of women possible can be best traced and documented in the texts in which they described the realities of everyday life and the challenges of the new community.

In Chapter Three, “The British female pioneers in New Zealand”, the analysis focuses on the texts written by the first wave of immigrants, especially women who were searching for a better alternative to their lives in the United Kingdom. The emphasis is put on the fact that, even though, practically all female colonists could enter the bonds of matrimony if they wished to, the careful reading of their diaries and letters reveals that the main thing they were enthralled with was the array of choices that the colonial life offered. The narrative that emerges from the accounts of these women shows a gradual shift in their standpoints and a slow crumbling of blind faith in the values of a patriarchal society not induced by lofty ideals, but by the social and economic conditions. What is more, it is possible to trace the first signs of ambition to find fulfilment outside the private sphere of family in these writings, which, in turn, can be presented as one of the reasons behind the rapid growth in the numbers of women supporting suffragettes’ ideas.

The further implications of these changes will be explored in Chapter Four, “The support network of the New Zealand suffrage movement”. in which the analysis will focus on the way the educational opportunities and the demographical discrepancies between the numbers of men and women resulting in more tolerance and appreciation extended to women by their male contemporaries contributed to the validation of the suffrage movement as a legitimate political movement to be reckoned with. The first part of the chapter includes an analysis of the writings of four, remarkable women: Kate Edger who won the first Bachelor Degree in 1877, Ethel Benjamin who was the first female lawyer representing their client in court and Elizabeth Yates, the first female mayor to be elected in the Commonwealth. This kind of perspective can help to explain why the idea of female participation in the public life was more readily accepted in the new colony. The second part of the chapter deals with the texts which show a range of male attitudes to the question of women’s emancipation, as shaped in New Zealand’s patriarchal society.

The last, Chapter Five, “The rhetoric of the New Zealand suffrage movement” focuses on the texts by women actively involved in the campaign for the female suffrage as well as their supporters and opponents. The analysis centres on the demonstration of the fact that the suffragists in New Zealand and the United Kingdom used very similar substantive arguments to convince their communities to accept the idea of granting women their democratic rights, but used different rhetorical devices, adjusted to the contrasting attitudes towards women and their role in the societies of the United Kingdom and New Zealand. One of the main purposes of this section is to show the political and social shrewdness of these women who could not only read the public mood perfectly and respond to it accordingly, but also show the inappropriateness

and inadequacy of the arguments used by their opponents without resorting to ridicule and antagonism. Their success, however, would not be possible without the combination of all the cultural elements discussed in the previous chapters which prepared both the women and the men of New Zealand for the changes in the gender roles. Finally, Conclusion recapitulates and comments on the most significant conclusions which can be drawn from the analysis of the primary sources and attempt to establish the field for further study.

Chapter 1

The development of the ideology of European suffrage movement: from the Levellers to militant suffragettes

In this chapter I will outline the history of the suffrage movement from the beginnings of the concept of the gender equality when it comes to politics till the moment women were granted voting rights in New Zealand in 1893. The primary aim of that framework is to place the success of the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union within the framework of global, contemporary political thought and showcase the common features that connect the efforts of suffragettes in various countries. This kind of approach will serve to emphasize the uniqueness of the New Zealand suffrage movement which shared ideology, rhetoric and methods of popularising their message with the activists campaigning for female suffrage in other parts of the world, but had the advantage of the convergence of conditions and circumstance that made the process of legislation of the right to vote for all women unprecedentedly swift and peaceful. As the leaders of the NZWCTU, like in many other parts of the world, looked up to the British and American suffragists and suffragettes who, in turn, developed their ideology on the egalitarian ideas of British and French philosophers and politicians, it is the evolution of the gender equality postulates that I am going to focus on in order to understand the roots of the New Zealand suffrage movement and its remarkable success.

Consequently, the chapter is divided into three main sections which explore the development and evolution of the ideas that eventually led to the acknowledgment of the right of women to civic equality and, consequently, to their enfranchisement. First, I will focus on the precursors of the concept according to which women should not be perceived as inferior creatures incapable of making independent political decisions from the seventeenth-century Leveller women to the eighteenth-century thinkers and authors, such as Marquis de Condorcet, Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft. Subsequently, I will outline the background of the rapid social, economic and political changes that were transforming the way the class and political systems functioned in European and North American societies in the nineteenth century and which contributed heavily to the emergence of female enfranchisement and gender equality political movements. Finally I will move to an analysis of the works of the nineteenth century philosophers and activists like Barbara Bodichon, Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill,

Mary Taylor and Francis Nightingale whose ideas constituted the foundations of the agenda behind the British, American and Australasian suffrage movements.

1.1 The origins of the suffragists ideals

The creation and development of well-structured organizations leading frequently complex and prolonged campaigns aimed at the introduction of female suffrage was, inexorably, associated with the political, economic and social transformations in nineteenth-century Britain. It is undeniable that the rise of political consciousness of working men and the emerging middle class in the early 1800s, after the hardships brought by the Napoleonic wars, was one of the vital contributing factors to the relatively rapid expansion of the idea of the emancipation of women. What is more, the social and economic changes initiated by the Industrial Revolution gave women more opportunities for employment, particularly in the textile industries and, as a result, the means to achieve a measure of unprecedented financial independence and confidence to act within their own peer groups. As E.P. Thompson notes, it was the period from 1815 to 1835 that saw the first indications of independent trade union action among female workers and, even though the Female Reform Societies did not put forward the demand for women's suffrage they offered a suitable platform for the activities of the radicals such as Robert Carlile and Eliza Sharples, Anna Wheeler and William Thompson, and Catherine and Goodwyn Barmby (Thompson 1978 454-6). The efforts of these and other individuals, who strove to popularise the question of voting rights for women, were instrumental in turning the issue, for the first time, into a focus for a political group. Still, it is important to point out that it is too simple to think of all women in the pre-Industrial Revolution era as strictly confined to a domestic and apolitical sphere. As Kathryn Gleadle has argued, women were involved in political debate and action before the advent of the changes brought about by the nineteenth century, though usually more as spectators and supporters than leaders. The parochial was, moreover, an area where women could make an impact, even if they were "borderline citizens" (Gleadle 45).

What is even more significant, however, is the fact that, even though women had been traditionally pushed to the fringes of public life it is still possible to find examples of individuals attempting to gain more rights for women as early as the seventeenth century. Regardless of the historical period, country or the particulars of a current political situation all these endeavours share certain features which place them within the framework of a global process that, centuries later, resulted in the campaigns and eventual victories of suffragettes in various countries of the

world. First of all, the texts written by women advocating potential enfranchisement and equality show an undeniable proficiency in using the rules of rhetoric and sound argumentation which clearly demonstrates that, regardless of the lack of possibilities of gaining regular education, women were more than capable of becoming participants in political debates. In addition, the arguments used by them to promote these notions bear striking similarities when it comes to the perception of social dynamics and show a significant sensitivity towards gender differences and possible contributions that women could bring to public life. Finally, even though none of the proposals can be classed as confrontational or significantly more radical than calls for the abolition of slavery or the emancipation of working-class men, they were unfailingly met with an inordinate amount of derision and ridicule on the part of the male authorities and a majority of politicians, who, regardless of their professed opinions on democracy and equality of men, refused to even consider treating the idea of allowing women to take an active part in public life as a legitimate option. All these factors, which remained constant for more than two centuries, constitute both the background and inspiration for the nineteenth-century suffragette movements and need to be examined more closely in order to understand the depths of the foundations that Kate Sheppard and her associates built their arguments on. For the purpose of this dissertation we will discuss four of the most radical seventeenth- and eighteenth-century appeals for gender equality by Katherine Chidley, Marquis de Condorcet, Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft. Even though, it would be possible to point out to other examples of women, and the occasional man, attempting to advocate the inclusion of women in the public life during this period,¹ the texts published by the aforementioned authors, were arguably, the most inspirational as the evidence of their influence can be found in the argumentation presented by numerous suffragette movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

¹ Some of the examples include Rachel Speght's *A Muzzle for Melastomus* (1617), Ester Sowernam's (pseud.) *Ester Hath Hanged Haman; or An Answer to a Lewd Pamphlet, Entitled The Arraignement of Women* in response to *The Arraignement of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Men, and Husbands* (1617), Constantia Munda's (pseud.) *The worming of a mad dogge, or, A soppe for Cerberus the jaylor of hell: no confutation but a sharpe redargution of the bayter of women* (1617) and Richard Brathwaite's *The English Gentlewoman* (1631).

1.2 The Leveller movement and the rights of women

The political movement of the Levellers which emerged during English Civil War was patently committed to democratic ideas of the extension of suffrage to include all adult men, equality before the law and religious tolerance. The main ideas of its supporters were published between 1647 and 1649 in a series of manifestos entitled *An Agreement of the People* which called for constitutional changes. In addition, as Rachel Foxley notices:

The hallmark of Levellers thought was its populism. Not only was Leveller theory pervaded by the persistence of equal rights which must shape political life, but the Levellers' practise of popular politics through print, petitioning and the crowd became notorious (207).

That is why, it is hardly surprising, that, even though there had been no precedent of similar protest, when Leveller women, led by Katherine Chidley decided to draw Parliament's attention to their grievances they did it with the help of petitions. Between 1649 and 1653, this group of women disappointed by the outcomes of the First Civil War wrote at least five collective appeals to the authorities. The most famous of them, entitled *To the Supreme Authority of England, the Commons Assembled in Parliament. The Humble Petition of Divers Well-Affected Women of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, Hamlets and Parts Adjacent. Affecters and Approvers of the Petition of Sept. 11 1648 (May 5, 1649)* and, in all probability penned by Chidley herself, managed to garner the support of over 10,000 women, many of whom did not identify themselves directly with the Leveller movement. The text itself makes for a fascinating reading as the argumentation and the rhetoric used in it clearly demonstrate that even though seventeenth century English women were devoid of the benefits of a formal education and opportunities to engage in public political debates, they were more than capable of presenting their case in a logical and clear way. As the petition in question was written in response to Parliament's refusal to listen to the Leveller women's earlier pleas in defence of the imprisoned Leveller movement leaders, one of the main aims of the document is to defend the idea that differences between the genders are not so significant as to justify the complete disregard and the lack of respect women receive from the authorities. In the first paragraph, the petitioners turn to both religious and political arguments to support their beliefs of equality:

Since we are assured of our creation in the image of God, and of an interest in Christ equal unto men, as also of a proportionable share in the freedoms of this commonwealth, we cannot but wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes as to be thought unworthy to petition or represent our grievances to this honorable House. Have we not an equal interest with the men of this nation in those liberties and securities contained in the Petition of Right, and other the good laws of the land? Are any of

our lives, limbs, liberties, or goods to be taken from us more than from men, but by due process of law and conviction of twelve sworn men of the neighborhood? And can you imagine us to be so sottish or stupid as not to perceive, or not to be sensible when daily those strong defenses of our peace and welfare are broken down and trod underfoot by force and arbitrary power? (15)

The reference to the equality of both genders in the eyes of God can be perceived as positively revolutionary at the time when, in England, women's civil rights were practically non-existent. The English common law was particularly restrictive (Erickson 3).

What is more, a majority of contemporary biblical references in the texts concerning the position of women in the society from the legal point of view were directed at proving the "natural" subordinate role of the female gender, like in the case of the earliest work in English devoted to laws relating exclusively to women *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights*, also known as *The Woman's Lawyer*. In this document, which lays out the current laws regarding women's duties in each of her three estates: unmarried virgin, wife, and widow, the author invokes the story of the original sin which, according to him, serves as a suitable explanation for the development of the gender roles as much as the reason to uphold them:

Return a little to Genesis, in the 3rd Chapter whereof is declared our first parents' transgression in eating the forbidden fruit: for which Adam, Eve, the serpent first, and lastly, the earth itself is cursed: and besides, the participation of Adam's punishment, which was subjection to mortality, exiled from the garden of Eden, enjoined to labor, Eve because she had helped to seduce her husband has inflicted on her an especial bane. In sorrow shall thou bring forth thy children, they desires shall be subject to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. See here the reason of that which I touched before, that women have no voice in Parliament, they make no laws, they consent to none, they abrogate none. All of them are understood either married or to be married and their desires are subject to their husband, I know no remedy though some women can shift it well enough. The common law here shaketh hand with Divinity.

Not only did the Leveller women challenge the notion of the biblical origin of the "natural" social order based on the inferiority of the female gender in their petition but they demonstrated an ability to notice and point out the hypocritical and inconsistent nature of the political and legal systems. As they juxtaposed the democratic spirit of the Petition of Right (1628) with the outrages committed against the leaders of the Levellers movement and the disregard the female petitioners were shown by Parliament, they "secularized the Christian paradox of strength in weakness and exploited its subversive rhetoric in order to capture the attention of their hearers" (Gheerare-Graffeuille 14). In addition, even though confidence and assertiveness shine through the arguments and rhetoric used in the petition, it is important to remember that the Leveller women steered clear of confrontation and attempted to accommodate the stereotypical perception of the "weaker sex" in their appeals. In the final paragraph of the document they referred to it directly as they asked the authorities:

And therefore again we entreat you to review our last petition in behalf of our friends above mentioned, and not to slight the things therein contained because they are presented unto you by the weak hand of women, it being a usual thing with God, by weak means to work mighty effects.

This final call for separation of the authorship of the petition's arguments from their merit in order to avoid gender prejudice is a sign of practically unprecedented political maturity. The appeal clearly demonstrates that the Leveller women were aware of the fact that the seventeenth-century English society was not ready to abandon the patriarchal stereotypes and, instead of a direct challenge, an attempt to make the authorities see the carefully crafted petition as worthwhile of attention regardless of the fact that it was put forward by women as the most promising way for their arguments to be considered and acknowledged.

In contrast, the reaction of Members of Parliament to the women's political activity shows an unfortunate inability to look beyond the constraints of the ingrained belief in the "natural" inferiority of women which deprived them of any legal or political standing of their own apart of their husbands. Even though Rump Parliament prided itself on its democratic character which was supposed to allow all the social groups to put forward their petitions this rule did not seem to extend to women (Suzuki 248). That kind of approach by Parliament was aimed at showing the female petitioners that they were: "trespassing in moving outside their proper domestic sphere and aspiring beyond their subordinate position by speaking on matters concerning the political nation" (Suzuki 248) as they should be aware of their "proper" place in the social hierarchy.

The Parliament's reaction, however, was still relatively civil in comparison to the snide remarks of a majority of comments in the newsbooks of the day. Even though it is possible to find rare examples of a grudging measure of admiration for the initiative and the courage of the female petitioners, (*Mercurius Pragmaticus*, April 24 to May 1, 1649) once again, it was not the actual contents of the petition but the perceived subversive nature of the act that seemed to enrage male commentators. The mildest interpretations of the causes behind the women's appeal suggested strongly that the document could hardly be understood let alone written by a woman, which cast the Leveller female leaders marching on Parliament firmly in the role of political marionettes. Other newsbooks introduced elements of sexual innuendos trying to explain the reason behind the interest that the signatories of the petition held in the freedom of men who were not their husbands (Norton 64).

For some commentators, the outrage caused by the threat to the established gender order was so great that they took the vitriol even further. The invectives flung at the Leveller women in their texts were an outward attempt at their debasement and discreditation in terms of sexual

behaviour, class divisions as well as national origin. One of the best examples can be found in *The Kingdoms Weekly Intelligencer* of August 8 to 15, 1643 that chose to label the women petitioning for peace: “Whores, Bawdes, Oyster-women, Kitchen-stuffe women, Beggar women, and the very scum of the Suburbs, besides abundance of Irish women”. As the Leveller women never raised the issue of emancipation and did not advocate the active participation of women in politics but were only asking for the right to be allowed to express their beliefs and defend their convictions, the level of scorn and outward hostility that their petition met with is a clear sign that seventeenth-century English society was not prepared to allow the strictly patriarchal division of gender roles to be questioned or redefined. Still, the ideas that were introduced, for the first time, in the *Petition of Divers Well-Affected Women* mark the beginnings of the rise of the female political consciousness which, two hundred years later, resulted in the creation and development of organized movements aimed at securing political rights for the female part of the population.

1.3 “The Age of Reason”: women and their rights in the Age of Revolutions

It was not until the eighteenth century and the start of the “Age of Reason” that the idea of women’s civil rights started to be explored in earnest. As Jad Adams states in her book *Women & the Vote*:

‘The Age of Reason’ ‘with its scepticism about previous knowledge and willingness to challenge every accepted norm on the basis of philosophical analysis, allowed for the first flowering of applicable concepts of equal or comparable rights between men and women. The Enlightenment was the intellectual revolution that finally allowed thinkers to pursue the notion of women’s political rights on a level with those of men. (Adams 28)

That is not to say that the leading philosophers of the Enlightenment era were vitally invested in the issue of female enfranchisement or even more fundamental right of women to play a significant and active role in public sphere of life. To the contrary, a majority of, predominantly male, thinkers tended to dismiss the social importance of women and justify the constraints of their poor education and unfair legal systems with references to women’s nature which inexorably links their destiny with reproduction (Adams 29). However, the very same Enlightenment ideas of toleration, progress, personal liberty and fraternity that inspired all the major political revolutions of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries sparked the initiatives which aimed at finding an equilibrium between the constraints of the patriarchal stereotypes and the idealistic nature of the new more inclusive social systems.

It was during the American Revolution, usually dated from the Declaration of Independence of 1776, that these theories of equality and personal liberty were exercised for the first time. Admittedly, the notions included in the Declaration tended to skirt around the issue of women's rights as the main points concerning, for example, the obligation of taxation and self-representation remained carefully gender-neutral, but the way they were constructed was dictated not by the obliviousness as to the women's status in society but by the desire to avoid additional complexities that could result in confusion. Still, the problem of gender inequality remained within the sphere of political interests of the Founding Fathers as evidenced in a letter that Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, John Adams, then the first Vice-President of the United States, on 31 March 1776:

I long to hear that you have delivered an independency – and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation (Butterfield 370).

John Adams' reply to his wife's warning was kept in a slightly mocking tone as he referred to the contaminating power of democratic ideas:

As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient – that schools and colleges were grown turbulent – that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters (Butterfield 370).

Still, the fact that Adams places the question of the emancipation of women on a par with the most contentious issues of race and slavery, which eventually led to the atrocities of the Civil War, clearly indicates that gender inequalities were considered to be a serious problem too complex to deal with in conjunction with the more pressing and fundamental concern of gaining independence from Britain.

It is important to remember, however, that even the introduction of gender-neutrality in the wording of the Declaration of Independence and the American constitution quickly became a source of inspiration for the discussion of gender rights, not only in the American War of Independence but also during the French Revolution. For example, the notorious second amendment to the US constitution, which gave all citizens the right to bear arms sparked a controversy in the French National Assembly as to whether this law could be extended to include women. As John Adams comments on the debate: "if women bore arms in defence of their country or their revolution, did that not entitle them to the same civic rights as men? If

not, what was it that disqualified them?” (Adams 30). The female participants of the conflict, themselves, weighed in on the issue in petitions and contemporary articles. One of the best examples can be found in a woman’s newspaper, *Le Courrier de l’Hymen, Journal des Dames* where, in 1791, one of the contributors wrote vigorously: “Do the men no longer remember having seen us at the taking of the Bastille, on the road to Versailles and on the field of the Federation? Let them beware of arousing our courage! We have made them free...”(Bouvier 110) Despite the efforts of politicians to avoid the controversy concerning the discrimination of women when it came to civil rights “once the Pandora’s box of liberty had been opened the notion of liberty would not be contained within a single social group or gender” (Adams 30). That is why, it is possible to argue that it was during both the American War of Independence and the French Revolution that the foundations for the future of the suffrage movement were laid.

1.4 “Liberty, equality, fraternity”: the works of Marquis de Condorcet

Arguably the most pioneering and influential work on the legal position of women during the period of the French Revolution period, a pamphlet entitled “On Giving Women the Right of Citizenship” by Marquis de Condorcet is exceptionally comprehensive in its approach towards the role women should be allowed to play in a society. Condorcet begins his text with a powerful observation and, in fact, an indictment of fellow philosophers and legislators who claim to uphold the human rights and follow the principles of democracy but, at the same time, deny half the population even the most basic civic privileges on the strength of outdated stereotypes:

Habit can so familiarize men with violence of their natural rights that those who have lost them neither think of protesting nor believe they are unjustly treated. Some of those violations even escaped the notice of the philosophers and legislators who enthusiastically established the rights common to all members of the human race, and made these the sole basis of political institutions. Surely they were all violating the principle of equal rights by debarring women from citizenship rights, and thereby calmly depriving half of the human race of the right to participate in the formation of the laws. Could there be any stronger evidence of the power of habit over enlightened men, than the picture of them invoking the principle of equal rights by an absurd prejudice, and yet forgetting it with regard to twelve million women. (McLean and Hewitt 335)

Condorcet’s observations draw attention to the fact that the exclusion of women from the debate about the equality of rights undermines the very essence of the idea of social equality. Consequently, any projects aiming at, for instance, allowing more citizens to participate in the

process of legislation of new law, suffers from inherent flaw, which renders it no less oppressive than the original political system.

Condorcet goes on to undermine the statement that it is women's innate physical and intellectual differences that prevent them from taking an active part in public life. He argues that neither their bodies nor the intellectual capacities should exclude them from the world of politics: "Why should people who experience pregnancies and monthly indispositions be unable to exercise rights we would never refuse to men who have gout every winter or catch cold easily?"(McLean and Hewitt 336) As to the argument according to which women are less intelligent and therefore predestined to be confined to the domestic sphere of life, Condorcet replies that such claim is practically impossible to prove as women are denied formal education. On top of that, he dismisses the tenet of remarkable intellectual achievement as a prerequisite for granting of the voting right as he states that "It would be quite absurd to limit the right of citizenship and the ability to discharge public functions to the superior class. Why, then, should we exclude women, rather than those men who are inferior to a great many women?" (McLean and Hewitt 336)

What is more, against the argument that there are natural qualities in a woman's mind or heart' which prevents her from passing a sound political judgment or becoming a successful and independent politician, Condorcet turns to historical examples Queen Elizabeth of England, Maria-Theresa and the two Catherines of Russia whom he perceives as paragons of female strength of mind and the courage of convictions. As he states, all these leaders had no more faults or weaknesses than their male counterparts and, therefore, should not be perceived as weaker or inferior. According to Condorcet the cases of women who were thrust in a position of power by accident of birth but proved to be competent leaders full of courage and strength of mind can be seen as proof that, given the right opportunities women are more than capable of rising to the challenge of governance, perhaps even better than men who frequently prove to be inadequate when it comes to the complexities of ruling a country. (McLean and Hewitt 336). In the next few paragraphs of his text, Condorcet shifts his focus from the question of social and political equality to the issue of gender differences. As he acknowledges the existence of vital divergences in the way women behave and react to various situations, according to the statement that he puts forward, their influence is to women's advantage as it gives them a noticeable advantage over the male part of society. In addition, what men tend to interpret as a women's overtly emotional and irrational behaviour is explained by Condorcet as a matter of a perspective that has been forced upon both genders by stereotypes. (McLean and Hewitt 336). The supposed "faults" of women's nature, which include gentleness, sensitivity and soft-

heartedness are, according to Condorcet, also the immediate consequences of the roles women are forced to play in society as it is “education and society which accustom women, not to the idea of justice, but to that of decency” (McLean and Hewitt 336). However, even though, that kind of conditioning deprives women of experience in public life, it does not mean that it should be used as a justification for their exclusion from the participation in politics as the same rule would have to be applied towards “a man who was obliged to work constantly and could therefore neither become enlightened nor exercise his reason” (McLean and Hewitt 336). Application of that formula, claims Condorcet, would result in a creation of new aristocracy, which is hardly in keeping with the goals of post-revolutionary and democratic society. Moreover, he compares the subservient legal position of women to that of enslaved Africans and suggests that it is the obligation of the new republic to correct this injustice that is rooted in the throwbacks of the tyrannical past.

Subsequently, Condorcet moves on to an analysis of three of the most common arguments against granting women the civic rights in order to highlight their incongruities and prove their invalidity in a democratic society. First of all, he addresses the fear that women’s influence over men in public debates would be a threat as men feel obligated by the chivalric custom not to defend their opinions strongly in an argument with a woman. However, according to Condorcet, it would be beneficial for any society to have women contribute to the political issues openly as “women have never been given complete equality in any country, and yet they have been influential everywhere; and the more they have been maltreated by the laws, the more dangerous their influence has become” (McLean and Hewitt 337). Moreover, men feel obligated to agree with women on trivial matters as “they allow women an empty victory and their defeat is no humiliation because it is seen as voluntary”. Still, if women were given access to serious debates on vital issues, men’s pride would take precedent over politeness.

As to the second objection, according to which, women would be distracted from their domestic duties if allowed to participate in the public life of their communities, Condorcet answers that, by the very nature of European politics only certain individuals, whether male or female, are called upon to devote a majority of their time and attention to public matters. In fact, women would not be more distracted from their duties than “labourers their ploughs, or craftsmen their workshops”. For some of them, especially the ones who are not forced to work for their living it may, actually, prove to be beneficial as “no woman in the richest classes is so busy with domestic affairs that we need worry about distracting her, and a serious task would distract her far less than the futile pastimes to which women are condemned by idleness and bad education”. Condorcet claims that, for all these reasons, men need not to worry that “just

because women could be members of the National Assembly, they would immediately abandon their children, their homes and their needlework” but should focus on the fact that the broadening women’s horizons by allowing them to take an active part in public life would, in all probability, benefit the entire society as it would “make them better able to raise their children and to make men of them” (McLean and Hewitt 338).

Even in republican France where the traditional social hierarchy had been abolished and where democracy was supposed to be the most important values, Condorcet’s ideas were undoubtedly controversially progressive. The Marquis, himself, realised that his work would not meet with general acclaim and, in the final paragraphs of his text, made an attempt at challenging his future critics to a calm and logical discourse. Condorcet’s proposal boils down to a calm and reasonable appeal for acknowledgment of the inconsistency prevalent in the attitudes towards women and their presumed social roles. It is especially striking as, surprisingly enough, its restrictive nature comes to the fore in a much more pronounced way, not in the realm of politics but when it comes to professions or public functions. According to Condorcet, until this duality is officially taken into consideration, any further debate on introducing equality of rights to society remains, to a large extent, immaterial. (McLean and Hewitt 339).

Still, even though Condorcet became a prominent figure behind the creation of the new, democratic constitution his vision of a new society based on logical and democratic rules of universal equality and cooperation rapidly lost him favour with the Jacobins, the most influential and increasingly conservative party in the National Assembly. That is one of the reasons why, even the mere suggestion of including female suffrage in the new constitution, introduced by Condorcet on behalf of the women’s club of Besancon, met with such derision and mockery that the proposal was swiftly withdrawn. Condorcet himself became an outlaw after he bravely voted against the death sentence at the trial of Louis XVI (in all probability due to his opposition to the idea of capital punishment and not out of sympathy for the monarch) and his texts were pushed to the sidelines of public attention (Nall 63).

In the context of the global history of the female franchise, however, Marquis de Condorcet remains an important contributor as he was the first one to have formed a coherent and realistic argument for female enfranchisement from the perspective of a philosopher trying to employ the democratic ideals of the Enlightenment to the world of the contemporary politics. His unflinching belief in gender equality is unprecedented and renders him exceptional among his fellow thinkers and politicians. As Jeff Nall notes in his article on the philosopher’s influence: “Condorcet’s ability to recognize any and all prejudices made him the Hercules

among the philosophes who frees the Enlightenment from its imprisonment by hypocrisy, slaughtering the prejudice that stood pecking at the very cornerstone of the Age of Reason's principles." Nall believes that Condorcet became not only became "the first true male feminist of his time, but also the first philosophe to make good on the principle to fell every unsubstantiated prejudice" (Nall 66).

1.5 Olympe de Gouge on the woman's right to freedom and equality

"The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" that was signed in August 1789 and declared the "natural and inalienable" rights of man that included freedom, property, security and resistance to oppression inspired not only the philosophers and the masses of men deprived of even the most basic civil rights, but also some French women who saw the new republic as a chance of gaining at least a semblance of an equal footing with the men who were to benefit from the democratic changes introduced by the National Assembly. This initiative aimed at changing the political system to the advantage of the female half of society resulted in the creation of dozens of women's societies in practically every major French city and town. The most vocal and prominent of these groups, referred to as the Cercle Social (social circle), assembled around the Marquis of Condorcet and was led by a Dutch woman, Etta Palm d'Aelders. In 1790-91, the members of the society launched a campaign for women's rights based on political articles published in their newspapers and pamphlets. The main arguments promoted in these publications concerned equal rights in marriage and in education as well as changes to inheritance and divorce laws (Mousset 36).

Arguably, the most straightforward and bold statements about the condition of women in the patriarchal society came from the pen of Marie Gouze (1748–93), who wrote under the pen name Olympe de Gouges. Her most famous pamphlet, entitled "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen" and published in response to the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen", is a sophisticated take on the declaration that outlined the social injustices between the aristocracy and the working classes. Following the structure and the style of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" not only does de Gouge show clearly that women have been excluded from the supposedly democratic promises of the document but also highlights the fact that women want to be perceived as equal but not identical to men.

According to de Gouge, women have inherently different natures and, therefore, their needs and the roles they are supposed to play in society have to be divergent to the ones of their male counterparts. That does not mean, however, that women are weaker or inferior, to the

contrary, de Gouge puts the very claims that have been used against granting women the right to participate in public life, such as their capacity for maternity, at the forefront of her argument. As she says in the Preamble: “the sex that is as superior in beauty as it is in courage during the sufferings of maternity recognizes and declares in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following Rights of Woman and Female Citizens” (Gouge 2). In addition, in the paragraph devoted to the right of free speech, de Gouge connects the problem to the typically feminine complaints connected with the lack of freedom when it comes to the expression of even the most basic ideas: “The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of woman, since this liberty guarantees that fathers will recognize their children. Any female citizen can thus say freely: ‘I am the mother of your child’ without being forced by barbarous prejudice to hide the truth” (Gouge 2). That kind of approach distinguishes Olympe de Gouge’s work from all other contemporary texts written in support of female suffrage and civic rights as even Marquis de Condorcet perceives maternity as nothing more but a ‘minor inconvenience’ when it comes to political participation while de Gouge tends to treat all the elements of femininity as integral to women’s activity both in private and public spheres of life. In a way, her perception of the female role in society foreshadows not only the arguments employed by the nineteenth century suffragettes, but also the late twentieth century feminist debates about the disparities between equality and gender differences (Desan 257).

The fact that de Gouge demands the acknowledgment of the separate nature of female needs does not mean, however that she postulates that women should get preferential treatment when it comes to public life. To the contrary, as she emphasizes in the paragraph on the creation of the laws:

The law must be the expression of the general will; all female and male citizens must contribute either personally or through their representatives to it; it must be the same for all: male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honours, positions, and public employment according to their capacity and without other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents. (Gouge 2)

What is more, women should be accountable to “rigorous law” to the same degree as men and can be “accused, arrested and detained” and if their guilt is determined “complete rigour is exercised by law”. Still, even this example of women’s duties is eventually employed by de Gouge to justify giving women the freedom of speech in the matters concerning politics as she claims: “woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum, provided that her demonstrations do not disturb the legally established public order” (Gouge 2). That kind of reasoning demonstrates Olympe de Gouge’s keen sense

of democratic justice and a level of political sophistication. Therefore, it is possible to claim that it can be seen as proof that, even without the benefit of formal education, as early as in the eighteenth century women were capable of devising logical and elaborate argumentation in defence of their own rights. Furthermore, in the conclusion of her declaration, Olympe de Gouge makes an attempt at inspiring all women to an individual and independent analysis of the changes happening in the post-revolutionary French political system. She is clearly confident of women's capability to draw logical conclusions and, eventually, find a way to forge new social roles that go outside the purview of domesticity. She states that it is crucial for women to be aware of the fact that, when it comes to the actual progress on the achieving any true form of equality, women have only themselves to rely on as even during significant social upheavals, such as revolutions, men are not likely to pay much heed to female entreaties for inclusion (Gouge 3).

It is feasible that, at the time of the publication of the declaration, de Gouge perceived herself as a potential future leader of a female political movement as, unlike the Leveller women and Marquis de Condorcet who relied on the good will of the authorities to change the status quo, she is the first one to advocate precise ways in which women can act to enforce the abolishment of the patriarchal stereotypes:

If they persist in their weakness in putting this non sequitur in contradiction to their principles, courageously oppose the force of reason to the empty pretensions of superiority; unite yourselves beneath the standards of philosophy; deploy all the energy of your character, and you will soon see these haughty men, not groveling at your feet as servile adorers, but proud to share with you the treasures of the Supreme Being. Regardless of what barriers confront you, it is in your power to free yourselves; you have only to want to...
(Gouge 4)

The kind of independence proposed by de Gouge in her text, aims not only at the awakening of the self-reliance frequently lacking in women due to the mode of their education and social expectations but creating the atmosphere of cooperation and true companionship between genders.

What is more, inspiring women to seek intellectual and social independence is not the only aspect of the matter Olympe de Gouge addresses in the conclusion to her declaration. She goes on to identify the institution of marriage as one of the most oppressive social concepts that is "the tomb of love and trust". It is not simply an institution that turns women into victims, but corrupts them to act in a self-serving and dishonest way as it creates opportunities for dishonesty in the only area in which women are left with any vestiges of power. Namely, whether within or outside the bounds of matrimony, it is only women who possess certainty as to the patrimony

of their children; therefore can be tempted to mislead men and indirectly influence the issues connected with inheritance (Gouge 4).

One solution to this problem, according to de Gouge, could take the form of a legal contract between a man and a woman as equal partners. The text would be drafted with the intention of securing the future of existing and potential offspring when it comes to the most essential issues connected with property and assets. What is even more striking, the proposed agreement between the spouses has a distinctively business-like quality which acknowledges, both the transactional character of the marriage institution as well as the inherently transient nature of romantic feelings between even the most loving couples. Therefore, the composition of the contract, which assumes that both sides have the same rights and can be united in their common pursuit of providing for their children, shows Olympe de Gouge as forward-thinking and ready to embrace concepts which were unacceptable for a majority of the late eighteenth-century French society.

Still, it was that kind of approach to relationships between genders, which combines the private and public spheres and reaffirms women's right to be perceived not as subjects but partners in social contracts, which became one of the main reasons why the ground-breaking ideas of Olympe de Gouge were rejected in the post-revolutionary France. In fact, all the manifestations of women's assertiveness started to be frowned upon and, eventually, perceived as a real threat to the increasingly Jacobins-dominated National Assembly. On the 30th of October 1793, the Convention closed all the women's political clubs and, at the same time, banned them from forming any organizations of this type (Hunt 68). The ideas promoting gender equality and female enfranchisement were not the only target for the post-revolutionary conservatives. All the women and men who dared to take a public stance against the patriarchal social order met with rejection, outright violence and even premature death at the hands of the Jacobin authorities (Desan 293). Olympe de Gouge, was declared an enemy of the people, imprisoned and eventually sentenced to death by a revolutionary tribunal in October 1793. (*Chronicle* 46). One of her persecutors on the behalf of the Jacobins, Pierre Chaumette, gloated after the sentence was carried out: "She wished to be a politician and it seems the law has punished this conspirator for having forgotten the virtues appropriate to her sex" (Scott 85). That kind of sentiment recapitulates the predominant stance that the Jacobin authorities took on the question of the gender roles in the society. Soon, the situation of women in France became even worse than before the revolution. In May 1795, they were forbidden not only to participate but also attend the meetings of the Convention; the only way for a woman to observe the proceedings was from the visitor's gallery and even then, only if she was accompanied by a

man who was a citizen. Eventually, the inferior position of women became formalized in the Napoleonic Code as women were barred from political rights and their legal position, in the matters such as divorce and property rights, restricted and subjected to the decisions of their male relatives (Mousset 38).

Still, even though the period of the French Revolution did not eventuate in the betterment of women's situation in the society, the questions that were posed as to their rights and the roles they should play, both in the private and public spheres initiated future debates and served as a source of inspiration for the creation of the organized suffragette movements in the mid-nineteenth-century. Most significantly, it was the moment in history when the problem of women's civic rights was raised for the very first time as a legitimate political issue on par with, for example, the emancipation of slaves. Second of all, in the works of thinkers such as Marquis de Condorcet and Olympe de Gouge, it is possible to find comprehensive theories on the connections among the right to vote, right to own property and the right to a proper education (Adams 43) Another important aspect of gender dynamics outlined in the aforementioned works touches upon the quandary that is still being discussed by the contemporary feminists. Namely, it is during the debates around the Revolutions that the fundamental question about the significance of the differences between men and women was originally asked and explored. Was it possible to pinpoint certain inherent traits that predetermined men and women to various social roles or were the biological differences between genders, in fact, immaterial to political activity and women's ambition to find fulfilment in public sphere?

1.6 “Mind has no sex”: *Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Even though it was the French Enlightenment thinkers that brought forward the ideas that inspired modern democratic theory and political systems, the proposal of political emancipation for women found more favourable conditions to flourish in Anglo-Saxon and not French culture. It was in Great Britain that the very first projects for an organized academic education for women took tentative shape. As early as 1671, in his pamphlet entitled *An Academy of Colledge wherein Young Ladies and Gentlewomen may at a very Moderate Expense be Duly*

Instructed in The Protestant Religion and in all Virtuous Qualities, Edward Chamberlayne proposes creation of a network of Academies or Colleges that could offer young girls an opportunity to gain at least a semblance of what was considered to be a classic academic education. Chamberlayne's ideas were taken up by some of the leading public figures of late seventeenth and eighteenth century, such as Mary Astell, Lady Montagu, Daniel Defoe and Bishop G. Burnet who saw the need to include girls in the educational system. Granted, most of them were not entertaining the possibility that women could find employment thanks to the knowledge they gain but saw it more as an opportunity to better equip ladies for the challenges of marriage and caring for a family. For instance, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, was convinced that the professions were closed to women due to the will of "Divine Providence" as "philosophical ladies" and "she-clerks" struck her as undesirable and slightly unnatural. On the other hand, Daniel Defoe, rejected any ideas of women's colleges as 'a kind of monastery' and smacking of popery. He created a model based on the public-school system that was already offering quality education to young men, putting more emphasis on teaching secular subjects without rejection of religious instruction. What is more, in his opinion a comprehensive program of education should include history and modern languages – especially French and Spanish (Purvis 57).

Despite the fact that most of these proposal for the education of young women were not merely idealistic ideas but of very practical character (both Mary Astell and Lady Montagu came up with specific examples of curricula and made concerted efforts to collect donations for the creation of the colleges) (Purvis 63) the predominant views on gender roles made eighteenth century English society reluctant to accept even a limited broadening of female intellectual horizons. In general, political thinkers in particular were not paying much heed to the needs of women and tended to perceive them only within the bounds of the patriarchal stereotypes. Education for young girls was not considered to be a matter of great importance and any interest in public matters, shown by women treated as going against their nature. Politics was a markedly sensitive topic as is evident in the following excerpt from an article by the essayist Joseph Addison who strongly felt that women should refrain from showing an interest in public affairs,

which of late Years is very much crept into their Conversation. This is, in its Nature, a Male Vice, and made up of many angry and cruel Passions that are altogether repugnant to the Softness, the Modesty, and those other endearing Qualities which are natural to the Fair Sex. Women were formed to temper Mankind, and soothe them into Tenderness and Compassion, not to set an Edge upon their Minds, and blow up in them those Passions which are too apt to raise of their own Accord (Addison 478).

Still, the very fact that it is possible to find eighteenth-century articles and pamphlets promoting girls' education or commenting on the inappropriateness of female involvement in the public sphere clearly demonstrates that, at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in Britain, just like in France, the democratic ideals of the Enlightenment were starting to slowly influence the established social order as the topics concerning gender roles and equality between the sexes were considered and discussed as serious issues for the very first time. It was also during that period that one of the most influential and defining texts on women's rights, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft, became, what one of Wollstonecraft's biographers, Emily Sunstein referred to as, "perhaps the most original book of [her] century)" (Sunstein 3).

As the controversial facts of Wollstonecraft's biography quickly eclipsed the initial success of her book², the merits of her argumentation were irreversibly marred by the fact that her theories became synonymous with moral decadence and corruption. However, the analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas as to the significance of female education and the need for changes in the British educational system which, by allowing girls equal opportunities to boys, would benefit the whole society shows forwardness of thinking and a modern approach, uncommon for eighteenth century texts on issues concerning women. Wollstonecraft was inspired to respond to a Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord's 1791 report to the French National Assembly, according to which women were predestined for the most rudimentary domestic education due to their overly emotional nature. Enraged by that conclusion, Wollstonecraft wrote her book as a retort and something of a comprehensive attack on the narrow perception and double standards that men employed when discussing women. *Vindication* was intended as the first volume of a larger collection of texts on the rights of women which was never completed due to Wollstonecraft's premature death. That is why, it does not contain any direct reference to the issue of female suffrage except for a tantalizing statement:

I cannot help lamenting that women of a superior caste have not a road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence. I may excite laughter, by dropping a hint, which I mean to pursue, some future time, for I really think women ought to have representatives, instead of being

² After Wollstonecraft's death in 1793, her husband William Godwin published a biography of his late wife entitled *Memoirs of the Author of the Rights of Woman*. As he did not shy away from the facts about her relationships with women, affairs with married men, the birth of an illegitimate child and her suicide attempts, contrary to his intentions, the book caused a huge scandal and vilified Mary Wollstonecraft in the eyes of the public. (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica) (2020, June 29). *Mary Wollstonecraft*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Wollstonecraft>).

arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government (23).

Even though, the rights of women were not the focus of *Vindication*, the ideas as to the inherent nature and potential of women that Wollstonecraft conveys in her text can be seen as one of the foundations of the manifestos penned by the nineteenth-century suffrage activists determined to find a way to the equality of political rights.

Moreover, the existing text of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* does offer a clear view on Wollstonecraft's view on gender roles in British society. In the introduction to the book, she draws a clear parallel between the inferior and subordinate position of women in society and the utter lack of educational opportunities that they have to struggle against. What is more, the lack of intellectual stimuli leads to suppression of the female potential to contribute to public life in favour of a limiting, strictly ornamental function. Wollstonecraft laments this state of things which she routinely observes among other representatives of her gender as she declares that "The conduct and manners of women, in fact, show clearly that their minds are not in a healthy state; as with flowers planted in soil that is too rich, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty". In the following paragraphs, she also points to what she considers to be the immediate cause of the conditions that the female half of the population find themselves in, as she concludes that "this barren blooming is caused partly by a false system of education, gathered from the books on the subject by men". Moreover, male writers are not likely to endeavour to understand the actual nature of women, instead they are much more inclined to shape female image according to their ideas as "they have been more concerned to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers". On their part, women absorb these patterns and let them influence the way in which they see and comport themselves. As Wollstonecraft comments due to distorted notions on femininity "almost all the civilized women of the present century are anxious only to inspire love, when they ought to have the nobler aim of getting respect for their abilities and virtues" (Wollstonecraft 4) which makes it practically impossible for them to reach their full potential.

In the following parts of her text Wollstonecraft puts discrimination that women are subject to in the larger context of an unjust class-based system. She argues that women, who are the pillars of British families and are responsible for the upbringing of the future generations are denied any participation in the democracy in the same way that the poor working class who, through their hard labour are producing the wealth of the nation as well as the luxuries enjoyed and frequently taken for granted by the upper classes (Wollstonecraft 26). In order to explain the injustice of the patriarchal order Mary Wollstonecraft turns her attention to the reasons

behind the way women are placed in the subordinate positions in their relationship with men. Her approach to marriage as an institution has a uniquely modern character, as she compares it to the opportunities for a professional career that men enjoy thanks to educational opportunities that they receive. The only significant differences between genders are the lack of choice that women are subjected to and the encouragement that they receive not to be ambitious and to look for fulfilment in seeking pleasure. Wollstonecraft is also the author of the term “legal prostitution” in reference to a marriage contract as women are not permitted to enter it as equal partners and are frequently unaware of its transactional nature. As women feel the pressure which dictates that in order “to rise in the world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, they must marry advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted”. Moreover, it skews their focus and robs their lives of meaning as, unlike men who enter professions who need pleasure as a mere source of relaxation, women are expected to seek for pleasure as the main purpose of existence (Wollstonecraft 63).

Wollstonecraft remains sceptical as to the possibility of a typical marriage meeting the expectations of either men or women. First of all, women who are, from an early age, taught to be pleasing ornaments and not intellectual companions for their future husband cannot expect that their initial charm will continue to have an unchanged effect throughout the duration of marriage especially as the relationships usually start when both partners are very young and immature. What is more, the fact that women are supposed to perceive pleasure as the most desirable aim in their lives brings the additional danger of them following the idea of romantic love instead of trying to form, what Wollstonecraft refers to as ‘virtue friendship’ with their husbands. In later years of marriage when “the summer is passed and gone” this kind of outlook can lead to an unhealthy situation when a woman turns for affection elsewhere or her desire to please grows languid or becomes a source of jealousy or vanity instead of love (Wollstonecraft 27-28).

That is not to say that Wollstonecraft has a uniformly pessimistic outlook on the female nature and women’s ability to break out of the confines of the patriarchal social roles. To the contrary, even though *Vindication* is straightforward in the criticism of both, the way men perceive and try to shape women and the fact that women themselves let men treat them as inferior creatures of limited and child-like intellect, Wollstonecraft places great emphasis on personal responsibility for initiating change on the personal level. As she addresses her future female readers, she attempts to inspire them not to look up to the external agency of male-created systems but to start with finding inner strength and confidence to find independence of

thought as they should “endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body” and stop relaying on “soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste” as they are perceived as synonyms of weakness if they do not relish becoming objects of contempt (Wollstonecraft 8).

In addition, Wollstonecraft offers detailed ideas as to what the particular stages and the contents of reformed female education should be. She agrees with her predecessors on the topic of the education for girls, such as Mary Astell and Lady Montagu (Purvis 45) when she advises teaching serious topics including reading, writing, arithmetic, botany, natural philosophy and moral philosophy. However, her ideas extend to the inclusion of vigorous physical exercise on par with the regimen provided for boys in order to stimulate minds as well as to test the boundaries of the advantage of stronger bodies that men have over women. As Wollstonecraft postulates: “Let us then, by being allowed to take the same exercise as boys, not only in infancy, but youth, arrive at perfection of body, that we may know how far the natural superiority of man extends” (Wollstonecraft 90).

The advantages of the reform of the system of education of young girls in an attempt to bring about a “revolution of manners” would, according to the conclusion of *Vindication*, benefit not only women but the whole society. Men would gain companions who could not only please or entertain but understand them, children could be brought up by mothers who would be able to explain the world to them and, finally as a long term-result, society could be governed in more efficient way with both genders sharing the responsibility for the functioning of the political system. Mary Wollstonecraft firmly believes that such a change is not only possible but inevitable once women start to be perceived as equal to men (Wollstonecraft 56).

However, she also adds a clever warning reminiscent of the arguments used during both the American and French Revolution according to which if man wants to persist in enjoying the position of absolute superiority, being “sole master of his house, because he is the only being in it who has reason; the divine, indefeasible, earthly sovereignty breathed into man by the Master of the universe”, he has to take into account that by depriving women of the rights of decision he can expect them to refuse to take on any responsibility, because once you assume that “women have not any inherent rights to claim; and, by the same rule their duties vanish, for rights and duties are inseparable” (Wollstonecraft 63). At the same time, this last sentiment can be read as a call for action to the female readers as they are encouraged to seek the equality of opportunities and rights regardless of the reactions and goodwill of men. This appeal marks the very first instance of a British text on the women’s rights to advocate the proactive approach to the matter of acquiring the equality between genders. *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,

arguably, became one of the sources of inspiration for nineteenth century suffragette movements especially the ones that did not hesitate to use aggressive or even violent methods to achieve their goal of female enfranchisement (Sunstein 127).

Despite her tarnished reputation, which limited the popularity of *Vindication* in the decades following its initial publication, Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas on the rights and, even more significantly, on the nature of women continued to influence both the philosophical and political movements that transformed societies throughout the nineteenth century. The earliest Wollstonecraft's followers came from the socialist circles around Robert Owen who, in turn, was Wollstonecraft's friend and admirer. In 1825, one of Owen's Irish supporters, William Thompson wrote *Appeal of one Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the other Half, Men, to Retain them in Political and thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery: in reply to a paragraph of Mr. Mill's celebrated "Article on Government"* with the aim of, as he states in the introduction, to: "raise from the dust that banner which [Wollstonecraft] hand nearly thirty years ago unfolded boldly, in the face of prejudices of thousands of years". As one of the practical outcomes of Thompson's text women were allowed to start joining trade unions. What is more, the direct or indirect references to *Vindication* can be found in the works of authors such as John Stuart Mill, George Elliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charlotte Bronte and Virginia Woolf (Sunstein 129).

The impact of Wollstonecraft's text was not limited to the United Kingdom's intellectuals, either. According to one of her biographers, Lyndall Gordon "a new translation [of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*] also came out in France in 1826 (as part of the run-up to the 1830 revolution)" (Gordon 447). At the same time, in New England, the widow of Mary Wollstonecraft's youngest brother, who, coincidentally, was also named Mary published an article entitled "The Natural Rights of Woman" in the *Boston Monthly Magazine* (Gordon 448).

The fact that Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas were perceived as inspirational by both socialists and thinkers like her cousin who, as a daughter of a New England preacher was a devout Christian, stands as a clear testament to their original and universal nature. In fact, her theories have been resonating with feminist philosophers to this day, due to the fact that Wollstonecraft touches comprehensively not only on the issue of women's civil rights but also on the question of female nature which still remains an unresolved and disputed issue. According to Lyndall Gordon, even though the issues of women's education and the professional advance have been resolved in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the question of female nature remains open an "if this century is to solve it, the 'new genus' of Mary

Wollstonecraft offers a start” (449). The example of Mary Wollstonecraft and other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers and philosophers who dealt with the issue of gender inequality set the foundations for the future organized political movements which developed once opportunities for social transformations appeared in the nineteenth century. Suffragettes expanded on these first, tentative proposals and built a practical strategy which, eventually, led to the changes in the way gender roles are perceived in Western societies.

1.7 The economic and political changes in nineteenth-century Europe and the question of civil rights

The question of female enfranchisement and gender equality political movements in the nineteenth century needs to be viewed and analysed in the wider context of the rapid social and economic changes which were transforming the way the class and political systems functioned in European and North American societies. The nineteenth century is the period in history which saw the advent of the process of globalization both when it came to trade and economy as well as politics. The Napoleonic Wars that swept through Europe at the beginning of the century (1793-1815) were seen not only as a military but also an ideological threat to the stability of the nations. Britain itself was threatened with invasion from 1795 to 1805 which, in all probability would result in occupation by authorities bent on remodelling every nation it conquered according to Revolutionary principles. A majority of the society found the prospect of the removal of monarchy, dissolution of constitution and the establishment of a republic unacceptable, even in exchange for the new Revolutionary order based on equal rights for all men and government by the general will (James 151-152).

At the same time, the innovations of the Industrial Revolution which started in the United Kingdom in the mid-eighteenth century and gradually spread to other countries of Europe, the United States and, eventually, even the furthest corners of the British Empire, were bringing deep and profound changes in agriculture, production of goods, economy, culture, consumption, population and class systems of societies. As Tryfon Bampilis notices: “during this period, an industrial capitalistic consumption culture emerged and various new commodities became available to large parts of the population” (380). The increased availability of manufactured goods and the reduction of the need for manpower introduced to farming thanks to the implementation of new machinery were also among then main causes of

the shift from the predominantly agrarian and rural communities to urban ones, which was transforming societies of the United Kingdom and other European countries. What is more, after the First and Second Opium Wars with China and the completion of the British conquest of India, the vast markets of these two countries were opened to foreign trade and, consequently, significantly increased the volume of European export and revenue in these regions.

All these developments which signalled the dawn of modernity when it came to the lifestyles of societies were extensively discussed and celebrated by the leading contemporary figures. As Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert noted in one of his speeches: "Nobody...who has paid any attention to the peculiar features of our present era, will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great era to which, indeed, all history points – the realisation of the unity of mankind" (Picard 263). The speech itself commemorated launching of the project of the Great Exhibition (1851), which, unlike the *The Exposition des produits de l'industrie française* (Exhibition of Products of French Industry) organised in Paris, France, from 1798 to 1849, the model for the British show, was designed to be the first international event showcasing the advancements in technology not only originating in the British Empire but all over the world.

It was also during this period that political movements, in particular those pointing out social inequalities and demanding the right to participate in the mechanism of democracy for the newly emergent working class, gained a shared universal agenda and global character. The same period of early to mid-1830s saw the appearance of the movement of Chartists in the United Kingdom, republican movements associated with the Hambacher Fest of 1832 in Germany and the Progressive Party in Spain, to name just a few. Eventually, the calls for democracy and social reforms culminated in the events of the Spring of Nations of 1848-1849 when revolutions aimed at abolishing the established monarchical structures swept through most of Europe and resulted in permanent changes in the political systems of some of the countries.

Even though working-class activists and middle-class leaders of the movement focused their efforts on the issue of civil rights for all men over 21, their arguments had an influence on the female part of society as well. Women were frequent observers and, at times, active participants of the large out-door meetings and political rallies organized by the radicals and it was not long before the idea of allowing women a share in the decision making process took shape in the proposals of the male leaders. As a radical weaver turned poet Samuel Bamford recalls in his account of a meeting of mill and other industrial workers at Lydgate in the Saddleworth district, on the border of Lancashire and Yorkshire:

I, in the course of an address, insisted on the right, and the propriety also, of females who were present at such assemblages voting by a show of hands for or against the resolutions. This was a new idea; and the women, who attended numerously on that bleak ridge, were mightily pleased with it. The men being nothing dissentient, when the resolution was put the women held up their hands amid much laughter; and ever from that time females voted with the men at the Radical meetings [...] I was not aware that the new impulse thus given to political movement would in a short time be applied to charitable and religious purposes. But it was so; our female voted at every subsequent meeting; it became the practice, female political unions were formed, with their chairwomen, committees and their officials; and from us the practise was soon borrowed, very judiciously no doubt, and applied in a greater or a less degree to the promotion of religious and charitable institutions. (Bamford 141-142)

Despite the fact that, writing about his reminiscences from the perspective of time and a position of comfortable respectability, Bamford exaggerates hugely his own contribution to the creation of the first female trade unions, he correctly emphasizes the fact that women needed the impulse provided by the Industrial Revolution and the male enfranchisement political movement in order to find the courage to start questioning their own position in the society. Jad Adams notices that: “before converting the wider world, in which there were many enemies, women first had to have the confidence of men in their own beds and around their own hearthsides; it was not enough for people with the interests of women at heart to call for change – the change had to happen in their own groupings”. Thus, Adams argues that it was necessary for women to receive rights within the radical societies before the movement for their general, political emancipation could be successful (57). In summary, that constituted one of the main reasons why, it was not until the changes brought about by the nineteenth century that the ideas as to the possible equality of genders could flourish among not only intellectuals and women of upper class but gain momentum among the wider circles of working women and men.

1.8 The development of the ideology of female suffrage in the nineteenth century

One of the first obstacles that the nineteenth century pioneers of the campaign for the universal suffrage had to contend with was the existence of gender stereotypes that dominated the outlook of a majority of the Europeans on women’s roles in private and public spheres. As in the case of political ideology, it is possible to notice a definite universal view on social roles of women that spanned across Western countries and to trace it back to a common source. As the centre of the relentlessly expanded empire and the leading manufacturing power Britain during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) was arguably a major source of standards as to the ideal of the contemporary femininity in the English-speaking countries. What is interesting, despite

the rapid technological transformations of Industrial Revolution and the rise of the modern trade, it was in the Victorian epoch that gender roles with accompanying stereotypes, especially when it came to middle and upper-class women, became more precisely defined than ever before in British history. According to Catherine Hall it was during this period that “gender divisions were reworked and men placed firmly in the newly defined public world of business, commerce, and politics; women were placed in the private world of home and family” (25). The Queen herself led the way with her carefully maintained image of marital and familial bliss and, after the premature death of Prince Albert, with the reclusive withdrawal from public life.

This ideal of femininity restricted to the confines of the private sphere was popularised and put forward as the most desirable model of behaviour, especially for women of upper and middle classes. Victorian women were perceived as “Angels in the House” (a designation originally derived from the poem by Coventry Patmore), who, according to Sarah Stickney Ellis, should work hard to “bring down every selfish desire, and every rebellious thought” as it was “the right of all men, whether ill or well, rich or poor, wise or foolish, to be treated with deference, and made much of in their own houses” (Ellis 68). Similar sentiments can be found in American publications of the period, such as good housekeeping manuals and articles in newspapers and magazines. For example, in an editorial that appeared in the *Springfield Republican* on the 29th of August 1881 under the caption “Uses for Women” the author states straightforwardly: “The best use a woman can be put is to be made the honest wife of some good man and the judicious mother of healthy children” They argue that “all the art and learning that she can compass are not of so much value to the world as the example of a life passed quietly in the exercise of domestic duties and social righteousness, in the gift to the country of children who shall carry on the national tradition of courage and generosity, of unselfishness and virtue” (3). This kind of outlook, places women firmly within the confines of the domestic sphere and limits their social role to housekeeping and childrearing.

What is more, these patriarchal sentiments found resonance with women as well. Mary Virginia Terhune (writing under the pen name of Marion Harland) who advocated women’s right to more comprehensive education and was leaning towards the support of female suffrage, wrote about the significance of the female role in the private sphere in unquestionably emotional terms in her book *Eve’s Daughters, or, Common sense for Maid, Wife, and Mother*:

It is not my purpose to depart so far from the ingenious tone I have preserved throughout this volume as to deny the justice of the world’s verdict. The purest, sweetest happiness which women can know this side of Heaven, flows from a harmonious marriage. I have, not admitted, but freely averred that elsewhere

in these pages, that husband, home, and children offer a sphere with which the most ambitious of our sex may well be thankfully content. (284)

Therefore, it is possible to state that, even in the eyes of women who perceived themselves as progressive, female social roles were inextricably connected with the successful domestic lives.

The ideology of domesticity was so pervasive that, for “respectable” women of upper middle and upper classes there existed no alternatives. In fact, all activities that required from women involvement in the public sphere were perceived as a threat, not only to the social order but to the mental and physical well-being of the “weaker sex” and their children. The important element of this system was that, as the flourishing industries required increasing numbers of manual workers, the patriarchal rules did not apply equally to women of all social classes. For some, predominantly working-class girls and women, work opportunities opened what Ann Digby calls a “social borderland” between the Victorian gender spheres of activity. Even though working-class women working outside the home, or mainly middle-class women engaging in semi-public activities were never formally recognized, neither were there considered to constitute a direct violation of what was perceived as acceptable femininity (Digby 198). It was these women that initiated the creation of female trade unions and, in the second part of the nineteenth century, stood behind the campaigns for female enfranchisement. Undoubtedly, they can be credited with spreading the idea of civic rights for women but it is important to remember that they constituted only a small portion of the least influential social group which meant that their contribution met with great resistance on the part of both, institutions and prominent individuals. For instance, while Chartist movement of the late 1830s and 1840s had a considerable tradition of speaking and demonstrating done by women, just a few of them concerned themselves with the particular legal, economic or political disabilities of women as a group (Thompson F.M.L. 149-150).

As the nineteenth century progressed the gender divide became stricter and the criteria for female respectability much narrower. That, in turn, had immediate consequences for the way women could act in political campaigns that involved both genders. One of the best examples is the movement against the Contagious Diseases Acts which was set up and spearheaded by Josephine Butler and envisaged prominent public-speaking roles for women. At the same time, however, the rules of the organization set women apart from their male counterparts as they emphasized the importance of “separate spheres ideology” which “stressed women’s purity, moral supremacy, and domestic virtue” (Walkowitz 256-257). That led to divisions which, in some localities caused the meetings to be split according to gender as the

subject matter of discussion was considered too sensitive for mixed company. As can be expected consequently men and women started to adopt different approaches in their plans of abolishing the Contagious Diseases Acts. Eventually, women's role in the movement became severely marginalized. The fact that that women were slowly pushed to the fringes of the campaign did not escape notice of Josephine Butler who, in 1877, expressed her concerns about the changes in management to the female executive of the Ladies National Association. She attributed the takeover of leadership partly to men's natural ease to cooperate with each other and partly to the fact that women "from long habit have quite naturally stood aside and allowed men to work alone, whilst they themselves try very faithfully to exercise that unseen or domestic influence alone which has hitherto been permitted them" (Walkowitz 139). The example of Josephine Butler's movement proves that even after women started entering the public sphere of politics the patriarchal standards of feminine behaviour were a factor holding them back as they struggled not only against the restrictive attitudes of men but also the conditioning of their own behaviour and reactions.

That is why, even the initial, tentative emergence of the suffrage campaigns in the 1860s and 1870s was met with shock and abhorrence on the part of not only the establishment of privileged men, but a large section of the female population as well. In fact, one of the most inflexible and formidable enemies of the attempts to break out of the rigidly confining code of Victorian womanhood was one Mrs. E Lynn Linton, an English novelist and essayist. Her scathing criticism of the very idea of women becoming legitimate participants in the public sphere resulted in the creation of terms which quickly became lasting elements of the rhetoric used by both sides of the conflict. Mrs Linton described a typical supporter of the female suffrage as a brutish and uncivilised "Girl of the Period" who, by challenging the patriarchal social order, lost her "natural" femininity as she tried to "become hard and fierce and self-asserting" (97). As the enfranchisement campaign dragged on, the "Girl of the Period" matured into a "New Woman" who Mrs Linton deemed to be "a neurotic, immoral, senseless creature as ignorant of needlework as a Hottentot" (105). The novelist is also credited with coining the disparaging term 'the shrieking sisterhood' for the suffragists, the name which has been used liberally and repeatedly by their opponents ever since (Coney 34).

Both the problems and the adversities that the suffragists struggled against were of universal character which resulted in similarities in the arguments and the rhetoric used by the individuals and organizations promoting the idea of equality of genders, in particular in English-speaking countries. It is striking how the dynamics of actions and reactions between the suffragists and anti-suffragists followed a similar pattern in various countries in Europe as well

as on other continents. New Zealand was no exception, as Kate Sheppard and her followers referred directly to the texts by their British and American predecessors and counterparts and kept in regular contact with other suffragist movements. In addition, they did face criticism that stemmed straight from the ideas of the Girl of the Period and the New Woman introduced by Mrs Linton. According to a writer in the Christchurch *Press* New Woman tried to “obliterate the distinctions of sex, by following the same pursuits, wearing the same kind of clothes, indulging in the same sports as men” (*The Origin* 4) and *New Zealand Graphic* added about her appearance “by some inscrutable law of nature [New Woman] painfully plain, apt to have scanty hair and prominent teeth, and is almost sure to wear spectacles, through which she glares at you” (*Female Bores* 7). For that reason it is interesting to analyze the particulars of the rhetoric used by the prominent representatives of the suffragist movements in the countries where the problem of gender inequality became an issue of public discussions and campaigns in the course of the nineteenth century. It is worthwhile, in order to try to determine which factors contributed to the unprecedented success of New Zealand suffrage petitions.

1.9 The British radicals of the nineteenth century and the women’s rights movement

When the question of the female suffrage was brought up during one of the sessions of the House of Commons in 1797, it was not only immediately dismissed but treated as a slightly amusing rhetorical question. During the debate even the radical MP, Charles Fox considered the very idea of granting women the right to vote as unfeasible as he considered them totally dependent on men, by laws of the nation and nature. According to him that dependence meant that women would vote as instructed by their husbands, fathers or brothers instead of using their own judgement (Adams 38). Clearly, the British political climate of the early nineteenth century was not conducive to an attempt at changing the system steeped in the strict patriarchal stereotypes and required a lengthy process of influencing attitudes, partly through the arguments of radical thinkers who pushed the cause of female suffrage forward by linking its importance to other causes such as working-men suffrage or the abolition of slavery. It was also the radicals that were the first to link the morality and sexuality with the problem of gender equality. As the historian, Constance Rover claims: “early feminism was closely identified with a new definition of sexual morality, perhaps even more closely than with the demand for an improved legal and civil status for women” (Rover 12).

When it came to political activity, at the beginning of the nineteenth century women started to get involved in radical movements that did not have a direct impact on their own position in society. For working class women it was the contribution to the Chartist movement that promoted the cause of universal suffrage, while the middle and upper class women played a significant role in the anti-slavery movement that started in the 1780s and, after the hiatus caused by the unrest of the Napoleonic wars, resumed its campaign in 1823 when a new British Anti-Slavery Society was formed. Even though the anti-slavery campaign was spearheaded by William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, it was the activities initiated and coordinated by women, such as the boycott of shops selling slave-grown sugar and protests against the physical abuse of women slaves that were the most efficient in the difficult task of swaying public opinion (DuBois E.C. 67, 134). The results of the actions of women-run associations were so encouraging that by the 1830s a third of all the anti-slavery societies were run by women. It was also during this fight for the rights of slaves to freedom that the petition for the abolition of slavery in 1833 was signed by over 400,000 women. (DuBois E.C. 45).

Still, the reactions to this sort of female activity were mixed, not only on the part of the authorities but on the part of the leaders of the radical movements as well. It is hard not to agree with Matthew when he claims that the boundaries between male and female territories were unstable and “they shifted gradually and not without resistance” (Matthew 176). For example, even though the efforts of women were undeniably garnering plenty of public support and were fundamental to the progress of the whole anti-slavery movement, its leader William Wilberforce disapproved strongly of the formation of the female anti-slavery societies and gave instructions to his main collaborators not to attend their meetings. (Hague 267).

Moreover, it was not only strictly political but any form of charitable female activity that provoked protests and resistance on the part of some of the men who were unable to look beyond the constraints of the stereotypes which confined women to the domestic sphere. One prominent example of that trend is the Association for the Reformation of the Female Prisoners in Newgate set up by Elizabeth Fry which was seeking to reform conditions for women in public institutions – prisons, asylums, hospitals and workhouses. Fry herself continuously emphasized the differences between genders claiming that:

All reflecting persons will surely unite in the sentiment, that the female, placed in the prison for her crimes, in the hospital for her sickness, in the asylum for her insanity, or in the workhouse for her poverty, possesses no light or common claim on the pity and attention of those of her sex, who, through the bounty of a kind Providence, are able *‘to do good, and to communicate* (Murray 285-86).

“May the time quickly arrive,” she continues, “when there shall not exist, in this realm, a single public institution of the kind, in which the degraded or afflicted females who may happen to be its inmates shall not enjoy the *efficacious superintendence* of the pious and benevolent of THEIR OWN SEX!” (Murray 286) Even though Fry and her followers were not aiming at gaining any political power they still met with resistance, especially on the part of prison wardens and other male officials (Matthew 177).

Admittedly, it is possible to find examples of prominent male figures in the radical movements who wrote in support of the right of women to take active part in public life. Even William Cobbett, who could not be called a feminist by inclination, when faced with attacks on early female reformers who were branded “petticoat reformers” and “degraded females”, rendered unrespectable by “deserting their station” and discarding “the sacred characters” of wife and mother “for turbulent vices of sedition and impiety”, thundered in his radical paper *The Political Register*, ‘just as if women were made for nothing but to cook oat-meal and to sweep a room.’ Other radicals, such as Richard Carlile supported gender equality more directly. Together with his “moral wife” Eliza Sharples (“Isis”) they published the first journal in English supporting women’s emancipation (Weiner 89).

Carlile was also the first person to have put forward arguments linking the availability of birth control with the state of subjugation women found themselves in, so popular in the various feminist movements of the second half of the twentieth century. In his article “What is Love” and a longer publication *Every Woman’s Book* (1826) he argues passionately for the introduction of gender equality as reducing the roles of women to that of a wife and mother turns them into “mere breeding machines”, which has to be seen as not only degrading but harmful. What is more, in both publications, he offers very practical advice on the most reliable methods of contraception, which scandalized Victorian readers. Carlile’s “moral wife”, Eliza Sharples, who inspired the publication of women’s rights articles in one of the Carlile’s newspapers *The Republican* and edited her own feminist free-thought journal *Isis. A London Weekly Publication, Edited by a Lady* was among the earliest activists for women’s rights. She was dramatic and radical in her argumentation, both during the lectures and in the articles she penned. For example, she claimed that women of the early nineteenth century Britain were trained to be nothing more than slaves and “creatures of fear, prejudice, misconception, or thoughtlessness which made them lower in “dignity and human intellect” than an ancient “Roman matron” who was permitted to pursue knowledge and engage in politics (Taylor, M 80-82). Still, she was of an opinion that the female emancipation would, sooner or later, inevitably arrive, “and no other reason is to be offered against the equality of the sexes, than

that which tyranny has to offer on every occasion – its will and power” (Taylor, M. 82). Despite the fact Sharples’ public career was short-lived, she remains an important figure in the history of the development of female rights movements.

Carlile and Sharples were not the only radical activists of the early nineteenth century in Britain who actively supported the idea of female emancipation. Arguably the most advanced text in support of gender equality of the period was penned by a socialist, William Thompson, with a significant contribution from his friend, Anna Wheeler. Thompson’s political views were heavily influenced by the ideas of Robert Owen, the creator of the term “socialist”, which he used for the first time to describe some of his co-operative ventures, such as his factory in New Lanark which was based on the principles of cooperation and fair treatment of the workers. It was during meetings of Owens’ supporters, dubbed Owenites, that at least token gestures were extended towards the acknowledgment of the woman question (Dooley 78). Robert Owen himself, was a supporter of the creation of the “New Moral World” which was perceived as a co-operative community which could constitute an alternative to the existing social order. The equality in this new version of socialist society would be ensured thanks to universal access to education, based not on the formalized learning process in institutions but on the immersion in cultural heritage of a nation and its impact on the contemporary everyday existence. In consequence, the “New Moral World” required deconstruction of the systems which upheld and maintained traditional values, marriage and family being the main representatives. Owen perceived the small family unit of parents and offspring that was being shaped by the changes brought about by the industrial revolution as one of the obstacles in the way of the introduction of the system of co-operation with its promotion of individualism and dispersion of property (Leopold 108, Owen 59). As a natural consequence of putting the existence of traditional family unit into question, Owen equally opposed the established system of sexual morality with its double standards towards men and women. Christian marriage, was based on false principles which prevented sincerity between partners and encouraged “prudery” and false shame. That does not mean, however, that the issue of gender equality was one of the priorities of the Owenites. To the contrary, as “A Female Socialist” writing from Edgbaston pointed out, the leaders of the movement paid nothing more but lip service to the emancipation of women as female members were not included in any of the Owenite councils. This early call for gender parity was clearly too forward and controversial to warrant much attention but it makes a poignant comment on the ambivalent attitude that most of radicals held towards the situation of women (Adams 63-64).

It is undeniable that William Thompson could see this discrepancy between the ideals and actions of the movements trying to radically transform the British political system and society. In the work that he conceived together with Mrs Wheeler, entitled *An appeal of one half of the human race, Women against the pretensions of the other half, Men, retain them in political and thence in civil and domestic slavery: In reply to a paragraph of Mr Mill's celebrated Article on Government* (1825), Thompson refers straightforwardly to the hypocrisy of the tenets of utilitarianism which professed to be offering the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people but steadfastly ignored women who constitute half of humanity. Thompson promoted the acknowledgment and appreciation of the women's input in philosophy, science and politics as his version of liberal democracy encompassed the potential of the whole of society regardless of class or gender (Dooley 147).

The immediate inspiration for the creation of the *Appeal* was provided by the publication of James Mill's "Essay on Government" which in itself is a revolutionary and controversial text in support of suffrage. For Thompson and Wheeler, however, who supported the ideas of universal suffrage, Mill's text was unacceptable, as it did not recognize that women's political interests and, in fact, their presence in public life are separate from the issues concerning men. "This male philosopher maintains that," thunders Thompson, "with respect to *one half* the human race, women, this universal disposition of man to use power for his own exclusive benefits ceases, and his knowledge with respect to them, invariably shows him that their happiness coincides with his, and is included in it!" (Thompson W 7). In fact, such an approach which equates the needs of both genders according to the will and preferences of men, regardless of a woman's age, position and marital status, leads to a situation, especially in a marriage, which turns women into nothing more but slaves of circumstance. Thompson outlines the problem of subordination in the following, very emotional terms:

Woman is then compelled, in marriage, by the possession of superior strength on the part of men, by the want of knowledge, skill and wealth, by the positive, cruel, partial, and cowardly enactments of law, by the terror of superstition, by the mockery of a pretended vow of obedience, and to crown it all, and as a result of all, by the force of an unrelenting, unreasoning, unfeeling, public opinion to be the literal, unequivocal *slave* of the man who may be styled to be her husband (Thompson W. 66-67).

That is why, the only feasible solution which can redress the imbalance between the position of genders is the emancipation of women which could bring "nearest approach to equal liberty and equal restrain the most happy, to all parties" (Thompson W. 113).

In the following parts of the *Appeal*, Thompson anticipates and undermines the potential arguments that opponents of female suffrage were certain to bring forward in order to

undermine his democratic proposal. According to him, one of the most common and absurd reasons for refusing women the right to vote is their inferior physical strength. “If strength be the superior title to happiness,” he proposes sardonically, “let all such qualifications for voters as the capacity to read and write, or any *indirect* means to insure intellectual aptitude be abolished; and let simple test for the exercise of political rights, both men and women, be the capacity of carrying 300 lbs. of weight” (Thompson W. 120). That kind of perspective makes any arguments against women’s suffrage based on the premise of the innate weakness of the female gender seem baseless and not worth serious consideration in political or social discussions.

In addition, Thompson proposes that women would be superior individuals when it comes to the control over the legislation and, strikingly, he attributes it predominantly to the fact that women lack in physical strength when compared to men. Due to that factor women are not likely to try to dominate other representatives of their sex as strong men tend to do amongst each other. In addition, they could not disregard or subdue men either as they would have to take into account superior average strength on the part of men. (Thompson W. 132). As a result, women would tend to care about men’s happiness and be more sympathetic towards them than men ever were towards women. According to Thompson it is significantly much more reasonable to take into account the happiness of the entirety of the society when it comes to passing legislation. What is more, he concludes that in the case of only one gender playing the role of exclusive legislators, women have more inclination to promote the satisfaction of all governed which renders them ideal candidates for this role (Thompson W 132-134).

When it comes to the intellectual capacity of women, Thompson claims that as legislators they “would be on par with exclusive males as to knowledge or intellectual aptitude, but would, *perhaps*, be inferior as to activity or active talent” (Thompson W. 135), but only due to the fact that they are denied equal educational opportunities. Ultimately, he blames social and political systems for the debasing situation of women and sees the solution to the problem in the introduction of socialism to Britain as it is the only system which guarantees communality and the conditions in which “men and women could live as equals” (Thompson W. 200). The change of the structure of British politics would not benefit solely women, either, as the liberation of women would reward men “with knowledge, with freedom and with happiness” (Thompson W. 209).

Thompson’s *Appeal* is one of the boldest and most comprehensive texts written in the early nineteenth century, in support of granting women civic rights equal to that of men. Arguably, the ideas and proposals for practical changes that should be introduced both in the

British social order and political system put forward by Thompson and Wheeler made an impact on numerous thinkers and politicians who stood behind the creation of the first organized campaigns in favour of female suffrage. In his introduction to the 1983 edition of the *Appeal* Richard Pankhurst, the grandson of one of the most renowned suffragette leaders, Emmeline Pankhurst, considers their ideas to be among the most influential British political documents. Moreover, as the first voice of a nineteenth-century man against the subjection of women, and the first with direct bearing on women's suffrage it is "a major landmark in the history of women's movement and of socialist thought" (Pankhurst xvi).

Despite the examples of politicians such Richard Carlile, Robert Owen and William Thompson, however, women's role in most of the radical movements of the early nineteenth century radical movement tended to be marginalized or separated from the mainstream activities of associations and parties. Historians disagree as to the interpretation of the significance that can be ascribed to the female contribution and put forward diverse theories as to its consequences for the future suffrage movement. The obscurity that a majority of female activities in the radical movements is frequently shrouded in makes it challenging to find a conclusive and unequivocal answer as to the exact nature and depth of the links between the radicals and early British feminists (McCalman 1).

The only point of consensus concerns the differences in motivations of women belonging to each particular social class. Most of the scholars seem to agree with Dorothy Thompson who claims that there exists a considerable gulf "between the aspirations of the middle class emancipators and those of women lower down in the social scale in Victorian society" (Thompson D. 112). According to Ian McCalman the discrepancy had immediate results on the ideology of the British suffragette movement as it divided into three, separate groups. The first one, comprised of predominantly middle class radicals and led by Francis Plate, focused on advocating birth control in pursuit of a stable political economy. Contraception was also an important part of the second, more "advanced" group of working class Owenites and St. Simonians, who also put emphasis on marriage reform in the course of promoting co-operative communities. Finally, there was the third group of working women who were not particularly interested in feminist ideology but did touch upon certain "female issues" while active within the frames of wider, radical movements (McCalman 2).

It is possible to argue that, even if the exact extent of female involvement in the radical movements that started to transform the political and social landscapes of the early nineteenth Europe remains disputable, it is unquestionable that the fact that women started to perceive a real opportunity to make a difference in the public sphere that, by custom, was deemed as

“unsuitable” for “respectable” ladies, had a significant impact on the concept of the “woman question”. Sheila Rowbotham sees these first female forays into the world of politics as a pivotal moment which provided women with confidence and a social awareness which, inevitably, led to questions as to their civic rights and position in the community. It was largely thanks to new forms in which the working class was coming together in political activity that women gained an unprecedented opportunity to insist on their participation in the process. Moreover, even though the involvement of women in the radical movement was partly due to the fact that the men needed their support, Rowbotham notices that it was mainly the commonness of both genders’ agenda and the assertion of a notion of the customary relations between the sexes that determined the successful contributions of the female activists (35).

The sense of newly found confidence and the conviction that women could cooperate with men, which were created thanks to their relatively peripheral involvement in the activities of radical movements, played a significant role in the development of the suffrage movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. Even though the working-class radicalism turned increasingly towards trade union activities as the most efficient way of exerting direct, political power, the way it inspired women to turn their attention to the public issues with the hope of making a difference found its continuation in the work of middle-class female reformers in the middle of the nineteenth century and eventually led to the formation of the organizations campaigning for the equal civic rights for both genders.

1.10 British middle-class women in rebellion against Victorian patriarchal stereotypes

Strikingly, the next phase in the creation of the female suffrage movement in the second half of the nineteenth century can be traced back not directly to the politics but to the gradual and, in many cases, individual mutiny of, predominantly, middle-class women against the constraints imposed on them by the society. Women were put under much pressure and had to cope with rapid changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Jane Horowitz Murray notices that the experience of women during this period was largely determined by their social class, which frequently led to startling incongruities. While middle-class women were considered too vulnerable to engage in even the simplest forms of activity outside their homes or be allowed economic independence, working class women were forced to work, more often than not, in physically demanding conditions and then subjected to a version of the domestic angel cult, which strongly encouraged them to stay at home (5). That is why, the discrepancies, not only

between the classes but between generations of women were so significant that it is difficult to speak of any uniformity of experience.

Middle-class women were especially vulnerable when it came to exclusion from the public sphere as they were economically dependent on their spouses and denied the opportunities to acquire either proper education or employment. These circumstances were particularly trying for women who were single or widowed as their options were severely limited to teaching positions or barely acceptable professions connected with art and entertainment. In 1841 there were just over thirty thousand women employed in education in posts ranging from poorly-paid governesses to proprietors of private schools run on commercial basis. In addition, writing and the arts opened additional, expanding avenues for females – between 1840 and 1890 the number of women employed in these areas rose from around nine hundred to over seventeen thousand (Matthew 172-173). Still, a majority of women, regardless of their talents and intellectual inclinations were forced into the role of “domestic angels” in order to remain “respectable”.

It is possible to notice a link between the growing discontent of middle-class women yearning to be allowed to be active in the public sphere of life and the reinstatement of evangelical family values that was happening in the first half of the nineteenth century. The process was initiated and promoted by a Cambridge academic Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, whose theories on procreation and economics dominated the way Victorian domesticity was shaped. As women’s morality became closely associated with the role of a mother and being the pillar of the familial life, any signs of independence be it intellectual or sexual became to be perceived as suspect or even unacceptable. According to Colin Matthew, handbooks and medical literature became dominated by anxieties connected with procreation. Consequently, placed great emphasis on self-restraint, at times through propagating false beliefs such as the claim that women took no pleasure in sex (166). This ideology became widespread and accepted by the public opinion at large which, eventually, resulted in the creation of a powerful machine of propaganda and indoctrination. Various channels including sermons and tracts, fiction, magazines and advice books were used to shape women and girls to accept prescribed womanly, submissive roles, while always underlying the importance of feminine qualities and the duties and the dignity of motherhood (Matthew 167).

Women subjected to these restrictive conditions of domesticity were coming up with a variety of solutions which allowed them to escape the patriarchal stereotypes. Some of them, like, for example, Mary Taylor who fled to New Zealand in search of new opportunities and Florence Nightingale who opposed the wishes of her family in order to serve as a nurse, openly

rejected feminine responsibilities. In other, more common cases, women refused to conform to the expectations by the means of hypochondria and self-imposed invalidism before fulfilling aspirations in the public sphere later in life, as did Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Isabella Bird Bishop. It is also possible to find examples of women who took advantage of otherwise unfortunate circumstances to free themselves from domesticity, like Harriet Martineau, and those who rejected the traditional familial bonds for less conventional relationships, as in the case of Frances Power Cobb. The stories of these remarkable women's lives all share the same element of dissatisfaction with the social status quo which reduced women to a single role without any allowance for individuality.

That is why it is not surprising that it was primarily ambitious and intelligent women, chaffing at the impossibility of finding fulfilment outside the constraints of domesticity that became authors of first sources of mid-nineteenth-century texts pointing out the injustice and absurdity of this situation. Most of them were not concerned with politics, but wanted to express frustration which stemmed from personal experience. One of the best examples of such an individual is Florence Nightingale who is renowned for her role as the founder of the profession of nursing. Florence, who joined the only suffrage society that existed at the time in 1868 at the behest of her friend, John Stuart Mill, was reluctant to participate actively in the campaigns in favour of granting women the right to vote, as she "feared that certain sense of opposition between men and women might be roused, which would only delay reforms" (*The Suffrage* 55). At the same time, her views on the restrictive, Malthusian morality were clear and shaped by personal experience after she spent the first thirty years of her life trying to disentangle herself from familial duties in order to start her career as a nurse. In her essay "Cassandra" (1852) written in protest against the idleness imposed on Victorian women, Nightingale identifies the root cause of the problem:

The family? It is too narrow a field for the development of an immortal spirit, be that spirit male or female... The family uses people, *not* for what they are, not for what they are intended to be, but for what it wants from them – its own uses. It thinks of them not as what God has made them, but as the something which it has arranged that they shall be. If it wants someone to sit in the drawing-room, *that* someone is supplied by the family, though that member may be destined for science, or for education, or for active superintendence by God, i.e., by the gifts within.

This system dooms some minds to incurable infancy, others to silent misery (Nightingale 215).

Nightingale continues with an argument according to which it is not women's inherent choice to be confined to domesticity as they "dream of a great sphere of steady not sketchy benevolence, of moral activity, for when they would fain be trained and fitted, instead of working in the dark, neither knowing nor registering whether their steps lead, whether farther

from or nearer to the aim” (217). As a consequence, women start to function in a false reality which drains their physical and mental strength (Nightingale and Poovey 221).

As Nightingale emphasizes, the most harmful aspect of this situation is the fact that most women are brought up to blindly accept idleness and do not realize what the source of the problem is. She points to the power of the social order which makes women “consider intellectual occupation as a merely selfish amusement, which it is their “duty” to give up for every trifler more selfish than themselves (Nightingale and Poovey 214). The absurdity of this situation in which gender is the only factor that determines the acceptable way of behaviour and sphere of social activity is emphasized by Nightingale in the following paragraphs when she places men in a situation customarily associated with women which makes them seem grotesque and ridiculous:

But suppose we were to see a number of men in the morning sitting round a table in the drawing-room, looking at prints, doing worsted, and reading little books, how would we laugh! [...] Now, why is it more ridiculous for a man than for a woman to do a worsted job and drive out every day in a carriage? Why should we laugh if we were to see a parcel of men sitting round a drawing-table in the morning, and think it all right if they were women? (Nightingale and Poovey 211)

This leads Nightingale to ask the question, obviously concerning middle-class women, whether the major difference between the sexes is that women are supposed to stay idle at home, while men are busy with their professional occupations (Nightingale and Poovey 211).

Even though “Cassandra” is an incomplete text which, in all probability, was never intended for publication, it does not stop at diagnosing the main problems in gender relations as caused by women’s lack of education and forced inactivity but sees a viable alternative based on Florence Nightingale’s life experience. “If they see and enter into a continuous line of action” Nightingale comments on the women expected to live up to the ideals of a “Victorian lady”, “with a full and interesting life, with training constantly kept up to the occupation, occupation constantly tasting the training – it is the *beau-ideal* of practical, not theoretical education – they are re-tempered, their life is filled, they have found their work and the means to do it” (Nightingale and Poovey 219). The solutions proposed by Florence Nightingale seem to be in keeping with the conclusions drawn by the radical activists, such as Owen and Thompson, as to the detrimental effects of the lack of educational and professional opportunities on women. However, as her arguments were not based solely on ideology and theoretical premises, they could have a more direct and personal impact on potential female readers and contribute to the promotion of the idea of women’s involvement in public life. Moreover,

Nightingale was not the only woman with a career outside the realm of domesticity who decided to voice their critical opinions on the limitations imposed on women in British society.

Among many examples, there is Mary Taylor, who published an article on the impossible situation of, so called, “redundant women”³ who were unable or, in some cases, unwilling to become wives and mothers. That, in turn, was deemed to be “unnatural” by political and social writers, such as William Rathbone Greg and led to an “incomplete existence”. As Mary Taylor proves in her article, written in response to William Greg’s ideas, a woman who belonged to that unfortunate group could not find any way of meeting social expectations as she had nobody to provide for her and had to risk losing “respectability” when forced to look for paid employment, or rely on charity, regardless of her talents and skills. That kind of situation, inevitably, led to frustration and resentment as women frequently faced advice pertaining to their marital status while they had severely limited options of changing it, even if not in order to find happiness or fulfilment but to avoid the threat of “hopeless poverty”. At the same time, they are fully aware of the fact that their wellbeing is not taken in consideration in crafting of the rules governing the society:

She is, or she is not, to be dependent, she is, or she is not, to earn a livelihood, for reasons quite foreign to her interests; and when ‘we want,’ or ‘we do not want’ her, they are not even taken into consideration. The definition of her ‘nature’ is given only to be ignored, and a great part of what constitutes her real self is left out of it (Taylor M. 60).

As Mary Taylor outlines in her text, the situation that the “redundant women” had to contend with was unsupportable as it stripped them off any vestiges of independence and opportunities for determining their own fate. Therefore, she succeeded in outlining the scope for future change which eventually resulted in granting women the right to vote.

The same can be said about texts penned by other, prominent, middle-class Victorian women writing about their experiences outside the realm of acceptable domesticity. Articles, journals and autobiographies by women of various professions or active in the public sphere were gradually and noticeably gaining popularity among readers throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, which clearly demonstrates that, regardless of the strength of the “Angel in the House” ideal suffusing Victorian culture and mentality, transgressions against its confines provided an increasingly fascinating source of interest for the public. What was also characteristic and, presumably, compelling to the audience, was the fact that many of the female authors publishing their memoirs or sharing their knowledge and practical experience did not

³ In 1851 British census showed the surplus of unmarried women ranging from five hundred thousand to a million (Macdonald 56).

follow in Nightingale's footsteps and focused not on the outright critique of the patriarchal system but on the way their stories expanded the options available to a woman in Victorian society. One such example can be found in the introduction to Frances Power Cobbe's autobiography which describes a productive life without a husband. As Cobbe notices any woman's life has great value even if "no man has ever desired to share it, nor has she seen the man she would have wished to ask her to do so" (Cobbe 163). The author uses her own experience to prove the claim that lack of attachment to domestic duties can be, in fact, beneficial for female intellectual development even if women are banned from taking an active role in public life:

Had I been a man, and had possessed my brother's facilities for entering Parliament or any profession, I have sometimes dreamed I could have made my mark and done some masculine service to my fellow-creatures. But the woman's destiny which God allotted to me has been, I do not question, the best and happiest for me; nor have I ever seriously wished it had been otherwise, albeit I have gone through life without that interest which has been style. [...] Thus it has happened that in early womanhood and middle life I enjoyed a degree of real *leisure* of mind possessed by few; and to it, I think, must be chiefly attributed anything which in my doings may have worn the semblance of exceptional ability. I had good, sound working brains to start with, and much fewer hindrances than the majority of women in improving and employing them. (Cobbe 163-164)

Frances Cobb does not try undermine or discredit the roles ascribed to genders in Victorian society but uses the example of her own life to underscore the fact that it is possible for a woman to find fulfilment outside of the private sphere of home and family.

Even though the message seems to be relatively simple, in Victorian society, with its abundance of "redundant women", the sentiment must have found resonance with a growing number of people struggling with the constraints of stereotypes and searching for acceptable alternatives. The same kind sentiment stood behind the success of Sarah Lewis' *Woman's Mission*, which was first published in 1839 and by the mid-nineteenth-century had gone through thirteen editions. Originally, the book was supposed to be a translation of a work by Louis-Aime Martin in which he presented an idealized image of woman as man's spiritual guide, in keeping with Rousseau's view on female nature. While her work progressed, however, Lewis decided to adapt Martin's vision to suit English Protestant and more conservative tastes and shortened the text removing all references to male licentiousness and changing the viewpoint of the narrator to that of a woman. The main focus of the book, which is the importance of motherhood, remained unchanged, but the perspective that the author adopts, gives it a wider more spiritual significance which, despite its confining aspects, makes women superior to men from a moral point of view. That is why, even though, according to Lewis, patriarchal division

between private and public spheres should be retained, women's influence does not have to or even must not be insignificant or inconsequential:

It is by no means my intention to assert, that women should be passive and indifferent spectators of the great political questions, which affect the well-being of the community, neither can I repeat the old adage, that 'women have nothing to do with politics'; they have, and ought to have, much to do with politics. But in what way? It has been maintained, that their public participation in them would be fatal to the best interests of society. How, then, are women to interfere in politics? As moral agents; as representatives of the moral principle; as champions of the right in preference to the expedient; by their endeavours to instil into their relatives of the other sex the uncompromising sense of duty and self-devotion, which ought to be *their* ruling principles! (Lewis 27)

The numerous publications of texts by Victorian women feeling overwhelmed or severely restricted by the patriarchal stereotypes they were forced to follow is a clear indication of the fact that the emergence of the organized movements promoting female suffrage can be traced back not only to the confidence inspired by participation of women in various radical movements but also to a serious social problem causing growing dissatisfaction among half of the British population. Regardless of whether the female authors called for a complete or partial overhaul of the system or limited themselves to suggestions of modifications or alternatives for acceptable lifestyle, their texts are unanimous in the expression of the pressing need for a change. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that, in the second half of Queen Victoria's reign, women started to join forces and ally in organized groups and associations aiming at protection and promotion of civic rights for women. It is possible to claim, that they took inspiration and example from other radical English movements that aimed at the improvement of the existing legislation from the point of view of newly emergent middle class. Still, from then on, we can see a distinct start of direct political influence by female activists who looked for sympathetic supporters among the Members of Parliament, put forward petitions and proposals for new legislative solutions and, finally, at the turn of the century resorted to protests, hunger strikes and even acts of terrorism.

1.11 The rise of the female suffrage organizations: Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group

Several of the histories of the suffragette movements quote an anecdotal story about some of the most significant female figures of Victorian political and social life which can serve as a perfect illustration for the astonishing influence of determined individuals on the transformation of the British legal system which took place in the second part of the nineteenth century.

According to the narrative, at some point in the 1850s Emily Davis visited her friend Elizabeth Garrett at her family home at Aldeburgh. During her stay they had numerous discussions on the most pressing, current issues concerning women, which were joined by Elizabeth's younger sister, Millicent. Finally, one evening, Davis is said to have divided what she considered to be the most important areas of gender discrimination between the three of them and allocated the tasks of securing women's access to higher education to herself, opening up the medical profession to them to Elizabeth and left the matter of female suffrage for Millicent to deal with in the future. Leaving aside the question of the factual content of this story, there is no denying the fact that it realistically captures the fervent and determined atmosphere of the period when individuals started to join forces in order to introduce gender equality in the social and political system of Britain. It also offers apt illustration for the rapidity with which the transformations were occurring, as all of these women lived to see their ambitions realized: Emily Davis founded the College for Women (later Girton College) in 1869, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson became the first female physician in Britain and in 1872 set up New Hospital for Women where predominantly working class women could be treated by qualified all-female staff, finally, Millicent Garrett Fawcett became the president of National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) in 1897 and campaigned tirelessly until women were granted the right to vote thanks to the introduction of the Representation of the People Act (1918) (Adams 78-79).

The discussion of the issues connected with gender equality started, however, with a pamphlet published by Barbara Leigh Smith (later Bodichon) in 1854. The work entitled "A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women", was written with the assistance of a progressive lawyer Matthew Davenport, and concerned the injustice of the British property law, which discriminated against married women. The first part the text outlines all the regulations concerning the ownership of property by women divided into chapters according to the marital status of individuals. It is only in the section entitled "Remarks" that Bodichon comments on the obvious absurdity of a law which allows a single woman or a widow to own and manage properties but deprives her of that right the moment she becomes a wife:

A woman of twenty-one becomes an independent human creature, capable of holding and administering property to any amount; or, if she can earn money, she may appropriate her earnings freely to any purpose she thinks good. Her father has no power over her or her property. But if she unites herself to a man, the law immediately steps in, and she finds herself legislated for, and her condition of life suddenly and entirely changed. Whatever age she may be of, she is again considered as an infant – she is again under '*reasonable restraint*' – she loses her separate existence, and is merged in that of her husband. (Bodichon, 1854, after Lacey 31).

According to Bodichon, British property law that put the entirety of a woman's possessions into the hands of her husband had very serious implications for, not only their social standing, but also the sense of personal identity. (Bodichon, 1854, after Lacey 31). What is more, as Bodichon adds, even though property laws are, by no means, the only symptoms of gender inequality pervading Victorian society, they are symptomatic of the attitude towards women and, at the same time, relatively simple to change quickly. "Why should not these legal devices be done away with", she asks, "by the simple abolition of a law which we have outgrown?" (Bodichon, 1854, after Lacey 34).

Bodichon's radical approach can be attributed to the fact that, was not an average woman from the Victorian middle-class. Still, despite her reasonable wealth, liberal upbringing and the fact that Barbara had access to an education usually reserved for boys, she had to contend with being a social outcast. As her parents were never legally married all the Leigh Smith siblings became, inevitably, victims of criticism and even ostracism. As Florence Nightingale's illegitimate cousins, they became known as "the tabooed family" and left outside the "polite circle" of the society (Chapple and Pollard 607). Strikingly enough, the unique combination of Bodichon's background and upbringing may have constituted the necessary factors which freed her "of the pressures which would hamper many of her colleagues: as an outsider, her radical ideas and endeavours were never curbed by the need for respectability or gentility" (Lacey 3). Barbara Bodichon was, undeniably, radical in her convictions according to which British law and social culture were in desperate need of transformation in order to do away with gender discrimination present in every area of life. She was also the person who initiated the introduction of the so-called "woman question" as a serious political issue in the mid-nineteenth-century. For the first time in British history petitions, demanding property rights for married women and enfranchisement, were circulated by well-organized committees and presented to Parliament. At the forefront of these initiatives was Barbara Bodichon with *The English Woman's Journal* which she founded and financed as a platform for the promotion of the most forward feminist ideas of the period. The offices of *The English Woman's Journal* at 19 Langham Place in London, became the headquarters of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women that championed equality in employment opportunities (Lacey 3).

Depending on personal inclinations, and, to a certain extent, life experiences, the members of the Langham Place Group promoted equality in various areas of public life and, occasionally, had conflicting ideas as to the priorities facing female activists trying to make a difference in the laws and traditions concerning women. Topics they discussed and wrote about ranged from the education of girls to the living conditions of the most destitute representatives

of the gender. Even within the scope of one subject, the focus of particular authors shifted from aspect to aspect as dictated by their interests or passions (Lacey 56). What is more, some of the members of the group did not subscribe to the uncompromising attitude and radical rhetoric employed by Bodichon in her texts and speeches (Stephen 108).

Bodichon used radical rhetoric in other articles and papers on the need for female suffrage as well. In one of her texts entitled “Giving the Suffrage to Qualified Women” she does not hesitate to claim that: “The exclusion of women, especially where a right of voting is annexed to the possession of property seems to be a part of the *loi du plus fort*, a remnant of savage life, which the improvements of modern civilization have not yet dealt with” (quoted in Lacey 129). Even though, the paper won the acclaim of the Langham Place group, some members, like Emily Davis, criticized it for being too forward and blunt (in Stephen 109).

As the Langham Place Group was not an association with homogenous structure and political agenda but more of a bevy of intelligent and ambitious women centred around the charismatic Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, it did not achieve any spectacular successes in the long-term project of gaining equality for both genders in all areas of the public sphere. Bodichon herself did not live to see passing of the final Married Woman’s Property Act of 1893 or of The Representation of the People Act of 1918 which finally granted some British women the right to vote in elections. Notwithstanding, the efforts of the members of the Langham Place Group, which included numerous publications, lectures and debates, creation of discussion groups and collection of nearly fifteen hundred signatures under the petition in support of female suffrage, initiated the discussion on the rights of women and had a significant influence on both, intellectuals and public opinion (Lacey 1).

When it comes to politics and legislation, the example provided by Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and her colleagues inspired thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor Mill who continued the struggle for official recognition of the need for gender equality and succeeded in the promotion of that idea. Eventually, the activities of these individuals resulted in the creation of well-organized and vibrant suffrage organizations which carried on the campaign for female rights until the end of World War I and the passing of the Representation of the People Act of 1918.

1.12 Looking to “raise the tone of public morality”: the works of Harriett Taylor Mill and John Stuart Mill

When Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon was preparing the first petition in support of female suffrage in early 1866, it soon became evident that, in order to have a viable opportunity to present it to Parliament, she would need to enlist the help of a sympathetic politician who believed in the cause and would support her efforts. In May of the same year she penned a letter to Helen Taylor asking her whether she, and her step-father, John Stuart Mill would consider taking immediate action to promote the idea of granting British women the right to vote. The choice of the Mill family was justified as both John Stuart Mill and his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill were known for their liberal opinions and personal choices which went beyond the constraints of Victorian stereotypes (Lacey 9).

Harriet Taylor Mill, in particular, seemed to have followed in the footsteps of some feminist predecessors in breaking the mould of restrictive Victorian expectations towards women. When Harriet was married to John Taylor she and John Stuart Mill found each other so attractive that they embarked on one of the most notorious affairs of the period that lasted for nineteen years until John Taylor's death in 1849 (Harris 67). Subsequently, Taylor and Mill married in 1851 and remained together until Harriet died of pneumonia in 1858. According to John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* his relationship with Harriett was based on their mutual keen interests in both, philosophy and current social and political events, including the fight to remove legal restrictions on the rights of women. It was, predominantly, the independence, quick intellect and strength of her spirit that attracted Mill to his future spouse as he remembers fondly (Mill, *Autobiography* 135).

It is undeniable that John Stuart Mill had liberal opinions and believed that egalitarian reforms should be introduced in Victorian society even before he started his relationship with Harriett Taylor. The determination to make a significant change for the better in British legislation and social structure made him a colourful and controversial figure in the world of British politics (Adams 85).

Still, even though Mill was familiar with the arguments put forward by the supporters of the idea of female emancipation and agreed with them on principle, it was the meeting with Harriett Taylor that inspired him to pursue these ideas in his political efforts. In fact, the issue of gender equality became one of the elements that attracted them to each other, and constituted an important part of their intellectually sophisticated courtship (Mill, *Autobiography* 207).

Taylor Mill was, undeniably, a passionate believer in gender equality and the issue of female rights constituted a majority of her writings on current political topics. In 1850, inspired by the proceedings of the Ohio Women's Convention in Salem in the spring of this year, Harriett wrote an essay, "Enfranchisement of Women" arguing for granting women political and social rights equal to those of men. The text was published in the *Westminster Review*, surprisingly, under John Stuart Mill's name. It is not entirely clear what reasons lay behind this decision and the professed regularity with which Taylor Mill and Mill collaborated with each other makes it even more difficult to determine whether the essay was an example of joint authorship or Taylor decided that using Mill's surname, instead of that of an unknown female writer, would carry more weight when it was published. One thing is certain though: "Enfranchisement of Women" remains one of the most radical texts of not only the Victorian period but in the framework of the entire history of British feminist writing (Deutscher 67).

Taylor Mill does not shy away from criticising of both, the stereotypes behind the structures of Victorian society and the limited way in which radical politicians perceive equality. The main tenet of her work is based on an unshakable conviction that women and men are born equal and law and customs should reflect that. "That women have as good a claim as men have, in point of personal right, to the suffrage, or to a place in the jury box it would be difficult for any one to deny," she says in the opening sentence of her article and goes on to point out the paradox inherent in egalitarian political movements which would exclude women from the laws ensuring social equality. She finds it striking, that the professed ideals of the "inalienable right" to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" seemed to be reserved solely for white men who use their privilege as the additional source not only over women but other races as well. The most logical correlation, according to her, should involve the assumption "that taxation and representation should be co-extensive" (Taylor Mill 29) and extend to women who are active participants in social life.

Taylor Mill sees the ingrained yet illogical prejudice as the main reason behind blatant discrimination of women still present in British law and unreflective references to tradition as the sole argument used in its defence. However, as the contemporary Britain and America pride themselves on being at the forefront of technological and social progress, the employment of old-fashioned stereotypes to the issue of female rights comes across as inexplicable as well as unacceptable. It is only the fear of unknown and unwillingness to accept changes that stand in the way of the transformations of law and customs, which would benefit the way society functions. Still, Taylor sees hope for the future as "an uncustomary thought, on a subject which touches the greater interests of life, still startles when first presented; but, if it can be kept before

the mind until the impression of strangeness wears off, it obtains a hearing, and as rational a consideration as the intellect of the hearer is accustomed to bestow on any other subject” (Taylor Mill 30).

In the following part of the essay, Taylor argues that there are no rational reasons or traits that can be attributed to women that would justify their exclusion from the public sphere of politics. To the contrary, as historical evidence proves, women have been more than capable of not only taking an active part but leading the governance of various countries. Taylor cites the examples women such as Queen Elizabeth, Isabella of Castille and Catherine of Russia as a confirmation of her theory that it is not gender that determines the worth of a political ruler (Taylor Mill 33). “Enfranchisement of Women” is also the first text to point out that women’s biological function in reproduction has been employed against them in the argument about their suitability for public functions. According to Taylor, the so-called “maternity argument” is flawed as it applies only to the women who actually have offspring. Besides, it is entirely unreasonable to expect any individual, regardless of gender, to fulfil only one, exclusive social role however time and energy-consuming (Taylor 30). Next, Taylor puts into question the assumption according to which men are predisposed for leadership as it leads to situations in which, regardless of their worth, it is them that have the absolute power over even the most capable of women. Taylor claims that, as a result, women cannot enjoy the benefits of democracy as men are reluctant to renounce the absolute power that they have over their wives. She uses the example of England, where women’s influence is severely limited to the sphere of domesticity, leaving the public matters connected with democracy or liberalism outside the scope of their interest. It is especially potentially damaging in the light of the fact that the majority of married men tend to sway towards conservative values and begin to “sympathize with the holders of power more than its victims” (Taylor Mill 33). Taylor argues that this kind of arrangement is harmful not only to women but men as well as they do not perceive their partners as equals and do not seek for indispensable intellectual stimulation in a marriage (TaylorMill 37). In consequence, women are deprived of not only social and political opportunities, but also of a chance of creating an intellectually stimulating partnership with their husbands, which renders their existence even emptier and devoid of true significance.

What is more, the author rejects the notion that there exists no need for a change of the social system because a majority of women do not ask for any other arrangements. To the contrary, Taylor claims that it is the perceived lack of possibility of success, as the authorities repeatedly refuse to listen to their complaints, that discourages women from taking more decisive stance. Another reason why female objections are not expressed more prominently is

connected with the conditioning that women are subjected to from childhood which makes them question the importance and, at times, legitimacy of their own doubts and needs. Women are discouraged from independent activity as “they are taught to think that to repel actively even an admitted injury done to themselves is somewhat unfeminine and had better be left to some male friend or protector” (Taylor Mill 37). Acting against these expectations carries the risk of social judgment or even ostracism and requires unusual courage and determination. Therefore, women have to overcome not only external obstacles but also the inner inhibitions in order to even make an attempt at promoting social equality in any area.

That is why, according to Taylor, the only solution to the problem would be a complete overhaul of the British social, cultural and political structures from education to legislation which would enable women to finally fulfil their potential. What is more, the only feasible way towards gender equality seems to lead through direct action which, according to patriarchal stereotypes, is considered to be unfeminine. In order to support this claim the author gives the example of American female associations which at that time started to publicly voice their opinions: “In the United States at least, there are women, seemingly numerous, and now organized for action on the public mind, who demand equality in the fullest acceptance of the word, and demand it by a straightforward appeal to men's sense of justice, not plead for it with timid depreciation of their displeasure” (Taylor Mill 38).

“Emancipation of Women” remains a strikingly radical and uncompromising text even when evaluated from the perspective of the twenty-first century, but it was John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, written and published several years after Harriett Taylor’s death “that was to become (with Marx’s *Das Kapital*) one of the two most influential political books of the nineteenth century, to be widely translated and quoted” (Adams 87). Mill also considered *The Subjection of Women* to be one of his most significant texts as he worked on the essay for several years and then after finishing writing in 1861, spent eight years revising and rewriting it before its eventual publication (Harris 67). He was also very precise in setting the decisive and strident tone of the argumentation as he started the first chapter with a statement: “The object of this Essay is to explain as clearly as I can the reasons for following proposition: The principle that regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong itself, and is now one of the chief obstacles to human improvement; and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality that doesn’t allow any power or privilege on one side or disability on the other” (Mill, *The Subjection* 1).

It is possible to find numerous similarities between the claims put forward in *The Subjection of Women* and Taylor’s “Enfranchisement of Women”, which confirms the claim of

close collaboration between the two authors. Just like Taylor, Mill is equally convinced that contemporary British society locks women into a subordinate position closely resembling slavery. According to him, however, the creation of this system was not a question of intentional design but a result of convergence of several factors that put women at a disadvantage. So, the elements which he considers most significant, are connected with the way the apparent physical advantage that men have over women finds its reflection in the rules of social order. According to Mill, women, fall naturally, under the dominance of the stronger gender which, subsequently, translates quite directly into legislation and, finally, tradition (Mill, *Subjection* 3-4).

Still, even though Mill does not consider the creation of patriarchal stereotypes to have been a conscious tool of gender oppression, he looks at the stubborn cultivation of their tenants in the age of progress as irrational and inherently unjust. What is more, according to his estimation, the only arguments in support of the existing status quo are, predominantly, based on the force of habit and the fear of the unknown qualities that a social transformation is bound to bring. Mill claims that treating any kind of advantage that one group has over another is a natural tendency and uses as proof the example of the division between the social classes of masters and slaves that “even to the most cultivated minds, to be the only natural condition of the human race” (Mill, *Subjection* 7). Consequently, there exists no substantial obstacle to acceptance of new avenues of female activity outside the confines of domesticity.

Next, he disparages the most common retort to the demand for female enfranchisement which brands it as going against the natural order in the following way: “So true is it that ‘unnatural’ generally means only ‘uncustomary’, and that whatever is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men is a universal custom, so any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural!” (Mill, *Subjection* 8) Mill supports this claim with the example of the reign of Queen Victoria which, at times, shocks foreigners, but is treated by the British as something utterly normal as they are accustomed to this form of government. Simultaneously, the same people would balk at the prospect of female soldiers or members of Parliament, as the novelty of such equality in the public sphere is outside of their scope of experience. However, the social expectations used to vary throughout history as, for example, in feudal times, “it seemed natural that women of the privileged classes should be of manly character, inferior in nothing but bodily strength to their husbands and fathers” (Mill, *Subjection* 8). Therefore, it is not unfeasible for the emancipation of women to gain popular support in Victorian England, given the right circumstances and favourable political climate.

Another issue which Mill agrees on with Taylor is the question of acquiescence of all woman to their subordinate position in the society. He disparages the claim that “women don’t

complain and are consenting parties to it” as, in his view, “ever since there have been women able to make their sentiments known by their writings (the only form of going-public that society permits to them), increasingly many of them have protested against their present social condition” (Mill, *Subjection* 9). Moreover, it is possible to notice the increasing complexity of strategy and intensity of efforts of organizations and individuals striving at promoting the idea of gender equality. The movement, led by the most eminent women of the society has been active in petitioning Parliament to grant women the right to vote. The appeals are supported by the claim that the growing number of women receive the education to rival the one enjoyed by men and make serious forays into professions and occupations that have previously been closed to them. When combined with the fact that “we can’t possibly know how many more women there are who silently have such hopes, but there are plenty of signs of how many would have them if they weren’t so strenuously taught to repress them as improper for their sex” the movement for female suffrage has great potential to be successful in the initiation of social transformation comparable with the abolition of slavery (Mill, *Subjection* 9-10).

Apart from discussing and expanding on the ideas that were already touched upon by Harriett Taylor Mill in her essay, the *Subjection of Women* introduces thoroughly original arguments into the discussion on the potential results of granting women the right to vote. John Stuart Mill claims that female suffrage would not cause any major shifts in the balance of power on the British political scene as “the majority of women of any class are unlikely to differ in political opinion from the majority of the men of the same class, unless the issue somehow involves the interests of women as such; and in that case women require the votes as their guarantee of just and equal consideration” (Mill, *Subjection* 30). In other words, under normal circumstances, women are much more likely to vote according to their class or party loyalty than to base their choice on gender. Moreover, as the more disadvantaged group they need this platform to express their opinions, especially in matters that concern them personally.

When it comes to the issue of women’s suitability “to hold offices or practise professions involving important public responsibilities”, Mill considers the criterion of gender to be entirely non-essential. According to him, any individual who succeeds in a profession automatically proves their worth and qualification. As for holding public offices; it is essential to trust the mechanisms of democracy which would eliminate women who are unfit for the responsibility in the same way they are supposed to exclude unfit men (Mill, *Subjection* 31). In addition, Mill repeats the argument already used by Harriett Taylor according to which, the acknowledgment of women’s abilities would bring benefits to the whole society as the examples of women such as Queen Elizabeth and Joan of Arc have shown “women’s capacities for government have

been found adequate in every place where they have been tried, and to the extent that they have been tried” (Mill, *Subjection* 33).

Another of Mill’s novel ideas can be found in the paragraphs devoted to the foreseen effects of the reform granting women equal social and political rights. Mill claims that, apart from the correction of long-term social injustice and the fact that the liberation of women would double the potential and talent available to professions, the involvement of women in the public life would have a clear effect on the moral tone and the rules governing various areas of public life. “The result of that would be that women’s opinions would have a more beneficial influence than they now do on the general mass of human belief and sentiment,” says Mill and adds “If women were socially and politically emancipated, they would be better educated and would have more practical experience of the things that their opinions influence; and the points I have been making show that those changes would improve the part that women take in the formation of general opinion” (Mill, *Subjection* 53). In effect, men would be forced to adjust to more civil ways in politics and public debates which, overall, would improve the sensitivity of the whole society and, lead to the creation of a more just and democratic political system.

Still, some of Mill’s ideas did not escape criticism, even among his own supporters as, following the utilitarian doctrines of Jeremy Bentham’s philosophy, he argued that initial limiting of enfranchisement to married women would be the optimal way of introduction of gender equality to Victorian society. That kind of approach was perceived as dismissive of the issue of single women’s voting rights, which was unacceptable for the activists of the fledgling suffrage movements many of whom were single. For Mill, however, it was not a question of discrimination but of difference in legal status as spinsters and widows were not subject to the rules of the “coverture” and could own property and pay taxes (Adams 88). Therefore, Mill was of the opinion that the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people could be achieved by focusing on the promotion of enfranchisement for married women, who constitute a majority among adults.

John Stuart Mill’s interest in female suffrage was also quite prominently expressed in his election address when he was invited to stand as the Liberal candidate for Westminster in 1865. Admittedly, he was not a particularly active or ambitious politician, as he refused to canvass or participate in the campaign costs but, by this time, he had a well-defined opinion on what the requirements for franchise should be and he based them not on gender but on educational and self-reliance criteria. “All grown persons, both men and women, who can read, write, and perform a sum in the rule of three, and who have not, within some small number of years, received parish relief should be allowed to vote” (Mill, *Subjection* after Clephante 89),

Mill declared straightforwardly in one of his speeches before the elections. He also believed that the participation of women in the world of politics would ‘strengthen the influences opposed to violence and bloodshed’ and prevent the “the expulsion of all beauty from common life” (Mill, *Subjection*, after Clephante 90). Despite the fact that Mill’s political views, including the opinion on the necessity of the introduction of female franchise, were highly irregular and caused some controversy among the Westminster voters, Mill was elected with a comfortable majority of around 700 votes over his Conservative opponent. Even though, some commentators dismissed the significance of this victory, claiming that it was the personal authority and not the strength of his arguments that got Mill elected (Clephante 103) but, in reality, Mill’s political success in 1865 was a major step forward for the suffrage movement as it proved that it was possible for a candidate to openly support the emancipation of women and not lose votes over the principle of enfranchisement. It was Mill’s victory that marked the beginning of the period of organized political promotion and inspired the creation of numerous female organizations which actively promoted the idea of gender equality throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

1.13 From middle-class campaigners to militant suffragettes

The result of the vote over the amendment to the Second Reform Act bolstered optimism among the activists of the women’s committees and organizations promoting the idea of female suffrage. As Ray Strachey notices in her history of the female suffrage movement *The Cause*, the hopes for quick advancement of the issue of enfranchisement were excessive and premature, which could be attributed to the lack of political experience and savviness that hampered most women in their initial efforts to influence the British Parliament. Even though John Stuart Mill and other male politicians sympathetic to the cause of female suffrage advised caution, it is possible to notice an increase in the number of new women’s organization in the years following the passing of the Second Reform Act (Strachey 109).

John Stuart Mill’s stepdaughter, Harriett Taylor, played a significant role in the creation of the London National Society for Women’s Suffrage in July 1867. The structure and the agenda of the organization were modelled on the example of a similar society which had been set up in Manchester a year earlier by activists such as Richard Pankhurst, Lydia Becker and Elizabeth Wolstenholme. These two centres were quickly followed by societies in Edinburgh (1867), Birmingham (1867) and Bristol (1868) and a rapid increase in the activity promoting the ideas of gender equality. That does not mean that all the activists were united and agreed on

the most pressing points on the political agenda. In London, the members of future associations had profound disagreements when it came to straightforward particulars, such as the name for a new organization as well as more fundamental question of whether only married women or all women should be enfranchised. In some cases, the discrepancies proved to be insurmountable, for example when Emily Davis supported an expedient motion to exclude married women from the petition of the enfranchisement and, when it was rejected by the society, she declined the proposal to become its member (Adams 89).

The issue of the marital status and the coverture rules as the deciding factors which could determine whether a woman could vote or not was a complex issue representative of the magnitude of complications that the female suffrage societies had to face on the road to gender equality. If only single women with the right to the ownership of independent properties could vote, it would mean that a majority of women would not be offered the opportunity to voice their opinion on the public forum. On the other hand, granting the suffrage solely to the married women would mean that women would be subject to constant change in their civic rights status (Jade Adams 92). In fact, as it turned out, it was easier for the general public to except the concept of unmarried women, “poor creatures who had missed out on the big prize in life” (Adams 92) to be allowed the right to cast their votes in elections. In 1869, a Manchester MP, Jacob Bright was successful in the introduction of an amendment to the Municipal Franchise Act which enabled unmarried women and widows to vote for town councils, which was a major step forward towards the acceptance of full female enfranchisement. A year later women were empowered to vote for and stand for seats on school boards which gave activists of the suffrage movement an opportunity to gain valuable experience in holding public positions in male-dominated organizations. All the most prominent figures promoting gender equality, such as Lydia Becker, Emily Davis, and Elizabeth Garrett took part in the first elections for the Poor Law boards of guardians and school boards and won seats in their areas. Moreover, an estimated 14,000 women cast their votes all over Britain, which clearly demonstrated that the claim according to which women were disinterested in politics was far from the truth (Adams 93).

Another point of contention for the newly created suffrage organizations was the question of whether the suffrage committees should seek the support and collaboration with prominent male politicians and businessman. Some of the leaders were of an opinion that the involvement of influential men was indispensable for the future success of the female suffrage cause. Others, including John Stuart Mill, felt strongly that the membership of the suffrage societies as well as their immediate associations should remain exclusively female. (Starkey 111). That is why, some of the suffrage societies introduced their own version of gender

discrimination which, in the long run, did not help to advance the cause rooted in the ideas of justice and equality.

The third significant issue dividing the suffrage societies was based around the issue of the participation in other campaigns such as that against the Contagious Disease Act. The opponents of the active involvement in other controversial social campaigns claimed that the association, especially with issues connected with sexual conduct could easily and permanently taint the public perception of female suffrage. What is more, according to politicians, such as John Stuart Mill, female suffrage societies had to focus on gaining the voting rights for women. Besides, once women were allowed to vote it would be more feasible for them to gain influence on the resolution of other social issues concerning their gender. As the consensus of opinion was very difficult to reach, the refusal to get involved in various causes falling outside the scope of suffrage left some of the activists isolated on the political scene. Eventually, it was the falling out over the Contagious Diseases Acts that led to actual splits in the structure of the movement in 1871, when some of the members of the Manchester society, who were also actively involved in the lobbying over the Acts, pressed for the involvement of the suffrage movement in the coordination of the petition for the Parliament. Further divisions led to a revision in the societies' approach to cooperation with other organizations as "feminists have stressed the educative and emancipatory function of participating in campaigns around social issues – that women who had not previously spoken in public or even attended a meeting were introduced to public work through campaigning" (Adams 93).

Arguably, the role of the suffrage organizations was essential in the process of furthering the cause of female enfranchisement, but it was the charisma and drive of prominent individuals that made significant impact, especially, on the way public opinion perceived gender equality. In the 1870s and 1880s, Lydia Becker from the Manchester branch of the society came to the fore as the unquestioned leader of the efforts aimed at gaining women full voting rights. Becker was not only the editor and publisher of *Women's Suffrage Journal* – the most popular editorial on female rights in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century -, but also possessed a keen sense of the importance that publicity can have on the outcome of meticulously organized political campaigns (Fulford 78). For example, in 1867, she made use of a clerical error which put the name of a Manchester housewife, Lily Maxwell on the parliamentary electoral register. As Mrs Maxwell was a suffrage sympathizer, Lydia Becker heard about the situation and personally visited the woman to convince her to vote. On the day of the by-elections they both headed to Maxwell's local polling station at Chorlton Town Hall where she could cast her vote. Seeing that Mrs Maxwell was clearly listed, the returning officer had no choice but to accept

her vote, which, according to accounts, met with the applause of everybody present at the polling station (Adams 94). Becker promoted this incident as a ‘test case’ of the very first woman to ever vote in British parliamentary elections. In fact, even though, there were previous incidents of women who owned property, and therefore, could vote in the elections (including a group of 30 women in Lichfield in 1843), thanks to the publicity, Lily Maxwell’s case is still remembered as precedential (Adams 95).

Lydia Becker’s activity was one of the most significant factors that stood behind the growing importance of the Manchester society. As she strongly believed in the efficiency of cooperation, Becker enlisted the help of prominent male politicians and activists to promote the female suffrage cause in the Parliament. One of their first joint initiatives, was to canvas female-owned households, to encourage them to sign up as willing to have the same right to vote as Mrs Maxwell. In all, the suffragettes collected 5,346 signatures under the petition which was presented in front of the Court of Common Pleas in 1868 (Adams 94-95). Unfortunately, the court ruled against the Manchester female householders on the grounds that “every woman is personally incapable in legal terms, of exercising a vote” (Pankhurst 46, Adams 95).

The suffrage campaign reached another of its hurdles in 1870 when MP Jacob Bright moved the Women’s Disabilities Removal Bill which aimed at the extension of the voting rights to female householders. Unexpectedly, the Bill passed its second reading but was defeated in the committee stage as it was opposed by William Gladstone (Hansard 12 May 1870, col. 619). This defeat marked the beginning of the period of subsequent rejections of all the petitions promoting female franchise that lasted until the end of the decade (Adams 95).

One of the main reasons behind this string of failures can be found in the change of political alliance instigated by Lydia Becker after Jacob Bright had lost his seat in 1874. Convinced that the support provided by sympathetic Members of Parliament would prove instrumental, Becker turned to a Conservative fraction, Mr William Forsyth, Member for Marylebone, who insisted on excluding married women from the female suffrage legislation. Becker’s acquiescence to that condition initiated another split among the activists as radicals, such as Jacob Bright, Richard Pankhurst and Elizabeth Elmy refused to introduce the divisions based on the marital status to the projects of franchise for women. The suffrage movement lost some popular support as well, because the majority of married women could not identify themselves with the changes to the policy brought about by the alliance with the Conservative Party. As this connection did not gain suffragettes any new friends, the bill was voted down in 1875 and, again in 1876, which, once again, clearly demonstrated a waning popularity for the suffrage cause (Adams 95).

The controversy sparked by the way Lydia Becker tried to get the female suffrage legislation through Parliament can be perceived as an error of judgment on the part of the otherwise astute political activists. However, it is important to remember that the female suffrage organizations had to face a curious situation when it came to the support they could expect on the part of the Liberals and Conservatives. It would be natural to expect the Liberals to be more open to the ideas promoting gender equality and Conservatives to steadfastly hold on to the Victorian stereotypes which put women firmly within the domestic sphere. However, as Jad Adams puts it: “Paradoxically, the leaders of the Conservative Part tended to support women’s suffrage, while their membership generally did not, the opposite of the situation in the Liberal Party” (Adams 99). William Gladstone in particular was too entrenched in his attachment to the ideas of the patriarchal model of a family to entertain any idea of allowing women access to public life, especially when it came to an involvement in politics. In a letter to one of his friends, Gladstone openly states that he harbours too much respect for the role women are supposed to play in society and the “permanent and vast difference of type [that] has been impressed upon women and men respectively by the Maker of both” to encourage them to “trespass upon the delicacy, the purity, the refinement, the elevation of her own nature, which are the present sources of its power” (Hollis 319-21). On the other hand, the leader of the Tories, Benjamin Disraeli, was of an opinion that in a country ruled by a Queen, where peeresses could sit in the House of Lords, there should be no reason to withhold the right to vote from women (Adams 98).

It is hardly surprising that this complicated, political situation did not offer a path of steady progress for the suffrage movement and became a major source of differences of opinion and splits among the activists. Apart from the unavoidable strife and chaos caused by the divisions, however, this particular period in British politics offered suffragettes an opportunity to define their agenda and priorities, which, in turn, equipped them for future campaigns in favour of the female franchise (Strachey 277). The experience that the suffragists gained during the attempts to pass various female suffrage bills through Parliament came in useful in 1883 during the discussion of the Third Reform Bill, which was intended to enfranchise male agricultural labourers. As it was a natural opportunity for the inclusion of women as well, and the political atmosphere seemed to be favourable the members of suffrage societies were optimistic as to the success of an amendment, encompassing, at least, unmarried women. However, William Gladstone once again blocked it, stating that he would rather prefer to see the whole Reform Bill fail than to allow the transgression against the gender roles. Eventually, after the Reform Bill was passed, two out of three adult males in Britain were allowed to vote,

a total electorate of 5,600,000. Even though that number encompassed barely 29 percent of the contemporary adult population, women were still put in the position of the group that was least represented in elections. The whole situation was made worse by the fact that many of the women who were denied the access to the franchise were much better educated and proficient in matters of politics than those who were now entitled to vote (Adams 98). As Jad Adams comments: “every advance in manhood suffrage left more glaring the disabilities of women. Large-scale immigration in the 1890s added a racial dimension to the debate, as middle-class women were appalled that ‘alien’ men who might not even speak the language were given franchise when pure-bred English women were not” (Adams 98).

The failure of the amendment to the Third Reform Act was, undeniably, a setback to the campaign for female suffrage, but at the same time, however, it drew new circles of previously unconvinced women to the movement. The new members tended to look for allies among members of the Conservative Party, which was reasonable as they were inclined to support the idea of the enfranchisement of at least some of the female property owners in order to balance the influence of newly enfranchised workers and Irish peasants, the majority of whom were expected to vote for the Liberals. In this respect, they were continuing the strategy first employed by Disraeli who was determined to do everything in his power to increase the Conservative share of the voting population. The Conservative Party faced two choices: they could either try to convince some of the working-class voters to support their agenda or enfranchise women, many of whom were sympathetic towards the conservative ideals. As working men constituted a more numerous group than female property owners and female franchise was still considered to be a dangerously progressive idea, eventually the Conservatives decided to focus their efforts on making their policies more accessible to the general public, in order to convince working men that Liberals were not the exclusive political group they should support. Due to this development, the matter of female franchise was postponed indefinitely, leaving the suffragettes’ hopes dashed once again (Adams 98).

The last decade of the nineteenth century was a time of uncertainty and, eventually, profound change for the activists promoting the female franchise. On the one hand, the most prominent politicians, such as the leader of the Conservative Party, Lord Salisbury were seemingly in favour of female franchise (Adams 99). What is more, the opposition in the Parliament was gradually dissipating and the numbers of women demanding equal rights were rising: in 1892 the bill proposing the introduction of female suffrage was defeated in the Commons by a majority of barely three votes which, two years later, encouraged a quarter of a million of women to sign a petition calling for the vote (Adams 99).

Still, however, on the other side of the spectrum, there were anti-suffrage activists who, incensed by the progress achieved by the suffrage societies, started to launch their own campaigns in defence of the traditional, patriarchal division between public and private spheres of life. It was actually, predominantly middle-class women who devoted much of their time and effort to philanthropic work and, on principle, supported the idea of giving girls access to higher education that became the most vocal in expressing their doubts about the benefits of giving women the vote and, therefore, access to the world of politics. One of the most prominent figures of this anti-suffrage movement, Mrs Humphrey Ward, was a published novelist who wrote stories with plots revolving around the themes of social and political conflicts and religious dilemma with the particular focus on conservative values. After the publication of her best renowned novel *Robert Elsmere* (1888), she gained the status of a public figure, which she used to launch a notorious campaign against the dangers of the suffrage movement. In January 1889, she initiated the publication of an article and petition titled “An Appeal Against Female Suffrage” in *The Nineteenth Century* edited by Sir James Knowles in order to undermine the notion of modern and progressive suffragists being pitted against old-fashioned and conservative men (Adams 99). The authors of the petitions start their text with the appeal not to emotions but to reason which, according to them, should be the deciding factor in the way the issue of gender differences should be resolved. They go on to emphasize the fact that the protest against the female right to vote does not equal the lack of support when it comes to “the fullest possible development of the powers, energies, and education of women”, but stems from a belief in the way the gender roles protect British society from chaos and incompetence. According to the petition women’s “share in the working of the State machinery should be different from that assigned to men” as there are significant differences in natural, physical and emotional traits that predispose men to “struggle of debate and legislation in Parliament; the working of the army and navy; all the heavy, laborious, fundamental industries of the State, such as those of mines, metals, and railways; the lead and supervision of English commerce, the service of that merchant fleet upon which our food supply depends (Adams100). The exclusion of women from the world of politics is not seen as a sign of discrimination or lack of respect towards women but what the signatories of the petition perceive as a natural acknowledgment of the inherent differences between the genders. A more detailed justification of this claim is presented when the text expresses admiration for the accomplishments of women in the areas connected with education and care: “The care of the sick and the insane; the treatment of the poor; the education of children: in all these matters, and others besides, they have made good their claim to a larger and more extended powers. We rejoice in it” (“An

Appeal” 781). Still, it does not alter the fact that women lack both the experience and the inclination to successfully engage in the realms of “foreign or colonial policy, or of grave constitutional change” and should not pursue ‘mere outward equality with men’ as that only “leads to a total misconception of women's true dignity and special mission. It tends to personal struggle and rivalry, where the only effort of both the great divisions of the human family should be to contribute the characteristic labor and the best gifts of each to the common stock” (“An Appeal” 781).

The reasonable and balanced argumentation used by the conservative anti-suffragists dealt a significant blow to the strategies employed by the activists promoting the introduction of female suffrage as evidenced by the lacklustre way in which Millicent Garrett Fawcett responded to the petition in the July edition of *The Nineteenth Century* (*The Nineteenth Century* 49, July 1889 89). Instead of addressing the actual validity of the reasoning behind the petitioners’ line of thinking, she focuses on accusing the female opponents of suffrage of being “ladies to whom the lines of life have fallen in pleasant places”, which left them too privileged to understand the plight of a majority of British women who are denied the opportunities to advance in society or even to decide about the important aspects of their own lives. Moreover, even when it comes to women who are seemingly placed in a position of relative power as properties or business owners, it is important to remember that the men who are their tenants or employees have a huge advantage over them simply because they are able to cast their vote in elections. In the following paragraphs of her rebuttal, Fawcett addresses the issue of the brutality of politics which, according to the opponents of female suffrage, makes it an entirely unsuitable field of activity for women. Instead of questioning the verity of this theory, however, she focuses on the attempt to prove that granting women the right to vote would not automatically cause a sudden increase in the numbers of female politicians. (Crawford 168). In addition, when it came to the particulars of the proposed suffrage bill, Fawcett expresses beliefs that are quite closely related to the values of the anti-suffrage Conservatives. In her response to the petition she agrees with the exclusion of married women from the franchise, arguing that if they are given the vote “changes will be introduced into home life which have not been adequately considered” (*Women’s Suffrage* 86). Fawcett goes as far as citing an argument that is thoroughly anti-suffrage when she states that if married women were allowed to vote “the effect in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred would be to give two votes to the husband. Wives are bound in law to obey their husbands” (*Women’s Suffrage* 87). Fawcett’s appeasing attitude was unacceptable to the younger and more radical suffrage activists, such as Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst, who set up the Women’s Franchise

League in 1889 with the express aim of securing the voting rights for all British women, regardless of their marital or financial status (Adams 103).

Millicent Fawcett's ineffective defence of the suffrage movement and the additional divisions in the suffrage movement are symptomatic of the state of crisis in which the societies found themselves in the last decade of the nineteenth century. After the death of Lydia Becker in 1890, it was Millicent Fawcett who took over the leadership and, despite its outward lack of success, continued Becker's moderate line of approach at the attempts at convincing the general public to accept the idea of female franchise. Admittedly, she also made concerted efforts to unite the divided suffrage societies which, eventually, led to the creation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897. Moreover, she remained one of its most prominent members until the end of her political career. Even though NUWSS gradually developed into a large organization of more than one hundred thousand members in more than five hundred branches all over Britain, the unity of strategy and agenda was never achieved, predominantly, due to Fawcett's unwillingness to antagonize the conservative circles of society. It was also the complexity of the British political system and the well-established structures and beliefs of the conservative party that stood firmly in the way of a positive resolution of the issues connected with the introduction of the female suffrage (Adams 102, 105).

It was not until the early years of the twentieth century that some of the suffrage societies activists, frustrated by ineffectual efforts of to push the franchise bill through the structures of Parliament, started to adopt a more direct approach to the campaign promoting universal suffrage. In 1903, Emmeline Pankhurst together with her two daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, set up an all-female pro-suffrage organization in Manchester. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), from the beginning of its existence proclaimed its independence from the British political parties and their ideals, and adopted the slogan "deeds not words" popularised by Emmeline Pankhurst as the baseline for the strategy aiming at securing voting rights for all women. The members of the WSPU, dubbed "suffragettes" by British journalist Charles Hands in an article in the *Daily Mail*⁴ (Crowford 452), did not devote their time to penning petitions or trying to convince MPs to support the suffrage bill. Instead, they turned to direct forms of

⁴ The term 'suffragette' was derived from the French suffix *-ette* which is used to denote that something is diminutive. Over the centuries *-ette* has become a marker of things that are short or smaller-than-usual (*cigarette* = small cigar; *roulette* = small wheel), feminine and female (*jockette* = a female jockey; *hackette* = a female journalist), as well as imitative and inferior (*leatherette* = imitation leather; *poetette* = a young or minor poet). (*Time*: 22.10.2015) Charles Hands coined the term, in order to show his disdain towards the members of WSPU and distinguish them from suffragists who opted for the constitutional methods of promoting the idea of the gender equality and universal suffrage.

protest, including marches and demonstrations as well as events aimed at garnering attention and publicity, ranging from public speeches to female activists chaining themselves to metal railings. The authorities responded with police interventions and arrests which only exacerbated the attrition, and hostilities between the suffragettes and the government. Many WSPU members were subject to invigilation and numerous periods of incarceration which they resisted with hunger strikes carried out to the point of exhaustion. As they could not be allowed to become martyrs for the cause, the prison authorities introduced the brutal and illegal practise of force-feeding. This, in turn, outraged the leaders of the WSPU who began to lose faith in the possibility of a compromise and a peaceful resolution of the conflict especially after the Liberal government introduced a new law. Dubbed “Cat and Mouse Act” the Prisoner's Temporary Discharge of Ill Health Act passed in early 1913 allowed for the early release of prisoners who were so weakened by hunger strikes that they were at risk of death. They were to be returned to prison the moment their health improved where the process would begin again. Clearly, the outrageous strategy adopted by the British government did not escape notice or criticism, which, unfortunately, did not influence the conduct of the officials.

Eventually, suffragettes were pushed beyond the limits of legal activity as they engaged in what can be perceived not only as acts of militancy but even terrorism. From 1912 onwards, Emmeline Pankhurst and her followers introduced a new strategy that was supposed to demonstrate their resolve and intimidate the government. Militant members of the WSPU became engaged in a complex campaign of smashing window panes, arson of mailboxes, private and public buildings as well as attempted and successful bombings. It was, in fact, the suffragettes who were the first to come up with the idea of constructing and sending letter bombs (Bearman 366). It is difficult to estimate the exact scope of suffrage militancy but, regardless of the statistics, however, it is undeniable that the suffragettes managed to stage a complex campaign of terror which caused a great deal of anxiety amongst the general public and inspired authorities to introduce new security and invigilation measures, such as the usage of photography for the surveillance of suspects or searching bags at the entrance of public buildings and roping off paintings at museums.

The most prominent British politicians did not escape the consequences of their unmovable stance on the issue of female suffrage either, as the suffragettes took out their anger and frustration on them during personal attacks. These incidents started as early as 1909 when, then-Home Secretary, Winston Churchill was accosted by a militant suffragette, Theresa Garrett, who repeatedly lashed him with a horsewhip screaming: “Take that in the name of the insulted women of England!” It was Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, however, who became

the main focus of the suffragettes' ire as both him and his property fell victim to numerous acts of violence. There were even reports by the Scotland Yard of a plot to assassinate Asquith which was treated as a serious concern by the Cabinet (Adams 213). The reasons for this hostility were connected with Asquith's unmovable position on female suffrage which he opposed throughout his career. His willingness to use force against female protesters resulted in incidents such as the brutal dispersion of a protest by suffragettes outside the Houses of Parliament on the 18th of November 1910 dubbed "Black Friday". The incident became the cause for even more vigorous and violent protests on the part of the WSPU.

Still, despite the undeniable determination and well-organized campaign that was impacting both the authorities and public opinion, the WSPU failed to make any progress towards a legal recognition of the rights of women. Even the tragic incident during the Epsom Derby on the 4th of June, 1913 which resulted in the death of Emily Wilding Davison who got trampled under the hooves of the royal horse did not bring about a shift in the way suffragettes were perceived as a majority of press reports described her actions as an act of a madwoman. The stalemate between the government and the suffragettes lasted until the declaration of war in August 1914, when Emmeline Pankhurst called for a suspension of militant actions and declared that the suffragettes would be doing everything they could to help recruit for the war effort (Mayhall 121-22). In return, the authorities unconditionally released all the hunger-striking suffragettes from Holloway Prison, which eventually incited the most prominent WSPU activists to speak at public meetings across England urging young men to enlist. *The Suffragette* rebranded itself as a new pro-war journal *Britannia* and by the end of 1916 claimed to represent almost one million women who went to work in various munitions factories. The NUWSS was equally determined to support the government during the war sent their members to staff field hospitals and drive ambulances as they wanted to prove, as Millicent Fawcett put it: "Let us show ourselves worthy of citizenship whether our claim to it be recognised or not"(Gullace 14).

Despite the fact, however, that both of the major organizations promoting female suffrage stood firmly behind all patriotic initiatives and more than proved that women could exert a positive influence on public life it was not their contribution to the war effort that was the decisive factor in the introduction of the Representation of People Act in 1918 which finally granted a group of British women the right to vote. Contrary to the governmental propaganda according to which suffragettes were rewarded for their loyalty during the war, the main inspiration behind the changes to the franchise was a series of restrictions brought about by the Third Reform Act of 1884 which included the condition of continuous residency at a single

address. Aimed at stopping transient workers from voting, it inadvertently disenfranchised almost five million men who had to move into military barracks or far-flung munitions centres during the war period (Adams 223, Fawcett 125). The solution to the problem was put forward before Parliament in 1916, the year of the general election, by a Conservative MP, Edward Carson and a group of his supporters who advocated for the so-called “soldier vote”, which meant franchise based on military service. The NUWSS saw this development as an opportunity to claim credit for millions of women who were taking an active part in the war effort which was, undeniably, a form of public service (Strachey 352-353). Asquith reluctantly acknowledged the validity of the argumentation in a speech in front of Parliament: “It is true,” he said, ‘(that women) cannot fight in the sense of going out with rifles and so forth, but [...] they have aided in the most effective way in the prosecution of the war. What is more – and this is a point which makes a special appeal to me – when the process of industrial reconstruction has to be set on foot, have not the women a special claim to be heard on the many questions which will arise directly affecting their interests? I say quite frankly that I cannot deny that claim” (Strachey 354).

This unexpected turn of opinion of even the most stalwart anti-suffragists was met with enthusiasm by both suffragists and suffragettes who were determined to make the most of the surge of the patriotic sentiments among politicians and continued to vigorously campaign for the inclusion of women in the new franchise law that was supposed to recognize the heroic contribution to the war effort. After two years of heated Parliamentary debates, various petitions and a change of government, on the 6th of February 1918, after going through both Houses of Parliament, The Representation of the People Bill received the Royal Assent and became the law of the land. Still, even though the moment marked the end of fifty years of fierce political struggle and the beginning of the process to turn the ideals of gender equality in public life into reality, the actual franchise bill failed to meet all the expectations of the organizations promoting female suffrage. Far from being democratic, the new law restricted the voting rights to women who were over the age of thirty and owned property, which, automatically, excluded a majority of young women who actively served in field hospitals and munitions factories and belied the claim which hailed the bill as the reward for women’s patriotic contributions. At the same time, all men over twenty one, regardless of whether they owned property or not, were given the franchise in a bid to even out the balance between the genders since the growing number of casualties among soldiers caused women to outnumber men by a significant margin. It was not until ten years later, when The Equal Franchise Act of 1928 was passed by Parliament on the 2nd of July that all British women were eventually granted the right to vote (Adams 223).

Meanwhile, in other English-speaking countries, such as the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand the advances in the campaigns in favour of female suffrage had been much swifter and fraught with considerably less drama. As a result, more inclusive franchises had been passed into law in practically all of them in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Adams 227). New Zealand, in particular, was not only the first, self-governing country in the world to have given all adult women voting rights in 1893 but was also entirely devoid of the aggression and violence associated with the actions of the British suffragettes. This early victory is especially striking in the light of the fact that New Zealand suffrage organizations drew direct inspiration from the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill's philosophy of equality and the leaders of the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union saw themselves as followers and, in a way descendants of British suffragists. Kate Sheppard wrote to Millicent Fawcett as early as April 1891 expressing admiration for the achievements of the NUWSS and asking for advice and moral support. "We watch with great interest," she wrote, "the progress of the work in England and feel we owe you, dear Madam, with others a great debt for the manner in which you have steered the question, if not into still waters, at least into a position where it is treated with respect. We shall be grateful for any advice as to work or to hear of any new literature, but do not wish to be troublesome" (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 55). A year after New Zealand passed the Electoral Bill, Sheppard came to Britain for an extended visit during which she took an active part in many events organized by leading feminists, including the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union biennial convention in London in June 1895 as New Zealand's delegate. Despite her efforts, and the involvement of other prominent New Zealand activists in the demonstrations organized by suffragettes, the success of the WCTU's served only as a morale booster for British suffragists and suffragettes as petitioning did little in the way of furthering their cause.

1.14 Summary and conclusions

As it has been demonstrated in this chapter, the origin of gender equality ideals that stood at the core of the activity of both, suffragist and suffragette societies can be traced back to the seventeenth century and the Levellers movement. The ideas initially introduced by the Enlightenment philosophers, predominantly in France and Britain, were gradually developed and expanded on by British thinkers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, William Thompson, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and John Stuart Mill over the course of two hundred years and resulted in the creation of the earliest political movements promoting female franchise. The British

suffrage organizations, those trying to achieve their aims through constitutional means and the ones resorting to violent acts, became a source of inspiration and, in many cases role-models, for women of various cultural backgrounds and nationalities.

The traces of inspiration provided by the British political organizations advocating the introduction of female franchise whether of suffragist or suffragette persuasion can be found in the writings of feminist leaders all over the world from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. This fact makes it even more striking that Britain fell behind New Zealand that managed to bring into legislation universal voting rights twenty five years earlier. What is more, the British Representation of the People Act was not an outstanding achievement as it “was part of a pattern of enfranchisement in nineteen nations, between 1915 and 1920, some of them very populous” (Adams 228). According to Jad Adams the main reason behind the prolonged futility of the British suffrage movement lies in the character of the country’s political system. “The conservatism and the rigid class divisions of British politics”, she claims, “meant suffrage could only be granted when democracy was wildly acceptable” (228). While the intricacies of the political systems, undeniably, played a significant part in the process of the recognition of female equality when it came to voting rights, the causes behind New Zealand’s early success are much more complex and include historical, sociological and economic elements which need to be explored and analysed in detail.

Chapter 2

A social and cultural history of New Zealand

The present chapter is devoted to a short discussion of various conditions which contributed to the shaping of a society which still held Victorian values in high esteem but proved to be ready to accept an attempt to introduce gender equality into its political system. New Zealand's democracy was the youngest one in the British Commonwealth, which gave it a certain flexibility, while the size and composition of its population meant that women were given an opportunity to play a more significant role in public life of the community. What is more, as the pioneers in New Zealand had to face the challenges of building up the entirety of social and economic structures of a new country, the exclusion of a large portion of adult inhabitants from the professions was not a viable option. First-generation New Zealand women, majority of whom were born and brought up within the sphere of influence of the ethos of "stiff upper lip", were not only determined to contribute to the society but had a firm conviction of a mission which, after New Zealand became a self-governing country in 1856, was channelled into attempts to forge an equilibrium between the genders. An additional source of inspiration for their campaign was provided by the example set by Maori cultural traditions which disregarded the importance of gender in the public sphere in favour of the prominence of an individual in tribal community, referred to as "mana". As historian Barbara Brookes notices: "Before the Europeans came, Maori lived in a society shaped by status, where descent from high-ranking ancestors determined ritual authority. Such mana, however, did not automatically apply to leadership, where personal qualities of authority and courage were important. [...] Concepts of mana derived from wisdom and skill and could cut across ideas about gender, and served to mould social life" (12).

The convergence of all these factors that came together in a few decades to create the unique social environment that made it possible for the activists of the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union to lead a swift and peaceful campaign that led to the introduction of the unique and universal female franchise in 1893. Immediately after the enfranchisement of women became a fact, opinions as to the reasons behind this development started to circulate. Both the supporters and the opponents of the female suffrage tried to find their explanations for the NZWCTU's success. For example, William Pember Reeves, a New Zealand politician and an amateur historian claims that women owed their victory to a lucky accident and the mistakes of the incompetent government. As a result, as he concludes "one fine morning of September

1893, the women of New Zealand woke up and found themselves enfranchised” (Adams 115). This kind of approach met with an outraged reaction on the part of Kate Sheppard who called Reeve’s claim “lamentable” and “utterly misleading’.” According to her, the success of Women’s Christian Temperance Union can be attributed to ‘a well-organized, hard-fought campaign that had a great deal of public support’ (Lovell-Smith, *The Woman Question* 55). Even though there was no consensus as to the exact nature and complexity of the causes behind the early introduction of the most egalitarian franchise in the contemporary world, Kate Sheppard recognized the uniqueness of New Zealand conditions when she wrote about the NZWCTU’s successful petition to Millicent Fawcett: “The fact that in England, women have not long ago won the suffrage,” she concluded, “is due largely to the prejudices that invariably cling to an old society, and also to the fact that the machinery is much more ponderous and more difficult to move than in a small country like ours, otherwise with so many advocates your battle for freedom would have been won years ago” (Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard* 126). The present chapter discusses the historical, social and cultural background that contributed to the unique character of the New Zealand franchise movement and helped New Zealand women become pioneers in the global history of suffrage.

2.1 The beginnings of European presence in New Zealand

When Abel Tasman, an explorer employed by the Dutch East India Company reached the north-west coast of the South Island on the 13th of December 1642, his crew became the first Europeans to sight New Zealand. They were also the first to have come into contact with the indigenous Maori tribes which, in this instance, ended with a violent encounter and deaths of four Dutch sailors (*Tasman’s Journal* 45). As the brief and violent altercation between Tasman’s crew and a local Maori tribe prevented Europeans from venturing on to New Zealand land, its effects did not leave any lasting impressions (King 102). The greatest impact that Abel Tasman exerted on the future of European contact with New Zealand was the depiction, albeit highly inaccurate, of the country’s west coast that would appear on the charts of the world after his voyage (King 99). Tasman also gave the new country the name of Staten Land, mistakenly believing it to be the most western part of Staten Land off the south-west coast of South America. The mistake was discovered the following year, when in late 1653, Hendrik Brouwer confirmed Staten Land to be an island. Following this discovery, an unknown cartographer employed at the Dutch East India Company renamed the land Tasman discovered “Nieuw Zeeland” or, in Latin, “Zelandia Nova”. The inspiration behind this choice was clearly the

desire to find a matching moniker for “Hollandia Nova” which, at the time, was the name for the western coast of Australia. The names were fitting as Holland and Zeeland were neighbouring Dutch maritime provinces which, in the eyes of the contemporary cartographers, resembled the location of Australia and New Zealand. It was under that name that the new country started to appear on the maps of the known world from the middle of the seventeenth century and over the next hundred and fifty years, became known as New Zealand, New Zeland before it was eventually spelled as New Zealand (King 100).

It was not until over hundred and twenty six years later, when James Cook, British explorer, navigator and cartographer arrived in the barque *Encounter* that the contacts between the two groups intensified and became more personal. Cook and his crew spent six months circumnavigating both New Zealand islands, meeting with various Maori tribes on numerous occasions, both during their visits on board of *Encounter* and in settlements ashore. What is more, thanks to the presence of a Tahitian guide and interpreter, the channels of communication between the English and the natives broadened and allowed for the mutual exchange of information and certain bridging of the cultural divide. According to historian Anne Salmond “not only did the Europeans have extensive opportunities to observe Maori life in different parts of the country, Maori people of various tribes had the first opportunity to examine Europeans at close quarters – to trade with them, to fight with them, to become infected with European diseases and to work out strategies for dealing with [them]” (68).

Altogether, Cook visited New Zealand four times, over the course of three voyages and spent almost a year off or on the coast of both islands, which had profound and far-reaching consequences for both, the Europeans and the Maoris. The data collected during Cook’s circumnavigation and mapping of New Zealand shoreline was precise and comprehensive and contributed greatly to the wealth of the eighteenth-century geographical knowledge. He succeeded in depicting both the size and the shape of the country with striking accuracy. Moreover, Cook managed to connect Maori culture with the culture of Tahitians and deduce correctly that they must have stemmed from a common source (King 105). Despite the controversy that has surrounded Cook’s journeys since the advent of the “fatal impact theory”¹ in mid-twentieth century, his relations with the Maori tribes were, predominantly, cordial and infused with mutual respect. Cook and naturalist Joseph Banks, who was part of the

¹ The theory according to which the eighteenth century contacts between Europeans and the peoples of the Pacific region had unequivocally disastrous consequences for the native societies and cultures. The main proponent of this view, Harrison Wright put forward a claim in his *New Zealand, 1769-1840: early years of western contact* (1959).

Endeavour's crew started a diligent process of collecting data on Maori language and culture and traditions of various tribes. The knowledge that they had amassed remained an invaluable and the most exhaustive source of information for scholars interested in the exploration of the indigenous culture of New Zealand and other islands of the Pacific region for the next two hundred years (King 104).

When it comes to the immediate consequences of European visits for Maori communities, it is important to note that not all can be labelled as detrimental to the functioning of Maori communities. Admittedly, the contacts between the tribes and the sailors led to some sexual encounters which resulted with the introduction of venereal diseases into a population that lacked immunity and means of treatment of this type of ailments. In addition, the British disrupted the balance between the tribes when they gave some of them access to firearms and gunpowder. On the other hand, the trade and exchange of knowledge and information between the two groups brought Maori benefits in various spheres of life. The craftsmanship and the building techniques used by Maori tribes became revolutionised by the usage of metals in the form of nails, chisels, gouges and fishhooks. A similar revolution happened in the area of farming as Englishmen left behind various root vegetables, which had been previously unknown in the Pacific region. Potatoes and turnips, in particular rapidly became staples in Maori diet and economy (King 105-106).

In the second half of the eighteenth century the land of Aotearoa² started its gradual transformation into a modern country and a part of the British Commonwealth. The three visits that Cook's crews paid to New Zealand between 1769-1774 marked the moment when Maori tribes began to be investigated by Europeans, which dispelled many of the myths that had surrounded their existence in what was the legendary land of Terra Australis Incognita. Moreover, the positive reports that Cook prepared about New Zealand's natural resources, especially its timber and flax, seals in the southwest and the quantity of whales in the seas surrounding the islands, sparked considerable interest in Britain. Still, due to the convergence of various factors, the Maori tribes managed to hold the control over their territories for another seventy years before the British started to set up permanent settlements in New Zealand.

² *Aotearoa* is the Maori name for the country of New Zealand. The literal translation of Aotearoa is "land of a long white cloud" (King 82)

2.2 Maori communities and their perception in Europe

James Cook's attitude towards Maori tribes was characterized by cordiality and openness which is quite striking when compared to other contemporary explorers. As Ann Salmond notices, it is obvious that Cook, just like his crew, was frequently taken aback by some of the particulars of Maoris' behaviour: "surprised by their sexuality, infuriated by their attitudes to property, and shocked by [...] cannibalism" (89). Still, despite of these traits, which were quite difficult to accept for the Europeans, Cook refused to perceive the local tribes as less than human as he realized that on both sides you could find "savagery and kindness, generosity and greed, intelligent curiosity and stupidity" (Salmond 91). Unfortunately, the expeditions that followed in Cook's footsteps in the remaining decades of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century were led by people who were not as open-minded as the British explorer. They were determined to make an effort to convert Maoris to Christianity and did not perceive them as people representing a diverse culture but as curios examples of savagery to be marvelled at and treated like a form of a trophy confirming the success of the conquest of new territories. It was predominantly due to attitudes of this type that the hostility between Maoris and Europeans began to gradually increase and led to altercations resulting in dozens, or even hundreds of casualties on both sides of the conflict. Over the next few decades, Maoris gained a reputation of fierce and indomitable warriors, whose unprovoked fits of murderous fury made them difficult to approach and, practically, impossible to negotiate with (see for example Craik 366-367 for such a description). Despite all the drawbacks caused by this one-dimensional and invidious image prevalent in a majority of the accounts, the deterring effect of Maoris' reputation may have contributed significantly to the fact that the tribes managed to retain the control over the land of both of New Zealand islands until 1840 (King 113-114)

2.2.1 The structure of Maori society

Even though the European explorers and commentators tended to depict Maori tribes as governed by rules based on the basest of instincts and therefore completely uncivilized, the actual structure of Maori communities was much more well-structured and complex. Maori, who were settlers themselves and originated from the region of Polynesia, arrived to the islands of New Zealand that they named Te-Ika-a-Maui (The Fish of Maui) and Te Waipounamu (The

Waters of Greenstone) sometime between 1250-1300 (Brookes 9). For the next several centuries Maoris functioned in isolation, which resulted in the development of a distinctive language, mythology, crafts and performing arts, different from other cultures from the Polynesian region.

First and foremost, Maoris developed their own mythology starting with the variety of creation stories which explained the ancestry of “tangata whenua” (people of the land)³ and their connection to the land and the gods they believed in. The line between humanity and divinity blurred in majority of these stories as they depicted the creation of the first human, a woman named Hineahuone who came into being after male god, Tane made her body out of clay and breathed life into her. “Hineahuone was shaped out of the soil of the Earth Mother who represented the receptive and passive element, while Tane, deliverer of the breath of life, represented the active, fertilizing, creative male element” (Brookes 10). From the start the balance between these two elements was pivotal for the foundations of Maori culture and society, starting with the language which was infused with the sense of importance of gender in all spheres of lives (Binney and Chaplin 26).

As Maoris considered the optimal coexistence of female and male qualities to be of utmost importance, they shaped the structure of their societies around the idea of communities bound together by ancestry. It was not the race nor personal talents or achievements that denoted identity and worth of an individual but the blood ties and familial connectedness. (King 77) Bloodlines and ancestry were so fundamental that, even though it was possible to join a tribe, usually through a marriage that brought a useful alliance, as “it was only the *descendants* of such a marriage who could be considered to have full membership of the tribe and the ability to pass such membership on to their descendants” (King 78). What is more, even the relationships within families had a much wider context than in European cultures as “matua (parent) and matua tane (father) and whaea (mother) were not terms denoting specific individuals but rather relatives of a particular generation. Similarly, tama (son) and tamahine (daughter) applied to relatives of the same generation” (Durie-Hall and Metge 81). That kind of application of the words describing the connections between members of family emphasised

³ The word ‘Māori’ is thought to be a post-European-contact term for the first inhabitants of New Zealand. It originally meant ordinary or local. Only after another race of people arrived in their country did the original inhabitants need a term to define themselves separately from the new arrivals. Māori also adapted the term ‘tangata whenua’ (people of the land), referring to local iwi or hapū, to define themselves as distinct from non-Māori. This also means ‘those who were here first’ and ‘host people’. It is still widely used among present-day Māori. (TeAra.govt.nz)

the communal character of Maori tribes and their belief in the ties extending beyond the bounds of immediate family.

That is not to say that Maori communities had a uniformly egalitarian character, as in each tribe there existed strict social differentiation which resembled closely the class divisions found in European societies. In the case of Maoris, the divisions were based on a belief that they shared with other Polynesian tribes, according to which people belonged either to the group of aristocrats (*rangatira*) or commoners (*tutua*). The status of an individual depended on the amount of *mana* (ancestral efficacy) that determined the level of power and authority over others. To a large extent, *mana* was inherited from ancestors, but it was also believed that the members of *rangatira* could increase its level by becoming exemplary members of their communities or distinguishing themselves by heroic or memorable deeds. The most remarkable *rangatira* could attain the status of *ariki* (leaders) who were characterized by *tapu* (personal “sacredness” or “untouchability”) and had a unique position among the tribes (King 79). When it comes to the internal structures of a tribe, apart from more intimate units of *hapu*, that usually consisted of members of immediate family and was frequently referred to as sub-tribe, there existed a wider organization of *iwu* (meaning “bones” or “people”) which encompassed relatives of numerous *hapu* not necessarily sharing the exactly same land or living conditions” (King 78). Additionally, there was a type of a federal designation called “*waka*”, which in the case of the Waikato *iwi* denoted their shared descent from the members of the crew that reached the shores of New Zealand in the *Tainui* canoe.⁴

All these complex elements that denoted the ancestry and placed an individual within the bounds of the structures of a community found their reflection in the art of “*Ta moko*” (ritual tattoo) that was another element unique in its elaborateness to Maori culture. Thus, despite of the uninformed opinions of infrequent European visitors, the reality of Maori communities was far from the chaos of implied by the savagery they were supposed to be stuck in. In fact, each and every member of a Maori was perfectly aware of their ancestry familial affiliation and the role they were supposed to play in the society from an early age and were devoted to upholding the values that their culture was built on. What is more, partially due to their isolation which

⁴ *Moko* was distinct from a traditional style of tattoo in that that, instead of being punctured with needles, skin was carved with special chisels, called “*uhi*” and, especially in pre-European contact period, it could be performed solely by the members of the “chosen” group (*tohunga ta moko*) and the ritual itself was supposed to be a *tapu* (sacred) practise. The design of each *moko* is unique to the wearer and conveys information about the wearer, such as their genealogy, tribal affiliations, status, and achievements (King 81).

enforced a limited contact with the representatives of other peoples, all Maoris were remarkably uniform when it comes to the way of life. (King 81)

Another aspect of Maori tradition that got skewed in the depictions by European travellers and scholars was connected with their perceived propensity for aggression and bloodthirstiness. It is true that Maoris were warriors who considered prowess on a battlefield to be one of the most distinguishing traits for a man to possess, however, all conflicts between the tribes, whether armed or not, were regulated by strict rules of “utu” – “often translated into English as ‘revenge’ but more properly meaning ‘reciprocity’ or ‘balanced exchange’” (King 81-82). Admittedly, the actual reality of everyday life of Maori tribes could be much messier than the system of utu would suggest and could incite conflicts that, to an outsider’s eye, may look like mindless violence. Nevertheless, all the evidence suggests that, before the arrival of the Europeans, when the tribes were in possession of only hand-to-hand weapons and did not gather and store large quantities of portable food or other goods, warfare was more incidental than a constant occurrence. Moreover, it was habitually waged solely during summer months and rarely resulted in more than a handful of casualties. The main incentive for armed conflicts was connected with disputes over the ownership of land which was perceived as one of the areas directly reflecting the level of individual and tribal mana. It is even possible to find incidents during which the mana superiority of a given tribe was established not by bloodshed but a more proficient performance of a version of the war dance, called haka. Overall, however, at the time when Europeans started to reach the islands of New Zealand, the way in which Maori tribes conducted warfare was, paradoxically, much less violent and more structured than the conflicts that kept sweeping over the European continent throughout the eighteenth century (King 138).

The entirety of elements that add up to create the mosaic of the pre-European Maori society and culture let us conclude that they lived in a highly civilized society that was misunderstood and hastily judged by the visitors who were startled by what was seen as exoticism of the rules governing the conduct of individuals and tribes. The complexity and the uniqueness of the structures that built up Maori society is also seen in its striking egalitarianism, as, despite the recognition of the inherently diverse character and roles of men and women in community, the gender discrimination was practically non-existent within the bounds of Maori tribes. The treatment of women was another trait of Maoris that Europeans found startling as it stood in direct opposition to their beliefs of social order, which placed its female members in the position of abject subjugation.

2.2.2 The position of women in Maori society

The role women played in Maori society was, to a large extent, shaped by the living conditions which they had to contend with on everyday basis. As Annie Mikaere comments in her article on the subject of gender roles in Maori tribes at different periods of their history:

The roles of men and women in traditional Maori society can be understood only in the context of the Maori world view, which acknowledged the natural order of the universe, the interrelationship or whanaungatanga of all living things to one another and to the environment, and the over-arching principle of balance. Both men and women were essential parts in the collective whole, both formed part of the whakapapa that linked Maori people back to the beginning of the world, and women in particular played a key role in linking the past with the present and the future. The very survival of the whole was absolutely dependent upon everyone who made it up, and therefore each and every person within the group had his or her own intrinsic value. They were all a part of the collective; it was therefore a collective responsibility to see that their respective roles were valued and protected. (32)

In the well-structured hierarchy of Maori society, where descent from high-ranking ancestors was the main factor that gave individuals authorities over others, both men and women could pursue the path aimed at proving that their mana levels placed them among the ranks of rangatira. Even though, as anthropologists such as Maharaia Winiata note, the Maori leaders were predominantly male and, in majority of regions it was male and not female primogeniture that gave precedence when it came to leadership, “both sexes could inherit rangatira status, mana and tapu from male *and* female antecedents, and among some tribes, such as those on the East Coast of the North Island, women were visible among the front ranks as tribal and community leaders and spokespersons. Exceptional women took such roles in other rohe, such as those of Ngapuhi and Tainui” (King 87). Consequently, in contrast to European patriarchal societies, ambition and initiative were highly valued in women. The oral tradition of Maori tribes, passed down from generation to generation and recorded later by scholars, is full of stories about women of great spirit, independence and strong will whose deeds made a significance difference to entire communities. (Brookes 12)

What is also significant, Maori language has never emphasized any supremacy of either of the sexes as both the personal pronouns (ia) and possessive personal pronouns (tana/tona) are gender-neutral. It is also possible to find examples of the acknowledgment of the indispensability of full potential of women for the balance and the well-being of the whole community in the idioms and proverbs used by majority of the tribes. For example, as Rose Pere has argued a popular saying “He wahine, he whenua, e ngaro ai te tangata” which is most

commonly translated as meaning ‘by women and land men are lost’ has, in fact “a more prominent, positive interpretation as it underlines the nourishing and essential roles of both the Maori women and the land for the community” (17-18). This theory is reinforced by the fact that in Maori mythology, the earth and, therefore, the soil that sustained the tribes and the ancestress of all the Maori, was personified as a woman named Papatuanuka. It was also her that played an instrumental role in the creation of the first woman, Hineahuone, as she instructed her son, Tanemahuta, where to find the female element and how to combine it with his breath in order to create humanity (Pere 20).

Still, women’s tapu (sacredness) was, predominantly connected with the fact that, as givers of life, they were considered to provide “the channel between the realm of the divine forces and the human realm” (Binney and Chaplin 26). Therefore, in a world where the competition between tribes for territory and resources was considered to be of dominant prominence in the life of communities, women of marriageable age could help to prevent bloodshed and loss of mana. The alliances created through marriages frequently improved the political dynamics between neighbouring groups and offered a way of strengthening and forging ties between various hapu or even iwi. That meant that the highest ranking women, known as puhi, were given special protection and privileges, but were, simultaneously, placed under various restrictions which did not apply to women of lesser importance. According to anthropologist, Joan Metge, “if a rangatira girl was betrothed in infancy (taumau), or she was a daughter of a chief, she was placed under tapu and expected to remain a virgin” (25). Additionally, when a woman married outside of her own hapu, she was given the “authority to dispense hospitality to travellers on her own initiative” (Firth 124) This right had a fundamental importance as ‘bountiful hospitality created indebtedness and was an important contribution to the mana of the group’ (Brookes 14).

As long as they were not reduced to the status of a slave, women born outside rangatira social class, could also, on average, enjoy more personal freedom than their European counterparts. First of all, virginity was not a paramount factor in determining the reputation of an individual. To the contrary, in many of Maori tribes, both young men and women were actually expected to have some experience in relationships before settling down with a permanent partner. Moreover, unlike in many other cultures, it was quite common to allow members of a tribe to choose whom they wanted to marry and there existed mechanisms which ensured this freedom. “If it was unclear whether elders would accept the preferred partnership, couples could seal their relationship by being found sleeping late together – a public declaration

which might result in the woman's family descending upon the man's for muru (plunder). Muru, in effect, sanctioned the marriage by compensating the losers" (Metge 26).

It is important to remember, however, that there were also certain taboos in Maori tradition. According to anthropologist Berys Hauer some types of marriages were practically not allowed: "those between first and second cousins, and between a chiefly woman and a low-born man. Chiefly men might take more than one wife, but the wife of highest rank took precedence, as did her children. Women captured in warfare might become slave-wives" (19). The violence against women and children outside the time of warfare was also strictly prohibited and carried the threat of severe punishment. Moreover, the reaction of a tribe was usually decisive and swift. The community intervened to prevent and punish violence against one's partner in a very straightforward way" (Milroy 12). In the case of abuse of a married woman by her husband, divorce was not only permissible but a relatively straightforward procedure, which did not carry a stigma for the woman involved. The issues concerning custody and support of children were also decided by the community and neither of parents were considered to possess an unquestioned right to be the primary caregiver.

Similarly, land ownership did not rest solely in the hands of male members of Maori tribes because, according to tradition the rights to it could be passed down through the female line and did not transfer to a woman's husband upon their marriage. As Angela Ballara notices: "if women were given use-rights on marriage, those remained their sole property – they did not become the property of their husbands. Any decisions regarding such property remained the woman's, and hers alone" (134). The same rule applied to the possession of other valuable items such as, for example, stone patu, or pounders for beating flax fibre, which were considered to be among the most prized family heirlooms handed down from mother to daughter. In general, the equality of ownership in Maori culture was quite striking as it reinforced women's independence and gave them more freedom to be active in the society (Ballara 136).

Overall, the cultural and social situation of Maori women stood in sharp contrast to the restrictive and discriminating rules of the patriarchy which pervaded European societies. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the rules according to which they lived met with total lack of understanding and even shock on the part of Pakeha (white) settlers who started to arrive to New Zealand in greater numbers around the middle of the nineteenth century (Brookes 15).

2.2.3 The Pakeha settlers and their influence on Maori communities

Despite the Maori tribes' fierce reputation which deterred European explorers from setting up permanent settlements on New Zealand islands in the second half of the eighteenth century, over the next few decades it gradually became clear that their isolation could not last. There were several factors that contributed to the increase of contacts between the cultures and, led to continuous presence of white colonists who, eventually, took control over the land. For one thing, Europeans moved much closer to the shores of New Zealand once the British government decided to set up penal colonies in Australia. Over the period of little more than a decade, three main camps for convicts, referred to as factories, were established at Port Jackson – soon to be known as Sydney (1788), on Norfolk Island (1789) and at Hobart (1803) (King 116).

Still, what was even more significant, the growing needs of newly industrial Victorian society meant that the new sources of natural resources were in high demand. New Zealand was rich in commodities such as timber and flax and was home to large flocks of seals that could provide quantities of quality oil and fur, a fashionable material for top-hats preferred by British gentlemen. For these reasons, as early as 1788, the British government issued instructions to New South Wales Governor Arthur Philips according to which he was supposed to take immediate steps to secure access to New Zealand timber and flax. However, as Philips had a limited number of naval vessels at his disposal and the situation at new penal colonies was turbulent and required his full attention, the conquest of New Zealand territories had to be postponed (King 145).

That is not to say that there were no Europeans living in New Zealand in the late eighteenth century. According to Michael King, men who chose to lead their lives among Maori tribes were, predominantly: “seamen who jumped ship from vessels out of Sydney in order to escape from despotic captains, leaky ships or lives which had been characterized up to that point by crime or misfortune (most appear to have been undischarged convicts on the run)” (116). They cannot be considered as the forerunners of the influx of European civilization, however, as most of them joined Maori communities. (King 117) In return, the tribal communities gained knowledge about European methods of farming, hunting and animal husbandry which improved the living conditions of individual tribes. On top of that, Pakeha Maori could serve as interpreters and negotiators in the increasingly frequent contacts that Maori had with explorers, potential traders and missionaries that came over to New Zealand in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The second group of Europeans that started to settle on semi-permanent basis in New Zealand were the people inspired by James Cook's reports on the abundance of seals on the southwest coast of the South Island. Unlike Pakeha Maoris, initially, sealers did not mix with the local tribes but set up their own settlements. In the Dusky Sound they collected around 4500 seal skins in 1792 and went back to Australia the following year. Other teams followed in 1793, 1795, 1801 and 1803 and other areas around Foveaux Strait and Stewart Islands saw dozens more between 1803 and 1810 (King 178). The main reasons behind the transitory presence of the majority of sealers on the South Island in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century were connected with primitive and difficult living conditions they had to contend with, combined with the lack of integration the local tribes which, at times, turned into outright hostility and armed conflicts (King 118-119).

However, as the result of the indiscriminate exploitation of the seal population over a relatively short period of time at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the profitability of the industry became questionable and many of the gangs of sealers found themselves abandoned by their Australia-based employers. Some of them, decided to stay in New Zealand, predominantly settling down among or in the proximity of Ngai Tahu communities in the south of the country and earning their living through raising pigs and growing vegetables (King 120). Sealers were followed by whalers who established settlements on the east coast of both main islands, around Cook and Foveaux Straits, and on the Chatham Islands from the late 1820s. The stations they lived in were usually situated near Maori villages, in some cases, tribes actually chose to move closer to the whalers. The reason for this proximity was connected with the economic needs of both sides as in the whale hunting seasons whalers needed the help of the local Maori men who, in turn, valued the additional revenue that could be used for the benefit of communities. (King 122).

Over the course of time, the two communities started to forge relationships that extended to private sphere of life as white European whalers married Maori women founding some of "the most prominent Maori families of the future – the Braggs, Solomons, Barretts, Loves, Keenans, McClutchies, Halberts, Manuels, and many others" (King 123). It is equally important to remember that, even though these mixed communities took advantages of the introduction of European style tools and clothing, new varieties of domestic plants and animals as well as other additions to the traditional Maori way of life, their culture remained deeply rooted in the local values and did not significantly transform the reality of the early nineteenth century New Zealand. (King 123)

Regrettably, the last major group of early European settlers in the second and third decade of the nineteenth century did not appreciate Maori way of life and did not even make an attempt at integration with local communities. In fact, Christian missionaries started to arrive in New Zealand with an explicit intention of bringing and instilling Victorian values in the furthest corners of the British Empire's sphere of influence. Another aspect in which they differed significantly from the communities of whalers was the fact that, despite the harsh conditions facing the potential settlers, it was whole families that were inspired to reach the shores of New Zealand. They were ready to brave the lack of even most basic amenities, medical care and help of wider communities in the name of what they perceived to be their "civilizing mission" (Middleton 57-58).

Despite the fact that the first European women constituted a very small group and were faced with various dangers which significantly lowered their life expectancy they played an important role in the civilizing mission that was supposed to shape New Zealand into an outpost of Victorian values. Predominantly, they were expected to share their knowledge with local women and "exhibit to the Natives the instructive example of a happy Christian family" (Goldsbury 73). The position of the members of the Church Missionary Society CMS on the importance of female influence was clear: "The native character," wrote a missionary, T.S. Grace, "requires all that we can give it of the softening and refining influence of the educated Christian woman. The women of this race must be raised, or the Maori will continue to inhabit his whare, with no bed but the cold earth; no door but one that he must enter on his hands and knees" (Brighton, Charles and Grace 14). The precedent for this kind of role model behaviour was established early on with the example of Hannah King who did not solely tend to the needs of her own family but also, from the outset of the mission, "took in young Maori women, teaching them sewing, housework, reading and writing, the catechism and the Lord's Prayer. Outside the household, she tended to the sick, dressing wounds and giving out medicines" (Middleton 114).

Still, the task that the missionary women had set out for them was far from easy as even the most basic concepts that they identified with were seen as challenging for the Maori culture. As Barbara Brookes notes:

European women's identification with the private space of the home was an alien concept in Maori society, where sleeping was communal, and cooking was performed in separate cooking sheds, or *kauta*, away from the *tapu* interior of their dwellings. Food preparation was the work of low-born women or slaves, and the structure and layout of Maori dwellings reflected the hierarchies within and across genders. Cultural meanings were challenged by the European custom of preparing food indoors" (23).

As evidence suggests it was Maori women who were particularly difficult to convince when it came to the expansion or alteration of traditional rules and habits while men especially “single men living in conditions similar to single Pakeha male settlers” were much more amendable and willing to defy various, especially domestic customs (Martin 115).

The discrepancy between the cultural expectations of the Maori and Europeans was evident to see even in the situations when a missionary acted motivated by what they understood to be chivalry towards the fairer sex. For example, Mary Ann Martin, wife of William Martin (who served as the first Chief Justice of New Zealand from 1841 to 1857) recalls in her diary a situation when a local tribe tasked with a delivery of large amount of firewood sent a group of women to carry it up a steep hill to the Martins’ house. Mary Martin relates her husband reaction who ‘insisted that no woman should do this’ and tried to forbid them from continuing. His intervention met with Maoris’ outrage as they resented this “infringement on the on the liberty of the subject, and it was the women in the group, in particular, that were infuriated with the loss of a job which, for them, had been an important “perquisite” (12).

Other areas of cultural and social mentality were even more contentious and, therefore constituted a constant source or misunderstandings and, occasionally, conflicts between the European missionaries and the Maori tribes. The perception of sexuality and, by extension, the rules of morality was one of such spheres which emphasized fundamental differences between the two groups. For missionaries, the ubiquitousness of sexual references in Maori art and language was a clear example of “the depravity of mankind” (Hobbs 50) among other things, they were scandalized by carvings on storehouses that depicted sex acts and genitals as well as the unashamed nakedness that was a common sight in Maori settlements. Moreover, the sexual freedom that allowed young Maori men and women to choose various partners without jeopardizing their reputation among the members of community was also shocking for the European settlers. The missionaries disapproved strongly especially of young Maori girls who readily enjoyed sexual encounters with sailors, traders and whalers who frequented the territories of both islands (Andrews 9). That is why “the uncensored sexual freedom previously exercised by young Maori women became labelled as prostitution, and thus sinful and depraved” (Brookes 42). As, apart from being deemed immoral, young Maori women were in danger of contracting venereal diseases or picking up coarse language and vulgar habits from sailors and traders, the missionaries embarked on an organized campaign designed to convince Maori men to adopt the “patterns of authority and deference that structured European families” and assume control over their women (Brookes 46).

It was in order to achieve this aim that missionaries strove to promote the institution of Christian marriage among Maoris. Even though Maoris had similar patterns when it came to relationships among adults, which despite certain tribal variations were usually formally sanctioned and obligated people of lower orders to remain faithful and monogamous, the marriages between the members of Maori communities lacked the bonds of dependency that characterized patriarchal families. Another element that complicated the introduction of the Christian-style marriages was connected with the fact that “polygamy was an important practise among the rangatira men which carried significant implications of both, social and economic nature” (Biggs 57). For the missionaries, however, this kind of arrangement was absolutely unacceptable and they demanded from the chiefs that they chose one of their wives to live with and sent all the others away. On their part, Maori men faced with such demands were baffled and frequently refused to act as assertively as was expected of them (Porter 493).

Despite the fact that Maoris were considered to be fierce and savage, it is an undeniable fact that their relationships were based on genuine affection to much greater degree than the patriarchal-style marriages prevalent in the Victorian society. The only thing the Christian missionaries trying to convert the local tribes were concerned with were the strict rules which determined the shape of marital unions. That meant that they could not have cared less about the fate of the wives who, for all intents and purposes, would have to be abandoned to fare for themselves in order to satisfy the requirements of monogamous Christian civilization. Maori chiefs, who chose their wives based not solely on their status or suitability, but on mutual attraction and felt they had obligation towards all of their partners were markedly reluctant to obey the teachings of the new religion.

What is more, other points of the doctrine, like, for example, the issue of afterlife, exacerbated these dilemmas even further as one Maori man asked of a missionary: “What was to become of the many wives a man has in this world after they have born him children as he did not wish to be separated from his relatives at the day of Judgement” (Howe 35). Maori women were equally devoted and emotional about their husbands which frequently met with criticism of the missionaries. “When the bereaved widow of a chief tried to kill herself, a missionary remonstrated and stated that a white woman would not do such a thing” (Brookes 42). According to Owens, another chief, Te Puhī, responded to this saying, “[Y]ou white people have no love” (73).

Still, despite all the controversy that the introduction of monogamy caused among the Maori tribes, it is possible to notice a gradual increase of popularity of Christian marriage among Maori tribes over the course of the first two decades of the nineteenth century. However,

it was not the religious or ideological aspects of the institution of marriage that inspired the locals to participate but all the trappings of celebration that accompanied the ceremony itself. Frequently, examples of missionary weddings sparked reactions of the Maoris whose marriages usually did occur without any ceremony or formal rites with the exception of the highest ranking chiefs (Keene 55). The scale of sudden enthusiasm to participate in the formalities of the marriage ceremony was so great that it could lead up to forty couples being married at a time; in one instance, treasured brass curtain rings from the mission household were donated to provide wedding rings (Fry 37). As Barbara Brookes notices: "Participation in the ritual of the ritual of wedding did not, however, always translate into an acceptance of the lifelong commitment the missionaries hoped for" (49). In fact, the rules that the institution of Christian marriage tried to impose on the Maoris and which they found quite incomprehensible made them treat the actual commitment as less binding than the traditional tribal relationships.

Another aspect of family life that European missionaries and the Maori tribes did not see eye to eye was the attitude towards children. In patriarchal families, children were supposed to be obedient and subordinate to their parents in a similar way women were subjugated in the relationships with men. The accepted system of punishment that was the norm in Victorian society met with shock and abhorrence of Maoris used to treating their offspring with gentleness (Owens). Missionaries noted the great affection bestowed on native children but, at the same time, criticized the way Maori brought them up (Biggs 74).

Overall, however, it is possible to state that unlike in the case of individual Pakeha Maoris and the groups of sealers and whalers, the missionary families managed to set a certain social model for the Maori tribes, which changed the way they saw themselves as well as their aspirations and perception of luxury (Brookes 37, Taylor 71). At the same time, the members of the CMS church as well as missionaries associated with other religious societies felt responsible for the moral well-being of the tribes they lived among. They worked hard to try to convince Maori tribes to convert to Christianity, focusing on the chiefs who could influence the rest of the communities directly. The wives of the missionaries made a concerted effort to introduce cleanliness, European clothing and work ethic to Maori women in the hope of "civilizing" them and direct them to the path of Christian salvation. The main obstacle that they came across was connected with deeply-ingrained sense of personal freedom and the reluctance to bend to outside authority (Rountree 59).

Another aspect of interactions with Maoris that made it extremely challenging for the missionaries to convince them to adopt the Christian way of life was the fact that the European sailors and traders who visited New Zealand offered the tribes a much more appealing and

easier way of taking part in the novelties of the “civilized”. Not only did they bring silver and other metals, previously unknown on the New Zealand islands, but also muskets and gunpowder which transformed the way the tribes waged war against each other. What is more, as the goods that the European traders brought with them to New Zealand were relatively affordable and their acquisition did not require Maoris to make any commitments to a new system of values, the influence of the visitors grew quickly and became a serious alternative to the “civilizing mission” of the CMS and other Christian associations. The missionaries were also seriously concerned about the unrest and chaos brought about by the musket wars and the additional competition of the French Catholic Church mission set up by Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pompallier in the northern Hokianga in 1838 (King 146-147, 145).

It is clear that by the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century the members of CMS and other Protestant churches started to feel threatened and overwhelmed both when it came to the success of their mission of introducing Christianity to the Maori tribes, as well as the day to day safety of rapidly growing European settlements on the New Zealand islands. It was also during this period that the appeals for a more permanent and formalized relationship with Britain began. Up till this point, the British government held little interest in the relatively small islands in the furthest corner of the known world as investment of resources in an effort of taking control over these territories was considered to be wasteful. This was the main reason why the Colonial Office employed what could be described as the politics of minimum intervention when it came to the affairs of New Zealand (Smith 39). Gradually, however, the volume of requests from the British missionaries as well as the local Maori chiefs started to be noticed and acknowledged by the British Government and eventually led to the appointment of the New South Wales viticulturist James Busby as the first British Resident in New Zealand in late 1832. He was supposed to represent British law and order and stand in protection of Britain’s diplomatic interests (King 267).

James Busby arrived in the Bay of Islands in May of 1833 and was welcomed with great deal of ceremony by Maori tribes and the missionaries alike. The celebrations included seven-gun salute and hakari, a feast Maori organize for their most venerable guests. Busby also came bearing gifts of blankets and tobacco for all the twenty two Maori chief in attendance and took advantage of this unprecedented occasion to “create an impression that his appointment was akin to a diplomatic posting and that he was the personal representative of the authority of the King” (King 152). Even though Busby’s claims and posturing were exaggerated, his arrival marks the moment which began of a new phase of planned colonization in New Zealand history.

2.2.4 The Treaty of Waitangi (1840) and the colonization of New Zealand

James Busby was an ambitious man, genuinely interested in the plight of local tribes and the adversities facing the settlements of British missionaries. However, as at the time of his arrival to New Zealand the British government still perceived his appointment as a purely symbolic gesture he was not given any formal power or tools of enforcing his authority. His instructions consisted of vague duties including the protection of “well disposed” settlers and traders, guarding against the exploitation of Maori tribes by Europeans and recapturing convicts escaped from the penal colonies of Australia. The local tribes realized very quickly that Busby has no support in his job of “maintenance of tranquillity” and began to refer to him as “the watch-dog without teeth” or ‘Man o’War without guns” (King 153).

Despite his limited means however, as the first British Resident in New Zealand, Busby felt obligated to try to convince Maori chiefs to adopt a system of government modelled on the European standards. At the same time, convinced as he was of the unquestionable superiority of British law and order, he failed to recognize the fact that Maoris were not likely to respond well to what they perceived as forceful attempts at changing their well-established traditions. This discrepancy in worldviews and expectations led to misunderstandings and contrived situations which did not advance the cause of strengthening the ties between Britain and native New Zealanders (King 153-154). Undeterred by the questionable outcome of his initial efforts, Busby continued to introduce initiatives aimed at shaping Maori community and their system of governance to resemble British society as closely as possible. In 1835, a year after the procedure which resulted in the selection of the very first New Zealand flag design, Busby felt compelled to act again, when a French adventurer Charles de Thierry came forward with a plan to establish an independent state in the Hokianga. In order to prevent this initiative from becoming a reality, Busby prepared a document entitled “A Declaration of the Independence of New Zealand” by a “Confederation of United Tribes” which boldly proclaimed the supremacy of tribal governance over the entirety of New Zealand territory (archives.govt.nz). The value and significance of this document is controversial as it was written by James Busby and translated into Maori by the missionary Henry Williams without any input from the Maori community and signed by Maori chief in exchange for another cauldron of cold porridge during a farcical ceremony. The British government was equally sceptical; one of the officials working at the time at the Foreign Office in London referred to the Declaration as ‘silly and unauthorised’. However, as Michael King notices, with time “declaration became a foundation

for the assertion of indigenous rights, and it *was* another step in the direction of a formal constitutional relationship with Great Britain” (155).

Busby wanted to become a representative of the British government in more than just a name; he needed support and resources in order to wield genuine power when it came to Maori tribes and realize the idea of bringing the territories of New Zealand within the sphere of influence of the British Empire. In order to achieve this goal he repeatedly appealed to the Colonial Office trying to convince the officials that a swift governmental intervention in New Zealand was an absolute necessity and had to happen as a matter of urgency. Finally, as his dispatches with their projects of complicated schemes of British government in New Zealand (ones that would enhance Busby’s own role) went largely ignored, in June 1837 Busby decided to send an alarmist report according to which the anarchy on the New Zealand islands reached such devastating levels that whole districts of the territory were becoming permanently depopulated which left the country of becoming “destitute of a single aboriginal inhabitant” (Adams 88-9; Rice 41-2).

At the same time, the public opinion back in Britain was gradually getting introduced to the idea of planned settlement and colonisation of Australia and New Zealand islands. The popularity of the notion got an enormous boost from the pen of Edward Gibbon Wakefield (Martin 20) Wakefield came up with a detailed project of the logistics behind what he believed to be the most efficient system of colonization that the British government should employ in Australasia and published it in 1829, in his *Letter from Sydney, together with an Outline of a System of Colonization*. At the cornerstone of his theory lay the idea that Britain should send groups of settlers consisting, predominantly of young, married couples, as it would, simultaneously solve three major problems connected with the endeavour. First of all, Britain could be relieved of surplus population that it was increasingly struggling to support. What is more, young families would ensure stability and rapid development of the colony and, finally, “a balance of the sexes would stem the tide of prostitution – a natural consequence, he believed of men’s aggressive sexuality” (Brookes 47, Daziel 29).

Unexpectedly, Wakefield’s ideas gained rapid popularity as he depicted the islands to be “the fittest in the world for colonisation [...] the most beautiful country with the finest climate, and the most productive soil” (Love 4). As a result new enterprise, New Zealand Company was created in 1830 with an express aim of colonizing the new land. In May 1839, they hurriedly equipped and dispatched a ship called *Tory* to New Zealand; led by Edward Wakefield’s brother William, the expedition’s purpose was to buy and prepare land for the future Company’s settlers (Adams 49). The fact that the plans for privately sponsored

colonization were taking shape pushed the British government into action trying to “pre-empt the sale of land in New Zealand, thus removing the possibility of profit for the company” (Rice 50). Thus, after years of relative inactivity, the British government, took immediate steps to secure New Zealand to become a formal part of the British Empire. In August 1839, a naval officer Captain Hobson was sent to New Zealand with the task of establishing a British colony on the islands in a formal and constitutional way (King 156). William Hobson travelled to Sydney first where he was officially sworn in as Lieutenant-Governor, under the authority of the Government of New South Wales. Additionally, Hobson hastily recruited a crew of men to create the core of the future civil service (King 156). The whole group proceeded on to New Zealand and arrived in the Bay of Islands on the 29th of January 1840. From the start, Hobson felt under pressure to act quickly and rushed into preparing and signing one of the most important and symbolic documents in New Zealand history.

To this day, the text Treaty of Waitangi remains controversial and heavily criticized piece of legislation, as its legal inconsistencies and the lack of input from the Maori community to its content became the root causes of the future armed conflict between the British settlers and the indigenous tribes. According to the “fatal impact” perspective the Treaty of Waitangi also marks the beginning of the downfall of Maori civilization and culture as it disturbed the fragile balance between them and the newcomers (King 156-7). The fundamental problems with the Treaty of Waitangi started with its structure and authorship. The officials and lawyers of the Colonial Office had not prepared any template or even a draft for Hobson so he was forced to piece together the text of the treaty by himself, with the help of his secretary, James Freeman, and British Resident James Busby. Once the text was ready, Hobson realized that even the literate among Maoris would, in all probability, have problems with understanding the full meaning of its articles, so he got missionary Henry Williams and his son Edward to translate the English text into Maori. It was impossible for the authors of the treaty to avoid inconsistencies and discrepancies between the English and Maori versions. According to Geoffrey W. Rice there is still no consensus as to the definitive legal repercussions of the articles due to the linguistic, semantic and cultural differences between the British and the Maoris (51-2).

The presentation of the contents of the treaty to the Maori chiefs gathered at Waitangi on the 5th of February. (King 158, 161 Rice 51) The first group of forty five chiefs signed the Treaty the following day, on the 6th of February; those who could write with their names and the illiterate ones, as had become customary during such occasions with part of their facial moko patterns. As it was impossible for all the tribe leaders to be present at the ceremony

organized by Busby, subsequent signings took place at Waimate North and the Hokianga in the second half of February followed by over fifty other locations in the North and South Islands over the course of almost a year. Despite the fact that some of the chiefs refused to sign and many of the female Maori leaders were denied the right to do so⁵ William Hobson did not wait for the signing to be complete and proclaimed British sovereignty over the whole country on the 21st of May 1840, making New Zealand a dependency of New South Wales before its own charter was introduced the following year, giving New Zealand rights as a separate colony. The declaration received royal approval and was published in the *London Gazette* which officially legitimized the incorporation of New Zealand islands into the structure of the British Empire (King 160).

The creation, signing and introduction of the Treaty of Waitangi was a rushed and haphazard affair which, despite fulfilling the formal requirements of internationally recognized constitutional procedures, resulted in creation of controversy which initiated a debate that has been going on ever since (King 164). Especially from the contemporary perspective, the intentions of both William Hobson and the missionaries can be perceived as questionable and deliberately detrimental to the interests of the Maori tribes. However, it is important to remember that “in the mid-nineteen Britain did not make equal treaties with native races, no matter how intelligent or industrious. The Treaty of Waitangi was the best the Maori of the time could have hoped for, a constitutional device that promised, albeit ambiguously, some protection of their heritage, whilst making them, without understanding of their obligations, subjects of the Queen” (Barber 44). When read closely, the articles of the Treaty reveal unprecedented attempt at the preservation of more rights of the native population than in any other country where British colonies were established. Therefore, it put more obligations on the British government officials both in London and in New Zealand settlements and established a specific type of dynamics between Europeans and Maoris (Sinclair 74, 76). The introduction of the Treaty of Waitangi, chaotic and faulty as it was, marked the beginning of a new period in the relations between British settlers and the native Maori population.

⁵ One of the most notorious cases includes Major Thomas Bunbury’s refusal to allow the daughter of Te Pehi, a high-ranking Ngati Toa woman, to sign the Treaty. Her anger was shared by other women at Kapiti, who “expressed some disapprobation in not having a more prominent part in the Treaty with Her Majesty”.

2.3 Forging the New Zealand nation: from the first European settlements to the 1853 Constitution

The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, despite the intentions and hopes of its authors, did not immediately resolve the problems and tensions between the two groups. To the contrary, during the initial period following the signing of the document, it is possible to notice an increase in the level of acrimony and the intensity of conflicts. It came as no surprise that, similarly to other colonies within the bounds of the British Empire, New Zealand had to adjust to the new system of government and overcome numerous logistical problems before a workable status quo could be established (Sinclair 74-5).

An aspect which complicated the introduction of the provisions envisioned in the Treaty was connected with the fact that some of the most prominent Maori chiefs refused to sign the document and a majority of the female tribe leaders were not even invited to participate in the ceremony. This became the group that constituted the core of the resistance against the spreading of European acquisition of New Zealand land (Barber 45). This kind of unshakable stance on the native population's rights were certain to incense the British settlers and provoke hostile reactions. In fact, the contentious issue of land ownership and the problem of priority of purchase turned out to be the most important among the causes that eventually led to a series of armed conflicts that became known as New Zealand or Maori Wars and lasted for over three decades.

It is equally important to remember that the solutions to the land distribution problems introduced in the Treaty were controversial not only for the representatives of the Maori tribes but European settlers as well. The especially contested aspect of the new law was connected with the priority that the British Crown received when it came to buying land from the Maoris. Envisaged as one of the ways of protecting the natives from the avarice of the settlers, the regulation evoked dissatisfaction among all the groups that were involved in the transactions (Sinclair 77). Due to the pressure exerted by both the settlers and some of the Maoris, William Hobson's successor, Robert FitzRoy, started to gradually relax the constraints imposed on New Zealanders by the articles. He decided to waive the Crown's right of pre-emption and allowed the individuals to purchase land directly from the Maoris if they paid a tax of to the government (King 165).

The formal incorporation of New Zealand islands into the British Empire's dominion, followed by the relaxation of the rules pertaining to land purchase resulted in a rapid increase in the numbers of European settlers over a relatively short period of time. In 1830, there were

only three hundred Pakeha living permanently in New Zealand. Most of them did not come directly from Europe, but transferred from Australia (King 169). With the arrival of British and French missionaries, the white population increased to the level of around two thousand around the time of signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. However, with the influx of British settlers after the introduction of the Treaty, Maori tribes started to lose their dominance when it came to the size of population. By 1858, Pakeha settlers outnumbered them by approximately three thousand: fifty nine thousand to fifty six thousand. Finally, by 1881, the European population reached around half a million, which meant that Maoris found themselves at distinct disadvantage in their own country (King 166, 169-70). That is not to say that European settlers constituted a uniform group united in their goals and aspirations. In fact, the bulk of the immigration to New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth-century was a result of the projects sponsored by private-enterprise immigration companies. (King 172, Sinclair 78).

The so-called Northern War, fought in the Bay of Islands in 1845-46 changed not only the dynamics of the interaction between the natives and the European settlers but resulted in serious changes in the policy of land distribution. Once the fighting with the northern tribes ended, Governor George Grey, in order to regain control over the way the land was sold and purchased in New Zealand, Grey restored the Crown monopoly of purchasing Maori land, which was maintained until 1862, despite the opposition of speculators (King 199). Thanks to his schemes, thirty million acres were acquired peacefully from the South Island Maoris as well as around three million acres in the North Island.

As Governor and later Governor-in-Chief, Sir George Grey played a pivotal role in the transformation of the system of government that took place in New Zealand between 1846 and 1853 and resulted in the decisive move towards self-government. In the initial, Crown colony period (1841-53) the executive power lay in the hands of the successive Governors and their Executive Councils. The councils consisted of the Governor himself, the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney-General and the Colonial Treasurer, in that exact order of seniority. When joined by three justices of the peace appointed by the Governor, the members of the Executive Council also assumed the duties of the law-making Legislative Council. This kind of constitutional arrangement was, from the start, extremely unpopular with the European settlers. The demands of the settlers reached the ear of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Henry George Grey in London. Earl Grey managed to convince the British government to prepare a project of a complex, three-tiered – municipal, provincial and national – system of self-government in New Zealand. In 1846, he sent Governor Grey a detailed document of a new constitution which regulated the all the avenues of the democratic network which would allow all the inhabitants

(at least when it comes to European settlers) to participate in the process of governance. Eventually, most of Grey's ideas were accepted by the British Government and incorporated in the New Zealand Constitution Act 1852 which was passed by the British Parliament and brought into operation between 1853 and 1854. The new constitution divided the country into six provinces: Auckland, New Plymouth, Wellington, Nelson, Canterbury and Otago governed by separate elected provincial council of not less than nine members and led by a superintendent chosen by council members. Above the jurisdiction of the provincial councils there were two chambers of the Parliament consisting of an elected House of Representatives of 24 to 42 members, and an appointed Legislative Council of at least ten officials. After passing through both Houses, each legislation on national level was supposed to be signed off by an Executive Council consisting of the Governor, and, eventually, a ministry chosen by the House of Representatives. Eventually, the leading minister would become to be called Premier, and later, from 1902, Prime Minister (King 201).

Significant, and unique for the British colonial systems of governance, was the fact that, according to the new constitution, the voting rights to both the provincial councils and the House of Representatives were based on the ownership or leasing property without the discrimination of the native inhabitants of the islands. Voters had to be male owners of property valued at, at least, 50 pounds a year or leasehold valued at 10 pounds. At the time when constitution came into force, elections for the House of the Representatives were supposed to take place every five years, and the House would initially have thirty seven members elected by 5849 voters, around a hundred of whom were Maori. This aspect of the formalized system of governance was essential as "this constitution in effect brought 'The Crown' to New Zealand and laid the foundation for the manner in which the country was to be governed for the next 150 years" (King 201) Moreover, its democratic character opened up the way for the extension of franchise to all Maori men in 1867 and to all women in 1893 (Fisher 93).

2.4 The British migration to New Zealand after 1850: the shaping of the values of New Zealand society

The situation of New Zealand colony in the mid-nineteenth-century, after the resolution of the conflict with the northern Maori tribes and the introduction of the new constitution was perceived as stable and encouraging for settlement both by the British government and general public. In addition, the discovery of gold deposits in the bed of the Matuara River in 1860 and at Lindis in 1861 sparked off hopes for attracting more immigrants tempted with the prospect

of instant prosperity. Combination of these two motivations started to bring new waves of European settlers to New Zealand in the 1860s and 70s which, in turn led to what Michael King refers to as “a decade of unprecedented prosperity” (207). “The population of Dunedin exploded,” King continues, “from 1700 people in 1858 to 18,500 by 1874. It had by then displaced Auckland as the country’s largest city. The full tallies in 1874, for cities and their suburbs, were: Dunedin 29,832, Auckland 27,840, Wellington 15,941 and Christchurch 14,270” (207). Many of these New Zealand cities were turning into thriving centres of trade and industry while the farming areas were producing abundance of high quality milk, butter, meat and wool.

That is not to say, however, that New Zealand of this period was an idyllic place which offered European immigrants luxurious or even comfortable conditions. To the contrary, starting from the arduous journey across the ocean, through the primitive and demanding living conditions to the need for self-sufficiency in all the areas of everyday life, emigration to New Zealand required toughness, perseverance and a healthy dose of flexibility from its prospective settlers. On top of that, after a period of peace which followed Governor Grey’s intervention, the hostilities between Pakeha and the Maori tribes broke out again with renewed force in the 1860s and lasted for over a decade. Even though the fighting between governmental troops and the Maori tribes normally did not directly affect civilians, it introduced an element of instability that increased anxiety and discouraged potential settlers. For all these reasons, New Zealand became the land of both opportunity and challenges which contributed to the way the new society started to organize itself and function. Settlers who arrived from overcrowded Britain, where strict class boundaries did not allow for much of upward mobility received a chance to and, in some cases, were forced to, acknowledge the needs and aspirations of all its members.

2.4.1. Conditions onboard the ships heading to New Zealand and challenges after the arrival

The British public was introduced to the idea of New Zealand as a new destination for people trying to improve their lives through the means of intense promotional campaign conducted by various associations, the New Zealand Company being chief among them. Potential settlers were enticed not only with positive accounts of life in the new colony contrasted with the dire conditions of crowded British cities but also with various inducements to cross the ocean and try their fortune in New Zealand. There was even a *New Zealand Journal*, published in London

and appearing fortnightly, which New Zealand Company started to issue on the 8th of February 1840. As Helen M. Simpson comments on this publication:

It contained such things as reports of colonisation societies co-operating in various districts with the main Company; reviews of books dealing with colonisation, with special reference to New Zealand; an analysis of the passenger-lists of the first ships that had left for the colony; accounts of the steps taken to ensure the well-being and progress of those going out; correspondence on relevant matters; advertisements regarding the Company's scheme for granting free or assisted passage to suitable emigrants, with advice in later issues as to the equipment necessary for the voyage, and the dietary provided; and in time extracts from letters and journals of emigrants of all classes already arrived in New Zealand. (35)

The general image projected in the journal was uniformly positive, glossing over any hardships or severe inconveniences that the colonists were bound to encounter during the journey and after the arrival to their destination. Still, despite the fact that the Company officials embellished the truth in order to enlist the largest number of recruits possible, it is difficult to accuse them of malicious intent aimed at deception, as it is easy to detect authentic enthusiasm for the idea of colonisation of New Zealand islands (Simpson 35).

Moreover, it is important to remember that for the rapidly growing population that was struggling with the consequences of social and economic changes brought about by the transformations of the Industrial Revolution the living conditions in the contemporary Britain were quite bad. Employment was increasingly difficult to find, wages were low and incurring debt was a crime habitually resulting in a prison sentence. That is why, a new start, even at a remote and demanding location from which majority of the settlers were not likely to ever return, was an attractive proposition regardless of potential downsides. This kind of attitude allowed the New Zealand Company and other associations to send a constant stream of colonists to New Zealand over the course of several decades.

When it came to the actual recruitment of the future settlers, New Zealand Company had a set of very strict requirements that promoted candidates who were skilled tradesmen or workers, were in excellent health and prepared to work hard once they arrived in their new country. Those who met these conditions however, could apply for financial assistance or even free passage in exchange for a period of work for the Company. Still, the hardship and difficulties connected with the emigration started with the arduous ship journey. The passengers were issued with a detailed list of supplies that they would be required to bring with them on board (Bassett 58). Alimentation on board during a long sea journey was another problematic area that the future settlers had to contend with. Even though New Zealand Company prided itself on providing a dietary "very much superior to what is usually within the emigrant's reach on shore," (Simpson 41) it was only first class, or "cabin" passengers who had their food cooked

and served for them (Simpson 41). Other people on board, travelling in the “second-cabin” or ‘intermediate’ class and those in the steerage had to fend for themselves, which meant organizing into cooking groups called messes (Bassett 59).

The main adversities that the emigrants had to overcome, however, were connected with the length of the journey which lasted at least four months, or even longer if the ship struck bad weather, and the cramped and uncomfortable conditions. Especially in the case of steerage passengers who were placed in the hold, immediately below the main deck, extreme patience and precise organisation of chores were of absolute necessity. There was a shortage of living space and the facilities for personal hygiene were restricted.

All these conditions were, quite obviously, conducive to the development and rapid spread of infectious outbreaks. Regardless of the fact that on each ship there had to be a ship’s surgeon, normally little could be done to prevent the complications or even deaths once the passengers started coming down with virulent infections. Young children were especially susceptible to falling victim to illness (Bassett 61). Apart from the dangers connected with the confined conditions on board of Company’s ships, the future colonists had to accept a very real possibility of various disasters that any vessel could meet with. In case of gales, hurricanes or fire at sea, which constituted the most dreaded of all emergencies, the crew and passengers had to rely on themselves and usually had very limited means and chances of escape. Taking into consideration the large number of ships that travelled between England and New Zealand, it is possible to state that there were relatively few catastrophes that resulted in the loss of a whole ship. Still, they did occur often enough to constitute a real risk which the colonists recruited by the New Zealand Company had to take into account (Simpson 59-60).

Therefore, it is not surprising that the end of each journey was met with enthusiasm on the part of the future colonists and provided a cause for celebration. All the aspects of the new country, from mild and agreeable climate through abundance of open space to ready availability of fresh and affordable food were sources of constant delight for the English settlers, who were not only coming off the ships where they could not enjoy any of these things but frequently originated from crowded and polluted industrial cities back in England. Even the simplest pleasures were highly appreciated as a member of a family, landing in Lyttelton from the *Sir George Seymour* in December 1850 attests to in his memoirs. ‘This country is like a paradise!’ he wrote with emphasis after they made straight for the baker’s in order to buy fresh bread and butter and enjoyed them sitting on the rocks of the wharf (Simpson 41).

The climate of New Zealand, which promoted vibrant vegetation and perfect conditions for both hunting and husbandry, was also beneficial for the health and well-being of the new

inhabitants (Drummond 105). When it came to the general health of the population, a doctor who came to New Zealand in order to set up his practice, wrote in a letter home: “Do not persuade medical men to come, for, unless they become farmers, they will be unoccupied” There was only one area in which medical practice could flourish as he explained in the second part of his missive: “medical men, though they will not have much to do in the way of sickness, will still find their hands well employed in bringing young ones into the world” (Simpson 71). On the other hand, in emergency situations, which normally required the intervention of a doctor, even the youngest settlers had to find a way to face them as a majority of colonists lived in remote locations with the closest medical professional hours or even days of hard horse riding away (Bassett 113-14).

Isolation was a serious problem for the settlers as outside larger communities of Wellington and Auckland in the North Island and Christchurch and Dunedin in the South Island the majority of the Europeans lived on individual farms with no network of roads that would make travelling between them easier. Moreover, even though the New Zealand recruits were issued with detailed instructions as to the equipment and provisions they had to bring with them to the new country, once they arrived to their destination they were expected to deal with all the necessities of everyday life in spartan conditions and with limited support available. It was especially true for the first groups of settlers that arrived in New Zealand: “In 1840 the first thousand Wellington settlers landed on the Petone beach. Thick bush and swamps were all they could see. Their goods were heaped in piles on the sand. There was no shelter, and Colonel Wakefield had not bought any land for them to farm. Even a year later, after the arrival of still more immigrants, Wellington was described as a very gloomy sight, with just a few huts to welcome the new arrivals” (Bassett 62, Drummond 105).

As the new arrivals had practically no way of purchasing a house after they got to New Zealand, they had to find a way to secure their own lodgings, which, in most cases, meant staying in temporary tents or huts while their own homes were being built (Simpson 73). In many locations on both islands, Europeans started to imitate some of Maori designs of raupo (reeds) or slab houses that could be built quickly and with the materials that were readily available and, therefore, relatively inexpensive. Many of these dwellings, though not intended to last, were both attractive and comfortable. Still, predominant influences in early New Zealand architecture can be traced back to the mixture of various European styles (Alison and Drummond 81). However, the difficulties connected with securing appropriate dwellings were just one aspect of the life in the new colony that Europeans found challenging. Unfamiliar with the conditions of the New Zealand islands early settlers were bound to make mistakes when it

came to the preparedness for life in very basic conditions. For instance, some of them could not fathom the reasons behind the advice given in emigration manuals and decided to pack items which were either too bulky or impractical for the life in what was still for all intents and purposes wilderness in comparison with the industrial conditions of British cities.

The relations with the native Maori tribes constituted another source of anxiety for the newly arrived settlers. Even though, a majority of the Maoris were, at least, neutral, or even friendly towards the Europeans arriving in New Zealand as they were seen as a potential source of profitable trade, there existed a very real possibility of civilians getting involved in armed conflicts that accompanied disputes over the ownership of land. For many settlers, especially women, the matters were not helped by the fierce appearance of tattooed natives of both genders or wild and exuberant customs which were completely unfamiliar to people used to Victorian rules and sensibilities. Maoris both fascinated and terrified the colonists as Charlotte Godley noticed in her letter about Ngai Tahu people of Murihiku sent to her family back in Britain in 1850: “Some of them, and especially the women, are frightful, but they look very picaresque, sitting about the place with a bright scarlet blanket and a deep black border spread all over them” (Godley 25). Still, most English settlers chose to disregard the exotic appearance and customs of natives, as they appreciated the abundance of produce that the natives offered for trade (Simpson 70).

The necessity of sharing the land and, at times, relying on the supplies and provisions provided by the natives that represented a culture based on entirely values from the Victorian principles, was an experience that added to the slow development of a new way of life and attitudes of European inhabitants of New Zealand. Despite the fact that many of fresh arrivals were determined to shape their new home to resemble Britain as much as possible and got enthralled with all the aspects of familiarity they could find in New Zealand landscape, even at the early stage of the development of European settlements it was clear that the conditions that the British colonists had to grapple with added up to create a new reality which, in turn, required the creation of an alternate social system and rules.

It was especially visible in the case of women, who started to find courage which allowed them to question or even challenge the predetermined roles and expectations so prevalent in Victorian Britain. As Mary Taylor wrote in a letter to Charlotte Bronte, as early as 1848:

I can hardly explain to you the queer feeling of living as I do in 2 places at once. One world containing books, England, and all the people with whom I can exchange the idea; the other all that I actually see and hear and speak to. The separation is as complete as between the things in a picture and the things in

the room. The puzzle is that both move and act, and I must say my say as one of each. The result is that one world at least must think me crazy. I am just now in a sad mess. A drover who has got rich with cattle dealing wanted me to go and teach his daughter. As the man is a widower I astonished this world when I accepted the proposal, and still more because I asked too high a price (£70 a year). Now that I have begun the same people can't conceive why I don't go on and marry the man at once which they imagine must have been my original intention. For my part, I shall probably astonish them a little more for I feel a great inclination to make use of his interested civilities to visit his daughter and see the district of Poirua. (MacDonald 85)

Mary Taylor was only one of many young and intelligent women who took the opportunities for going against the stereotypes and gender prejudice of their compatriots that the new colony offered. Regardless of the fact that, as her words attest, Victorian morality and expectations were still present in the new society and it took courage to try and find your own way, the possibilities for advancement were, undeniably, more readily available than in the structured society of Victorian Britain. As the realities of daily life in the new colony started to enforce changes in the traditionally perceived gender roles, an increasing number of New Zealand women took the opportunity to break away from the confining stereotypes of the domestic sphere of activity and make their mark in the various areas of public life. Arguably, that was one of main contributing factors in the creation of the New Zealand suffrage movement and its eventual peaceful achievement when it came to gaining women the right to vote.

2.4.2 Everyday life in nineteenth-century New Zealand: work, education, leisure, and the question of gender

Settlers arriving in New Zealand in the second half of the nineteenth century undertook the long and arduous sea journey and faced various challenges and difficulties of the strange and relatively uncultivated land with courage and what can be described as generally good cheer. Tempted by the visions of a better and more prosperous future propagated by the associations in the vein of New Zealand Company, the potential colonists were willing and ready to leave the familiar life in Britain forever, in favour of venturing into unknown in the hope of bettering their lives. That is not to say that the passengers of the ships heading for New Zealand were of universally liberal persuasion and determined to forge a new type of society once they arrived at their destination. To the contrary, as Helen Simpson notices, the predominant sentiment among the early settlers was a desire to create a more universally prosperous replica of Britain, far flung from any revolutionary ideas (78).

Despite the fact that, initially, a large portion of the immigrants expected to retain the traditional model of employment and family, which envisioned men getting a job outside of the household and women taking care of the family, this model turned out to be unattainable in New Zealand colony for various reasons. Most of all, as the early ships carried predominantly young, male passengers the new colony was very quickly beset with the problems connected with a shortage of women, which created a huge gap in the areas of domestic and auxiliary jobs. In order to offset this imbalance, both the New Zealand Company and the provincial governments introduced schemes that encouraged the emigration of working people of both genders. According to Charlotte Macdonald:

From the outset, publicly sponsored immigration schemes were designed to attract to the colony of New Zealand a steady influx of working people: agricultural labourers, shepherds, navvies and female domestic servants. Labour of all kinds was in short supply, and the demand for women to perform domestic work was as insistent as that for men to help with the harvest and to build roads. (19)

Therefore, it was relatively easy for any skilled woman to gain assisted or even free passage offered through various schemes from the early stage of the colonization efforts. For instance, the first number of the *New Zealand Journal* gives a list of the trades and professions of all the emigrants who were granted free passage by the officials of the New Zealand Company on the first nine ships sent out by them. “Among these are six dressmakers, one dairywoman, one laundress, three milliners, four nursemaids, nineteen seamstresses, one straw-plaitter who was probably, though not certainly, a woman, and a forty-three servants. Of the “servants” we may suppose that a fair proportion would be women” (Simpson 145). That gives us a clear indication that a significant percentage of early female New Zealand settlers were not only ready but expected and encouraged to find employment outside their households.

Even in the case of women who were confined domestic life only, the New Zealand experience diverged significantly from the Victorian standards. In the case of middle- and upper-class women in Britain, running a household entailed predominantly duties connected with managing of a number of staff and making sure that home became a shelter and respite for the male members of their families. The New Zealand realities, on the other hand, were much more challenging, but also proved to have a distinctly equalizing effect as the shortages in both labour and supplies meant that regardless of the position that they had held back in Britain, all women had to get involved in daily chores. What is more, as the living conditions and facilities of the colony were fairly restricted, even mundane tasks required a significant amount of stamina and physical strength. There was also another new economic aspect to typically

women's work as any surplus produce or services they could provide became a vital source of additional income or trade opportunities for New Zealand families (Brookes 60).

New Zealand offered both genders plentiful opportunities for finding profitable employment in diverse areas, but it is possible to state that in the first few decades of colony's social development there still existed a clear distinction between the professions that were perceived to be typically male and those that were considered to be suitable for women. In addition, on average, men's work offered better wages, gave them greater mobility and control over the amount and quality of their leisure time which resulted in male occupations being perceived as superior to women's work. However, as the number of women arriving to New Zealand increased their presence in public became more prominent and acceptable. As Caroline Daley writes in her analysis of the gender relations in the Hawke's Bay town of Taradale in the second half of the nineteenth century:

The public world of commerce was a strongly masculine environment. Taradale's main road was a man's road. The hotel and billiard saloon stood at one end and the vast majority of shops were owned and run by men. Women were not even encouraged to go to town to do their shopping. The baker and butcher would call regularly on the surrounding homes, and the grocer would pick and deliver orders. The mobility of men's work meant that their work places covered a wide area, thus increasing their hold on the public world. However, over time this hold began to be threatened, as more women moved into these public spaces. The single and widowed women who took up paid employment encroached on what had previously been male territory. Men's work-a-day was slowly changing. (75)

This gradual shift in gender balance in the area of public and private work positions was brought about not only by the relative flexibility of the rules governing the functioning of young New Zealand society but by a host of other significant factors as well. First of all, even with more colonists arriving in the colony, New Zealand was still suffering from the shortage of women. Due to that fact, the value of female presence grew considerably in comparison with the conditions prevalent in Victorian Britain where women were in majority and, therefore, considered to be "surplus" or "redundant".⁶ In order to persevere in the harsh realities of the colony the men who had decided to leave their homeland behind needed not only companionship, but also a sense of hope for the future which could be achieved through an opportunity to set up a family. Consequently, all single women who arrived in New Zealand, from quite well-educated middle-class "redundant women" crossing over from the United Kingdom through large groups of Irish orphans to ex-convicts recruited in Australia, could be

⁶ The British census of 1851 showed the surplus of unmarried women ranging from five hundred thousand to a million, in New Zealand the situation was reverse: in 1864 there were 162 men for every 100 females.

sure to find a host of matrimonial opportunities in the new land which offered them a degree of choice many of them had never experienced before. As a result, women started to develop a sense of self-worth and confidence which, pretty soon, led to the development of ambitions exceeding the confines of the domestic sphere.

However, it is still equally possible to notice the gender division when it comes to the leisure time and activities that the early New Zealand settlers engaged in. The differences in the ways men and women tended to spend their free time frequently stemmed from the nature and circumstances of the majority of female and male types of occupations. While men tended to have regular working hours which gave them more time and opportunities to seek out various forms of entertainment, for a significantly large group of married women, leisure was much less defined and difficult to obtain on regular basis. According to Caroline Daley it was customary for women to work on endless household chores without any breaks or to combine social interaction with practical tasks. Moreover, as the transport facilities were severely limited and women did not normally ride horses, bicycles or drive they frequently became stranded in their own houses (113).

In addition, as working men of the early stage of colonisation had more freedom of movement and more money to spend on their pleasures, the development of various facilities catered, predominantly to their needs. "Besides the hotels and the billiard saloon, there were lodges, sporting organisations, and public buildings, which men made their own. Particularly in the period before the Great War, the provisions for men's organized leisure were far superior to anything provided for women" (Daley 133). Other informal and unorganized forms of recreation, such as hunting and shooting, fishing, chatting to friends in the main street or drinking pints in a pub soon became a very important parts of New Zealand men's identity. The ability to devote time and money to leisure quickly became a sign of status for a man and the ability to wield power over his family. Consequently, unlike in the case of women, the culture of masculine leisure was in no way defined by the concepts of domesticity and respectability. Young women were constantly challenged to find acceptable public expressions for their need of recreation which made their experience much more challenging. On the other hand, men were encouraged to cultivate their pastimes which challenged ideas of respectability and was an avenue for them to show their prowess as good providers (Daley 133-4).

Paradoxically enough, the nature of some of the most popular male recreational activities lay at the basis of the creation of the oldest and most significant of New Zealand female movements, the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union, which gave women a platform allowing them to engage in the public life of communities. As alcohol played

an important part in many of male leisure activities, especially in the isolated, farming communities, the economic and social effects of overindulgence were felt keenly by whole families. That is why, when Mary Clement Leavitt of the United States-based Women's Christian Temperance Union arrived in New Zealand in 1885, on a mission of setting up a world-wide movement promoting temperance and alcohol prohibition, her arguments fell on very fertile ground among women of different classes and backgrounds. The interest was so great that, within seven months ten, very active branches were created all over New Zealand. Despite the criticism that the activists faced,⁷ the popularity of the movement was growing steadily. From 1890 many Maori women started to join and actively campaign for temperance as they were concerned about the effect the alcohol was having on their communities. It was especially prominent when it came to its relationship with land selling as some of Maori men would sign the sale deeds while drunk or sell land they owned in order to buy alcohol or cover debts in taverns (King 324).

It is important to remember, however, that the activities of the WCTU were not simply limited to promotion of temperance but included initiatives concerning the betterment of women's social and economic situation in general. "Classes were held presenting new ideas about healthy clothing, food, and diets for children and the sick. Pre-school centres, staffed by WCTU volunteers, were set up. Working women's claims for better conditions and pay, and attempts to unionise, were actively supported. 'Fallen women' (those who became pregnant outside marriage, or prostitutes) were helped to find homes and employment" (teara.govt.nz). What is more, WCTU encouraged women to become public speakers and officers in charge of branches. The WCTU operated through departments, each under the control of a superintendent and responsible for an area of work. Departments covered temperance literature, juvenile work, prison work, social purity, Sunday school activity, dress reform, franchise and legislation, and much else besides (nzhistory.govt.nz). This organizational work gave leaders such as Kate Sheppard experience that proved invaluable when it came to the campaign which eventually led to the peaceful granting of female franchise in 1893 (Daley 134).

Another aspect that contributed to the gradual expansion of women into the public sphere was the fact that, partly due to the shortage in the numbers of women arriving in New Zealand, many of New Zealand men tended to appreciate the role women played in the community much more than their British counterparts, which meant that they tended to accept

⁷ For example the leaders of WCTU were described by *New Zealand Herald* in March 1887 as "old maids, or wives who are not mothers, or eccentrics".

their increased presence in all spheres of life more willingly. For example, unlike in Britain where women had to go through a long and arduous fight for the access to secondary and university education, in New Zealand the newly created educational system did not discriminate against the female gender at any level. At the beginning of the Victorian era, in the United Kingdom, education at the primary and secondary levels was available only to girls from wealthier families and limited to the skills they may need while running a household. It was only after a prolonged campaign and support and lobbying of relatively wealthy women like Emily Davies, Dorothea Beale and Frances Buss, who were also founders of schools and colleges for girls, that sciences and languages became a part of curriculum, if only of privately run schools (Levine 30, 32).

On the other hand, in New Zealand, girls of all social classes and economic backgrounds had unrestricted access to the schools at the primary and secondary levels and the same curriculum taught to the boys, practically from the moment the New Zealand educational system was established in the 1860s and 1870s. Admittedly, however, the introduction of gender equality in education was not down to the liberal convictions of the New Zealand government as the communities of settlers were much more concerned with the creation of educational opportunities for boys. The fact that schools for girls were created at the same time can be attributed to the dedication and determination of an educationalist from Port Chalmers, Miss Learmonth Dalrymple, who was a firm believer in the necessity of educating both genders from an early age up to university level. She corresponded with Dorothea Beale and Frances Buss and founded a school for girls in New Zealand along the same lines as her English predecessors (Grimshaw 4).

Miss Dalrymple started to act immediately when the first discussions on the establishment of first boys' secondary school in Dunedin began to take shape in the mid-1860s. She employed similar tactics to the ones that were later adopted by the organizations campaigning for female suffrage, as she created a committee of women, with herself at the head in order to influence the local authorities and convince them that a school dedicated to the education of girls was equally essential. In addition, the activities of this new committee included not only the promotion of the idea of girls' education among the community, but also enlisting the aid and support of prominent male citizens, whose authority lent the necessary gravitas to the cause and contributed greatly to its eventual success. Eventually, the Otago Girls' High School opened in 1871, just days after the inauguration of the boys' school. Miss Dalrymple was also the author of the curriculum and the set of regulations governing the school, which, in turn, became a model for the girls' schools that were later established in Auckland,

Christchurch, Wellington, Napier, and Invercargill. Finally, when the free secondary education was introduced in the country in 1877 it was granted, indiscriminately to both genders (Grimshaw 8).

This initial equality when it comes to education on primary and secondary levels can be perceived as the reason behind the support extended to the petition for the admission of women to the university's lectures, degrees and scholarships by the Otago University Council when the negotiations accompanying the creation of the University of New Zealand were in progress in 1871. Similarly, when the University of New Zealand actually came into existence in 1874, its authorities did not pass any regulations which would introduce distinctions between the genders, which allowed Kate Milligan Edger, a daughter of an Auckland nonconformist minister, to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in mathematics just three years later. Edger's success came a year before the first university in the United Kingdom, the University of London, opened its degrees to women, the moment which also marked the beginning of a long campaign by the English reformers to promote the idea of full admission for women in the older universities (Grimshaw 10).

The fairly casual way in which the presence of female students was accepted at newly created universities was quite astonishing for visiting British intellectuals. For example, William Steadman Aldis who arrived in Auckland in the 1880's expressed his surprise at the fact that, in contrast to his classes in Britain which contained very few girls who huddled embarrassed at the back of the room, in New Zealand classroom he was met with "a cheerful bevy of colonial damsels facing him from the front benches, whilst the men sat modestly at the back (Grimshaw 12). These educational opportunities opened the professional world of medicine, law and local government, which was an achievement unprecedented in the British Empire. As a result, women were given an opportunity to prove that, despite the patriarchal stereotypes, they were more than capable of facing the challenges of public life which, in turn, made the idea of female enfranchisement easier to accept for New Zealand men.

2.3 Summary and conclusions

The short discussion of the early history of New Zealand presented in this chapter clearly demonstrates that the settlers who arrived on the islands in the second half of the nineteenth century found themselves faced with unique conditions which, inevitably, changed their views on many aspects of social reality, including gender roles. Despite the fact that they had to brave

harsh and exhausting sea voyages, overcome the shortages of the most basic facilities, and find a way to coexist with Maori natives, whose culture and traditions were strikingly exotic for Victorians, the pioneers that settled in New Zealand adapted and created a society that offered opportunities for both men and women to eventually improve the quality of their lives.

Many of the women, in particular, were aware of the exciting new options opening up for their gender in the new land. For instance Mary Taylor who was a middle-class woman with decent education who felt stifled by the patriarchal rigidity of Victorian society, noted after joining her brother in New Zealand: “There are no means for a woman to live in England but by teaching, sewing or washing. The last is the best, the best paid the least unhealthy and the most free. But it is not well enough paid to live by. Moreover it is impossible for any one not born to this position to take it up afterwards” (Brookes 67). By contrast, in New Zealand Taylor found the independence she was looking for, as she worked as a teacher, bought land, built a house and dealt in cattle. Eventually, together with her cousin Ellen Taylor, she opened a women’s clothing and drapery shop and reflected on her new life: “My life now is not overburdened with work, and what I do has interest and attraction in it” (Brookes 67). She was not the only one, either; women in New Zealand got many more opportunities to work outside the confines of a household than their counterparts, back in Britain. As historian Catherine Bishop proved in her analysis of the job market in the nineteenth century New Zealand, many of small businesses set up during this period even if operating, for legal reasons, under a man’s name were in fact run by women which proved their ability to be successful outside the patriarchal bounds of domesticity and strengthened their independence. In the 1880s and 1890s their options of influencing the public sphere were expanded even further by the creation of the New Zealand Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

Still, it is important to remember that the external conditions of life in New Zealand were just one contributing factor in the process that resulted in peaceful granting of voting rights to women in New Zealand. Another crucial aspect of the campaign is connected with the way in which British women, shaped by the imperial mentality of “stiff upper lip” and brought up to uphold British resourcefulness and steadfastness even in furthest and most exotic outpost of the British Empire, managed to utilize the realities of their new country and shape new social roles for themselves. Their resourcefulness and ambition are clearly visible in their letters, diaries and memoirs which are analyzed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

The British female pioneers in New Zealand

The reign of Queen Victoria, which spanned a greater part of the nineteenth century, is considered to mark the height of the development of the British Empire. As the largest political entity the world has ever seen, between 1814 and 1914, the Empire encompassed over 14 million square miles of territory and was home to 450 million people. That meant that Queen Victoria ruled over more than a quarter of world's population and, as Scottish writer, John Wilson remarked, the sun never set over her empire. In addition, as at the time Britain had the most modern and largest navy and could, therefore, hold supremacy at sea, the country took on the role of a global policeman that introduced and upheld the so-called Pax Britannia within, as well as outside of, its territory. Consequently, with its dominant position in world trade, Britain could extend its control over the economies of not only its own colonies but countries such as China, Argentina or Siam.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century British society forged a conviction of the superiority of the British spirit that “could be justified in terms of material, scientific and intellectual progress and adaptability” (James 45). As Jeremy Paxton comments in *Empire: What Ruling the World Did to the British*, “Creating and running this enormous enterprise required a certain type of individual, which gave Britain its idiosyncratic public-school system, designed to produce not intellectuals but ‘sound chaps’ – capable, dependable, resourceful” (15). Moreover, young girls, particularly of the middle class, were shaped in a similar fashion. The women accompanying their husbands to the furthest and most exotic outpost of the British Empire were also expected to uphold similar values and act as symbols of British resourcefulness and steadfastness. Wives were supposed to maintain a positive attitude even in the worst of circumstance as were constantly reminded by various slogans that “To a true-hearted girl who wishes to make a man happy, there is bliss in an African hut” and “It is in your power to make or spoil the British nation” (Paxton 45).

My claim is that, despite the fact that the colonial wife was supposed to be a strong reincarnation of the Victorian model of domestic femininity, the process of migration had an unintentional empowering effect on women coming to New Zealand and helped the early

female colonist not only to adapt to the challenging conditions of their new country but to start to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the society that was still governed by relatively flexible rules. The determination to employ the “imperial spirit” for the betterment of their lives is especially noticeable in the texts by women recruited by organization in the vein of Maria Rye’s Female Middle Class Emigration Society, which promoted the idea that the colonies offered a huge host of new possibilities for professional advancement and economic independence to British educated women who, back at home, were forced to compete for subservient positions as governesses. The narrative that emerges from the accounts of these women shows a gradual shift in their standpoints and a slow crumbling of blind faith in the values of a patriarchal society, induced not by feminist ideology, but by the social and economic conditions. Granted, initially, many of the single British women who were brave enough to make the decision to cross the ocean in the hope of forging a new life in New Zealand did so with the intention of finding a suitable husband, which can be perceived as a fulfilment of female roles prevalent in Victorian Britain.¹ Within few decades, however, the labour shortages in the new colony combined with the way female companionship was valued by the male settlers opened up alternative solutions which went beyond the restrictions of the domestic sphere as the only domain suitable for women.

In addition, for some of the predominantly working-class women, emigration was a chance to break away from the social and familial bonds which, in Britain seemed to be unshakable. Charlotte MacDonald describes the case of a Sussex laundress, Ann ‘Dunn’ who gained a passage to Canterbury in order to escape from an abusive man she was cohabiting with. Her situation came to light only because her partner (whose name was Dunn) reported to the emigration agent’s London office trying to track her down and falsely claiming to be her husband. There were, undoubtedly various other reasons and circumstances for their decision to emigrate. Some women chose to go to New Zealand in order to escape their abusive husbands, while others pretended to be married to people that were already married to someone else. As divorce was extremely rare and available only to people of means, emigration seemed to offer a convenient alternative and a way of rearranging familial relationships. It is difficult to estimate the scale of this phenomenon, but it was definitely a tempting option to start over for people unhappy with their personal situations.

¹ As discussed in the first chapter.

Regardless of the type of motivation that inspired British women to immigrate to New Zealand, their experiences in the new homeland tended to not only challenge their resilience and ingenuity, but also change the way they perceived themselves in relation to society. This gradual shift is clearly visible in letters, diaries and memoirs that many of them penned over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. The narrative that emerges from these texts helps to depict what Frances Porter refers to as ‘private experience’ of women which is frequently missing or disregarded when it comes to the official and historical accounts of the European settlement of New Zealand.

Whether it came to the decision to emigrate, the journey itself, the first steps and hardships on the new soil or the realities of life in New Zealand colonies, women wrote to share their experiences with others or to commit them to memory – their own or their descendants. The careful reading of these texts allows us to understand more fully the motivations and ambitions of women brought up in Victorian patriarchal society as they used the ethos of ‘stiff upper lip’ to carve out a space for themselves in the public life that used to be reserved for their fathers, brothers and husbands.

3.1. The first steps in the new homeland: the decision to emigrate, the journey across the sea and the arrival in New Zealand

As we have already explained in the previous chapters, from the beginning of the British settlement of the New Zealand islands, the organizations such as the New Zealand Company and Maria Susan Rye’s Female Middle Class Emigration Society promoted the option of settling down on New Zealand islands in an organized and well-thought-out way. The campaign covered all the aspects of the process and utilised various channels through which it could reach the largest audience possible. Potential colonists, especially those with special skills or of certain professions and single women of marriageable age could also benefit from various schemes that offered assisted or even free passage. Moreover, within few decades, the first colonists, desperate to find reliable labourers and house servants, started to send missives back to Britain trying to entice members of extended family or acquaintances to join them in New Zealand. For instance, Carlow-born migrant Annie Dempsey sent a request from South Canterbury offering wages and assistance with the passage to a specific candidate:

Dear Sister is Mary Byrn of Knock Bally still at home yet or would she like to com to Newzeland. I would like to know as we would like to have a Respectable girl to live with us. We would give her good wages and make her as a companion or if Mr Burk did know of a Respectable girl who would wish to come out

it would cost about Ten Pound to Pay there Passage here. We would Pay it. She could earn it afterwards with us when She would come out. (McCarthy 75)

The financial considerations definitely played a significant part when it came to the process of making a decision to emigrate. Despite the fact that in the first half of the nineteenth century Britain was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, which, for example, found its reflection in the extravagant displays of the 1851 Great Exhibition, in the later decades of Queen Victoria's Britain's economy slowed down considerably. It is possible to state that the British government became too complacent and entrenched in the vestiges of its own success. According to James Foreman-Peck the Victorians overlooked the necessity of building a new foundation for further growth of Britain in the twentieth century, failing to pay heed to adequate growth of education and industry (1). On top of the sudden shift from agricultural to industrial population which brought about social strains in various areas, "the Victorians constructed no official figures for national income, expenditure or output, although a few attempts were made to produce numbers for one or two years by private individuals" (Foreman-Peck 3).

The financial strains and economic uncertainty that characterized the existence of the British working class and, to a lesser degree, the middle-class, in the late nineteenth century Britain was especially challenging when it came to women, in particular those who could not fall back on the support of a male relative. Single women devoid of employment options could not entertain any hopes of financial independence. Moreover, they were often put under pressure to perform domestic duties that were in keeping with the perception of the female sphere and obligations, regardless of their own ambitions and inclinations. It was not uncommon to come across a spinster taking care of elderly parents or her bachelor brother's household, but only as long as her help was necessary; if her parents died or brother married she was supposed to step back with dignity and accept any form of charity she was offered.

Despite the common Victorian preconception, according to which women were supposed to be happy with this patriarchal arrangements, it is possible to detect clear traces of resistance against the requirement of passive submissiveness in many of the contemporary accounts of the female colonists. One of such examples can be found in the letters that Mary Ann Wrigley, a 40 year old woman from Bedford, wrote to her brother and sister-in-law in Wellington. As she had no financial recourses after the death of her mother, she was contemplating joining them in New Zealand in order to find an opportunity for a fresh start. This decision met with the disapproval of her elder brother John, who was reluctant to take over the responsibility of taking care of their elderly father, as he considered it to be Mary's duty. Her letter to her other brother, Henry, written in June 1859, clearly demonstrates that, despite

the pressure exerted on her, she refused to be cowed. Mary relates a detailed account of heated conversation that ensued when John Wrigley asked her why she was contemplating emigrating to New Zealand:

I said, 'You see I am nearly 40 years old and have no money or husband and have no chance of saving anything in my circumstances and do not wish to be dependent on anyone. I want to help myself, and they [Eliza and Henry Wrigley in New Zealand] are doing so well and say that I might do well if I was there. Suppose I was to go for ten years and get what would keep me in my old age, it would not be amiss would it?'

'Oh no [John Wrigley replies] but what would [our] father have to do without you. You will not think of leaving him?'

I said, 'The rest are as near to him as I am'

'But then your home is 'the home'. If you go, it will have to be broken up and he will be a lodger. Then you think you could make your fortune, Mary Ann, in about ten years?'

'Suppose I am fortunate.'

He laughed at me. 'Are you really in good earnest?'

Well these have been my thoughts. I have told many that I may go. The answer has always been, you cannot think of leaving your poor old Father. Stay till he has gone, then you will be at liberty. (Porter and MacDonald 96)

Mary Wrigley's account of the conversation with her brother clearly demonstrates the weight of the expectations impressed on her by her family as well as the resolve that she displayed while arguing her case.

The determination with which Mary defended her right to independent endeavours was definitely perceived as unwomanly by the standards of the period and made her look cold and uncaring. Contrary to that preconception, in another part of her letter, she explains the sacrifices that she has already made for the well-being and peace of mind of her relatives and her realization that the self-reliance and financial independency that she was striving for is not a fancy but an absolute necessity:

This subject has occupied my mind for a long time – more since the death of our Mother. When she was living she wished me never to leave her so long as she lived. I said I would not, she must not be uneasy on that score for I never thought of leaving her, but now she is no more and I am left alone to lament her loss...

There is not one, either friend or relation, on whom I could expect to thrust myself if I could not earn my living. I have no fear but that I could live anywhere so long as health is given to me. I care not for being called an old maid till doomsday if I had my friend in my pocket. I never fret about being married for most husbands are not worth having ... I never think of anything else but working hard for my living, for ever since I began to work I have had to do that. (Porter and MacDonald 96)

That is why, despite the entreaties of her relatives, problems with her health and the explicit risk of being deemed a rebel or even an outcast, Mary stuck to her decision of emigration which shows her resolve and indomitable spirit that seem to be characteristic traits of many of the British women who were brave enough to try to find new life and fresh opportunities in New Zealand.

Moreover, as the ending to her letter to Harry and Eliza indicates, Mary was not harbouring any unrealistic expectations as to her future in a new country either. To the contrary, she was fully aware of the fact that as a middle-aged woman with weak health, she could not expect a limitless range of options, but was determined to take responsibility for her own fate and potential success or failure of her endeavours:

I have thought sometimes I may come next summer. It looks strange that everybody knows what is my duty better than myself. Neither sister nor brothers will say anything about it. I may go where I like if only I carry the burden, so long as there is one to carry. We are, I must say, very comfortable together considering what we have to live on. There are not many that can live on much less. (Porter and MacDonald 96)

Eventually, Mary Wrigley joined thousands of British women emigrating to New Zealand in 1867 at the age of almost 48, which is an indication of New Zealand's society ability to absorb any amount of "redundant" women who could not hope to achieve any sort of financial or social independence in Britain.

That is not to say that New Zealand was perceived as the new promised land by all single women reluctant to follow the rules outlined for them by the constrictive patriarchal stereotype. Even inarguably progressive individuals, such as the author Charlotte Brontë, expressed doubts and disquietude caused by the fact that New Zealand's conditions were still considered to be exotic and more than slightly dangerous. For instance, in a letter addressed to Ellen Nussey, Brontë voiced what can be only described as criticism towards the decision to emigrate made by her best friend, Mary Taylor:

Matters are progressing very strangely at Gomersal [Mary Taylor's West Riding village]. Mary Taylor and Waring [brother] have come to a singular determination, but I almost think under the particular circumstances a defensible one, though it sounds outrageously odd at first. They are going to emigrate – to quit the country altogether. Their destination unless they change their minds is Port Nicholson, in the northern island of New Zealand!!! Mary has made up her mind she can not and will not be a governess, a teacher, a milliner, a bonnet-maker, nor housemaid. She sees no means of obtaining employment she would like in England, so she is leaving it. I counselled her to go to France likewise and stay there a year before she decided on this strange unlikely-sounding plan of going to New Zealand, but she is quite resolved. I cannot sufficiently comprehend what her views and those of her brother may be on the subject, or what is the extent of their information regarding Port Nicholson, to say whether this is rational enterprise or absolute madness. (Stevens 19)

Clearly, the uncertainty connected with the conditions of the new colony made the decision to emigrate seem risky or even controversial.

However, despite certain misgivings that can be found in the texts penned by potential colonists and their friends and relatives, the benefits offered by the new colony clearly outweighed the predicted risks and apprehension connected with venturing into the unknown. The overall tone of the letters penned by British women planning to settle in New Zealand is predominantly optimistic as the comparison of economic and living conditions between the two countries inspired hope for the future. Moreover, it was not only single women who saw New Zealand as the best place for development not only for themselves but for their relatives as well. A young wife and mother, Sarah Greenwood who decided to leave Britain for New Zealand together with her husband John and their eight children explained their motivations in detail in a letter to her grandmother:

The chief part of the money [sent by her grandmother] Danforth expended in books giving us full information concerning the colony of New Zealand which I really think will be our ultimate home. Every prospect of success here has failed entirely... You know... the extreme difficulty of finding employment in England even for single men; how much more then for a numerous family? Then again in a few years we shall have sons to place out, and only think of the many anxieties even experienced by parents with money and connections to back their endeavours and you will feel what a comfort it must be to reside in a country where every young person of good conduct is sure to meet with a profitable employment. Then again I must confess, entre nous, that I should regret to see my daughters remain single from the want of fortune if they wished to marry (which we know most young folks do), and in a thriving new country they would be sure to have a choice of husbands. (Porter and MacDonald 63)

The decision to emigrate was clearly based on the foundation of economic and social opportunities that opened up for the colonists, and what is probably even more important, for their descendants.

Moreover, Sarah and her family are not impetuous or frivolous about their decision, either as she expresses in the next part of her letter:

We are quite aware of the many little and great privations undergone by emigrants but I do believe that few are better qualified to disregard them than ourselves, both by temper, good health and being thoroughly acquainted (as far as theory can teach it) with what we must expect. And after a struggle of five years [in England] during which time my poor Husband has never felt the satisfaction of saying 'I am supporting my family', you may well suppose that our labours would be sweet indeed if attended by any success. (Porter and MacDonald 63)

Thus, the Greenwoods seem to have conducted an extensive research on New Zealand's situation and prospects, so they could prepare themselves for the journey and the actual task of starting over in a new country. Her words suggest that even after weighing up all the drawbacks

and dangers connected with emigration, Sarah cannot help but come to a conclusion that, in comparison with New Zealand, Britain has very little to offer to a majority of its people.

Still, even faced with the prospect of permanent separation from friends and extended family and potential for future bereavement, which, even with a wide circle of support, was inevitably one of the most difficult times in the life of any Victorian woman, Sarah retains her positive outlook and declares readiness to undertake significant risks to see her family provided for:

I know my kind Grandmama will say, 'what would Sarah do if her Husband were to die?' Do you know that the idea of such calamity is much less fearful to my mind on that than on this side of the world, and that from the certainty that my kind and liberal relations would neither be grieved nor burthened with my children who would at an early age be able to support not only themselves but me also, if necessary. I need hardly say that the idea of separating from my ... excellent Family is most painful, so much so that I endeavour as much as possible to avoid thinking of it, well knowing that it ought not to weigh in the scale against the welfare of a Husband and children ... Again (and it is a great consideration), it is impossible for a woman to have a better or more tender and affectionate partner in all her joys and sorrows than I am blessed with, so that my dear relatives will never have the feeling 'How Sarah must miss our affectionate sympathy'. How much such a feeling must add to the bitterness of separation. . (Porter and MacDonald: 63-4)

The exchange between Sarah and her grandmother presents us with just one of the examples of the way a large number of Victorian women approached the prospect of emigration. Brought up in the spirit of steadfastness and resolve in the service of the British Empire, they were not easily discouraged by the discomforts and even dangers they could come across in the new colony. Contrary to the patriarchal stereotypes, however the correspondence and diaries of many emigrant women across various social classes demonstrate maturity of judgment and the ability to analyze various factors in a calm and rational way which belies the contemporary perception of women as emotional and flighty creatures.

What is also significant, women, especially those travelling without the protection of a family, needed every ounce of their resolve in order to survive the hardships of a long and dangerous sea journey. On top of having to deal with the inconveniences connected with the extremely cramped conditions, shortages or low quality food supplies, diseases and the constant risk of sea disasters, women had to contend with risks typical for their gender. As Charlotte MacDonald puts it: "In the closed and isolated confines of shipboard communities they were easy targets for the sexual predations of crew and passengers. As a relatively powerless and usually minority group they could not depend on the protection of the men who occupied positions of authority. The captain, surgeon and officers were, themselves, frequently

perpetrators of these abuses” (73-4). Therefore, throughout the decades during which the volume of emigration to New Zealand reached its height, the government gave preference to families with large number of daughters or young female relatives. “The London tailoring family of Jane and John Cole was exemplary in this respect, with eight daughters ranging in age from twenty-one-year-old Sarah to eight-year-old Jane. The family emigrated to Canterbury in 1862” (MacDonald 22). Single women who could not travel with their families were in a more complicated situation, as they had to travel under guardianship of a married couple or an older, respectable woman who could act as a matron.

Still, even with all these provisions in place, crossing to New Zealand was considered to be dangerous for young women, which inspired the New Zealand Company and other associations to introduce additional measures which were aimed at providing additional security to young women. In fact, however, the rules imposed on them proved to be so restrictive that the journeys became even more difficult. According to Charlotte MacDonald, young unmarried girls required a whole system of elaborate machinery of protection on board emigrant ships, which was based on the physical segregation of adult passengers in steerage. In addition, the women themselves, were restricted not only in their movements about the ships or the hours they were allowed on deck, but also when it came to permissible communication with other passengers. Even then the diligence with which these regimens of “protection” and “moral machinery” were enforced was a subject of constant questions and controversy (74).

As a majority of single women travelling without the support of a family belonged to the working-class, it is hardly surprising that they were less inclined to leave accounts of their experiences during the journey. Even though most of them were probably literate, the scant written material that survives to this day consists predominantly of brief entries concerning the weather and the current ship position, which reflected the tedium of a long sea journey. Among the drudgery of hard conditions and the imposed restrictions even dramatic or tragic events became just a part of a complicated tapestry of relations among passengers. These included storms, calms, births, deaths, ceremonies to mark progress along the way as well as inevitable tensions and conflicts arising from sharing the same small space. All these elements contributed to a complex set of relationships between emigrants, passengers, crew and officers who were under additional stress of leaving their homes and a suspenseful journey to a pace as yet unknown (Charlotte MacDonald 74).

All these elements find their reflection in the scant source material that includes journals and diaries of some of the working-class girls travelling to New Zealand in steerage. The examples include a detailed account of the journey on board of *Northampton* undertaken by an

assisted emigrant, Bessie Prouten, who went to New Zealand in 1877 to join her fiancé. The entries of her journal are a curious mix of descriptions of weather and sights, trivial complaints about inconveniences of the journey and matter-of-fact reports on tragedies befalling other passengers. For instance, a month into the long journey Bessie recounts:

12 JANUARY We are passing Madeira, it looks very pretty in the distance ... We are having beautiful weather ... Today they took the opportunity of getting up the boxes, but much to my disgust mine did not come up. I mentioned it to Dr., he said he would see about it... I can do without more clothing but I am anxious about my hats getting spoilt and want something to drink – biscuits I can do without as my appetite is quite come back and I can eat anything so I shall get fat now. I am writing on the poop as the Matron does not like us below when it is fine, and in the evening we cannot see as the lamps do not give sufficient light ... We have all our bed and bedding up here giving them an airing. One of the girl's went over – board, sheets, blankets and all – it was a spree seeing them go ... While the weather is hot our beds are to come up twice a week; it will take out the closeness for it's seldom we have our portholes open ... Last Saturday a little baby died and was buried on Sunday morning, the Dr. reading the burial service. The child was three months old, the last one of six they have buried, it was very delicate (Porter and MacDonald 71)

The lack of emotions displayed in the description of the deaths of babies on board could be interpreted as coldness or even callousness on part of Bessie, who seems to be more concerned with the potential damage to the items of her wardrobe.

However, it is important to remember that, just like her travelling companions, Bessie was not only heading towards an unknown future, but had to deal with the confinement that infringed on her personal freedom in a way which bordered on imprisonment. In this context, her emotional detachment when it comes to genuinely dramatic events seems to be a defence mechanism against becoming too emotional under pressure. It is especially likely, as even after barely few weeks on board of *Northampton* the atmosphere of oppressive imprisonment spread among the single girls who were completely separated from the other passengers. Not only did the isolation affect the girls' social interactions, but also excluded them from limited forms of entertainment other groups could enjoy to break up the tedious monotony. In further paragraphs of the entry made on the 12th of January Bessie remarks:

The young men often have concerts of an evening on their deck but we don't hear anything of it till next morning when the Constable tells us ... As soon as the Constable has brought us down our hot water, the door is locked – talk about being particular – it is almost ridiculous. When on the poop the girls are not to look over at the young men, and when we go downstairs, the Matron stands at the bottom till every girl is down because they should not stand at the door and speak to anybody, which they will if they can. Sometimes they go up to the WC which is close to the door on purpose to get a chance of speaking to their friend but the Matron is up to them... (Porter and MacDonald 71)

The segregation among passengers was in force even during Sunday masses which only served to increase the sense of alienation and disgruntlement among young girls on board. As Bessie noted in her diary on the January 14th:

This morning we had Service on the deck. We girls sat facing the cabin door, the married people behind us and the young men behind them. No fear of there being any matching on board for we are like a lot of prisoners with a jailer. [...] All the girls see their friends this afternoon, no sweethearts or cousins are allowed to speak. There are a lot of girls going out to be married, very few to situations. Some are going to join friends, others have their mothers and fathers with them. In our mess there are four girls quite alone, one of them has a situation when she arrives. (Porter and MacDonald 72)

On top of that, as they were only allowed to mingle within their own group and were all equally uncertain of what their future in New Zealand would bring. What is more, they generally could not fall back on the support of friends or family which made their situation even more difficult.

That is not to say that the experience of married women travelling to New Zealand with their husbands and offspring was significantly less burdensome or trying. Excluding a very small number of female passengers in the first class, it was mothers and wives that had to shoulder all the duties connected with taking care of the needs of all members of their families. In addition, due to the fact that Victorian families tended to be large and a majority of women who decided to emigrate were of child-bearing age, even on small ships carrying up to few dozen passengers there were little babies requiring a lot of attention and pregnant women who were likely to go into labour during the journey. One account of such a journey can be found in the journal of Margaret Peace, who set for Auckland with her husband, five children (including a baby) and a younger sister, Isabella in late 1864. They travelled on a small brigantine, *Clara*, that carried just 37 passengers. Even with such limited numbers, however, the passage was quite dramatic, especially for women. Mary recalls at least one birth which was assisted by her sister Isabella:

17 JANUARY Expect to have an addition to our passengers today. Poor Mrs Davie whose child died the day before we sailed is sick today. God grant her a good time. It is very hot and the staterooms are very close yet he who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb can take care of her even although circumstances look bad. Half past four a baby is born ... and the mother is well, so is the child ... She is to be named for the ship, Clara ... My sister and Mrs Brown attended her. Mrs Foote washed the baby. (Porter and MacDonald 65)

During the same afternoon, *Clara* narrowly missed a disaster as it was almost rammed by a much larger steamer. Understandably, the incident caused panic and uproar among everybody on board as a potential sinking of the vessel would result in the deaths of a majority if not all the passengers. For Margaret, the situation had an additional stressful aspect which she recounts in the second part of the entry for this day:

Margaret discovers that one her children 'little Maggie' is missing and fears she has been crowded overboard in the excitement of the near miss. I heard one and another crying out, 'Maggie Peace, Maggie Peace', and still no answer. O dreadful! Had we escaped and had I lost my child? She had lain down and slept before the terror came on us, and the noise – ringing the bell, shouting, screaming and cursing, yes cursing – had not waked her. She was found by one of the passengers lying near the long boat on some planks ... I returned to the cabin with a grateful heart. (Porter and MacDonald 65)

Still, keeping track of wayward children who tended to get bored and wander off was a relatively minor part the responsibilities that married female passengers were burdened with. What is even more significant, due to the conditions on board the ships heading to New Zealand, women struggled with the more fundamental task of keeping all members of their families from physical harm. Margaret experienced that particular difficulty first-hand when her youngest child got hurt towards the end of the journey:

28 JUNE My presentiments of evil are gathering into shape ... Last night when at tea the ship gave a lurch and the table tipped up. A coffee pot full of hot coffee fell over my baby's head scalding him very severely. Poor lamb, I thought it was his last hour ... All on side of his head and face is full of blisters and I have spent a dreadful night with him for fear he might take a fit for his nerves are shocked by the cold water we poured over him as well as by the anguish of the scald but he is bright again this morning. (Porter and MacDonald 68)

That does not mean that women travelling with their families focused solely on husbands and children and limited their efforts on fulfilling their needs. The example of Margaret Peace demonstrates that Victorian women were more than capable of taking a stance in matters that went beyond the confines of the private sphere even in a situation when their private lives presented them with overwhelming challenges. On the same day when her baby got injured, Margaret wrote an official complaint to the captain of *Clara* protesting against the change of route that the ship was taking. The tone of the note is very strict; Margaret goes as far as to threaten the captain with financial consequences. The whole text is transcribed in her journal:

Captain Roper

Sir

As the voyage is already too long and as we are neither driven by stress of weather nor want of provisions to seek any harbour of refuge, I hereby protest on behalf of myself, my sister and my family against your taking the ship into any other port short of her destination of Auckland, and whatever expenses I may incur through your neglect of this warning I shall hold you responsible for.

Margaret goes on to explain how she noticed the change in the direction the ship was taking and then discovered that instead of landing in Auckland the ship would be going to Manukau. As her husband was not well at the time, Margaret took it upon herself to stand up to the captain with determination and resolve:

My reason for writing this note is that after we had made the land I observed that the ship was running south instead of north – the course we should pursue for Auckland – and on making enquiry I found that the captain did not intend to go to Auckland, the advertised port, but to Manukau. I had once heard in St Johns that the ship was intended to go some place with an Indian name ... but considered the part ill informed ... never for a moment thought that any one would be daring enough to advertise a vessel for Auckland then take her to another port. I immediately went to the chart to see where [Manukau] was situated and found a caution warning against entering without a pilot appended to directions for making harbour. Seeing this I went to my husband who was sick in bed and asked him to write out a protest ... but he said it would be of no use ... I then went in search of the captain and found that he was lying asleep in the cook's galley ... so I came down to the cabin and wrote the note. (Porter and MacDonald 69)

This type of attitude was an indication that, despite the patriarchal stereotypes, the nineteenth century British women were likely to show determination in expressing their opinions publicly especially when stressful circumstances put them under pressure.

The striking element in Margaret's account of events is the fact that her motivation seems to stem from the sense of responsibility for the well-being of family and not from the eagerness to assert her right to stand up to the figures of authority. In fact, initially she acts in accordance with the tenets of patriarchal hierarchy, as she entreats her husband to protest against what she perceives to be an outright injustice and potential danger for her loved ones. It is only after she finds him unable and unwilling to act that she decides to take matters into her own hands. Moreover, she does that without any reference to gender equality ideology or reflection on the fact that she was trespassing on what was traditionally considered to be male area of activity. In fact, it is possible to state that the future search for independence that New Zealand embarked on in the second half of the nineteenth century grew out of this gradual involvement of women in official matters that started with incidents brought about by the difficult and stressful conditions that the colonist had to face both during the journey and after the arrival to their new country.

Insomuch as the disembarkation after a long sea journey gave future colonists a temporary sense of relief, they were quickly faced with new challenges as the uncultivated land required an enormous amount of effort to make it habitable and the shortages of labour and supplies meant that both men and women had to share all types of chores in order to survive. Even the working class people used to hard physical exertion found the volume and the nature of the work overwhelming at first, but were also usually encouraged by the demand for their services and the high wages they could expect. On the other hand, members of the gentry had to accommodate themselves to circumstances which were completely novel and, at times, even shocking for them. Difficulties started from the moment they set a foot on New Zealand soil,

because even securing a permanent shelter could constitute a serious challenge and the loyalty of the servants they brought with them from Britain could not always be relied on. Georgiana Bowen, a member of the Anglo-Irish gentry, who came to the south island with members of her family in 1851 described the situation in a letter to her sister Ellen:

I have often in England been obliged to plead constant occupation as an excuse for short letters – truly I did not then know what work was. It is only Colonists who can have any idea of what roughing it is, and it is ill suited for any but the young, strong and active. I am thankful to be able to say that our health has been good since we landed otherwise we could not have gone through all we had to encounter. After having had our turn of the barracks at Lyttelton ... we came out to the plains and are now in wooden shanties or tents of which perhaps you can form no idea. Labour is enormous, for example a man and his wife require £50 per year with their maintenance (and their children) – which must be good and abundant and many of them are so independent, as it is termed, and they often leave their employers for to do their own work ... Our man Simpson and his wife like many others left us after landing having refused to take £40 per annum. (Porter and MacDonald 87)

Therefore, the value of physical labour increased significantly and became an asset that both men and women could use to their advantage while looking for a better quality of life.

Moreover, it was not only the costs of labour that went beyond the expectations of emigrants arriving in New Zealand; the prices of not only luxuries and manufactured goods but also of raw materials were much higher than in Britain, which put additional strain on the finances of even the wealthy settlers. As Georgina Bowen complained to her father and sister in the letters sent during the first six months that the Bowens spent in New Zealand:

You would laugh to see the various huts, tents, and barracks the passengers high and low are at presented located in, and all the rough they have to do. We must only try to keep up and hope that things will improve by degrees – of course those with the most funds have the least difficulties and will get on the fastest – everything to be paid for at enormous price especially labour – carpenters are getting a shilling an hour and all in proportion. [...]

The land was chosen on the 17 February as advertised and we have got our section but alas while others are building their houses for the winter we are obliged to stand still for want of funds and shall have to meet the change of season without any preparation until our funds come out – we shall be in a truly trying position in every way.

This colony requires much more money than the various representations led people to suppose. (Porter and MacDonald 87-8)

The high cost of various commodities levelled the differences in communities as only a tiny minority of the richest colonist did not have to struggle with its impact on their budgets.

In addition, the severe shortages when it came to the availability of trades people and house servants had an unintentional equalizing effect on the whole society. For instance, middle- and upper-class women brought up to be managers of household staff had to get out of

their comfort zone and get involved in everyday chores, which back in Britain belonged to the domain of working-class women. Moreover, frequently they had to come up with creative ways of dealing with the problems caused by limited supplies or lack of funds. Mary Ann Martin, wife of Chief Justice William Martin was one of these women who took to the tasks of homemaking with ingenuity and the sense of self-reliance. In her diary she recounts the measures she undertook to create domestic comforts out of any materials she could obtain. As a result, packing cases and empty boxes were turned into dressing tables, washstands, ottomans and lounges that were in short supply. Mary had a strikingly positive attitude as she tried to use anything she could to create her new home: “A little white muslin and pink calico, and chintz cushions stuffed with scraped flax, made a handsome show” (Martin 12).

The hardships accompanying setting up homes in the colonial conditions continued as women faced the challenges connected with satisfying all the basic needs of their families from cooking and washing to finding materials for new clothes or linen. These everyday matters required flexibility and the ability to adapt as Lizzie Heath, a widow with an infant son who came to New Zealand to an arranged marriage, explained in a letter to her sisters:

Housekeeping here is very different to at home for one not only has to do everything but has to make things to do things with, such as making yeast to make bread for there are no shops here one can send to buy any, any numbers of other things in the same way. It is my aim not to waste a thing. I dry and bake every feather for feather beds and pillows are thought a great luxury here ... and the hops that I have made beer from I wash and dry and make mattresses and cushions of ... We cannot get fresh meat when we like so when we do get it I am anxious to make varieties ... I salt some and spice some and make sausages and pot some. Then when we get fresh, cure some so as to keep something of all sorts by me. So what with these sort of things and my every day work, besides mending and washing, I find it necessary to plan out my day's work before I rise. (Porter and MacDonald 172)

As the experience of the extensive and demanding housework was shared by practically all women across the social classes it is possible to state that it constituted one of the initial elements which contributed to the growing sense of solidarity among New Zealand women. In the decades leading up to the introduction of female franchise in 1893, the spartan living in a majority of settlements started to gradually level out the differences especially between female colonists of various social backgrounds as they struggled with the lack of funds and supplies that affected many British people in New Zealand. As a result, even though New Zealand islands were much more sparsely populated than Britain, social interactions tended to be more vigorous due to the fact that contacts between people were less hampered by the constraints connected with social or financial status.

Emily Cumming Harris who came to New Zealand with her elderly father and her sisters, Ellen and Frances, technically belonged to Nelson's "society", but the financial standing of the family was precarious which, back in Britain, would put her outside the mainstream of communal activities. In New Zealand, however, the situation was completely different as Emily remarks in her diary: "I often think how very different our position here is to that of persons in England with a small income. There, unless they had a great many relations, they would only know two or three families. Here, there are always more than fifty families where we can call – all people better off than we are ... I do not say that we are better off than we are ... I do not say that we are better off for knowing so many people but it is pleasant" (Porter and MacDonald 181). Even in the case of the highest echelons of the local authorities the tendencies of mingling with representatives of various social strata were clearly visible and even promoted. In one of the entries of her diary Emily enthusiastically describes a novel approach to entertaining and organizing parties introduced in Nelson by the wife of the Governor:

25 SEPTEMBER Last week a notice appeared in the Evening Mail that Lady Onslow wife of the Governor would be 'At Home' on Wednesday afternoon at four o'clock. Of course there has been an immense discussion as to who should go and who ought not to go ... I settled the matter to our own satisfaction in this way. If Lady Onslow only wished to select a few of the Nelson upper ten to call upon her she would not have put the notice in the paper as these people would be sure to call, but as the Governor's wife she wished to extend her invitation to a much larger number of persons and so I considered that our being so poor was no reason why we should not go ... It was not as if we tried to push our way among people we did not know; it was a sort of duty we owed to ourselves, and so we decided that I should go to represent the family as I had the most decent looking dress and bonnet ... There were a great many people there, just those I expected would go. It was more like a garden party than a formal call. Most of my friends were there and I enjoyed it much. (Porter and MacDonald 172)

Not only did these social conditions incite the creativity of women, but strengthened the ties between people of various backgrounds and classes.

Still, these new rules that started to govern the social life in the New Zealand colony did not mean that settlers' communities had a uniformly egalitarian character. To the contrary, class divisions still played a significant role, as is evident in Emily's account and the way she is unsure how to approach the invitation issued by the wife of the Governor. Both she and her family were quite concerned with social niceties such as the appropriateness of assuming that they can attend the gathering and the lack of suitable visiting clothes which clearly demonstrates their attachment to the social etiquette prevalent in Britain. On the other hand, Emily had enough of openness of mind to allow herself to adjust to the novel conditions and enjoy the possibilities offered by a larger and more diverse social circle. It was women like Emily

Cumming Harris, brought up in the strict confines of British Victorian society, but also eager to partake in the variety of options offered by New Zealand society that constituted the main force behind the future movement promoting enfranchisement of women.

Notwithstanding, the relative flexibility of New Zealand social norms was not to everybody's liking. Some of the colonists, including women, found the relaxing of the bonds of class strictures too grating and, in some cases, impossible to accept. Surprisingly enough, it was the inability to assimilate and not the harsh and trying conditions in the colony that seemed to be one of the most important reasons behind the decisions that saw some of the early colonist abandon New Zealand in favour of the return to Britain. For instance, Louisa Rose who came to Christchurch with her family in 1852 was happy to be preparing to go back to Britain after barely three years. In a letter to her sister, Constance, she wrote:

You may imagine how unsettled we feel and how much there remains for us still to do, paying farewell visits to all our Ch'ch acquaintance (not one of whom I regret leaving except the Gressons and Miss Richard) is of itself a long business and of course it must be done.

Elizabeth and Mary [servants] both return with us which is a great comfort ... Conway [Louisa's husband] is now... helping Maria in all the kitchen work. I wonder sometimes how Conway will get on in England with the servants, they are on such a different footing here with their masters and mistresses to what they are at home but the change will be delightful at all events. (Porter and MacDonald 91-2)

Thus, Louisa Rose represented those female migrants who clearly found the porous nature of social boundaries in New Zealand uncomfortable and unsatisfying.

For a majority of women settling in New Zealand, however, the colony was quickly becoming synonymous with the sense of much greater freedom than had ever been known to them. The development of this conviction can be partly put down to the flexibility and wider variety of social interaction, but to even bigger extent to the greater physical mobility and the wildness of the landscape, which became factors that boosted women's confidence and contributed to their life quality. After Maria Richmond joined her brother, painter J.C Richmond, in New Zealand in 1853, she described her impressions of the country in a letter to her friends in the following way:

It has just occurred to me that I have never distinctly said how I like this country ... I may have failed to express the intensity of satisfaction I feel in this new home ... I can say most emphatically that I am disappointed in no single particular, that as far as I can see we acted most wisely in coming here. At the same time I do not think I should dare to advise or persuade anybody to come out. You find people calling the climate execrable because the sun does not shine perpetually, and because when it does blow or rain it does it in good downright style. You find also people who don't see any beauty in the place because there are not country lanes, hedges, pretty little villages with church spires dotted about. In a perfectly new country you of course miss the finished garden-like appearance that years of cultivations can alone

give ... but how the absence of these things should blind people to the loveliness before their eyes I cannot understand ... I am able to enjoy a great many scenes here that most women never see because few are so fond of scrambling about as I am. I grow fonder and fonder of the Henui every time I go to it. (Porter and MacDonald 89-90)

Overall, even though New Zealand did not offer the comforts of strictly established social patterns or luxuries common in Britain and was, therefore, not an ideal place for those who could not handle the stress of a complete upheaval in every aspect of their lives, for ambitious women, struggling against the restrictions imposed on them by patriarchal stereotypes, New Zealand conditions were inarguably stimulating. What is more, the wild landscape of New Zealand, untouched by the exploitative agricultural practises, could inspire in many of female colonists a sense of freedom and incite a desire to explore, which, by extension could incite the process of formation of new individual identities.

In an entry of her diary, Maria Richmond encapsulates the essence of this enormous change in women's situation:

11 NOVEMBER At present I cannot see any reason for growing intellectually or morally sleepy in the colonies. I certainly have never felt so wide awake as I have done since I landed in New Zealand. The wonderfulness of the change, the ease and certainty with which one traverses such wastes of water, the suitability of almost all our party to the new situation, the feeling of coming home, as it were, to a country wanting you, asking for people to enjoy and use it, with a climate to suit you, a beauty to satisfy and delight, and with such capabilities and possibilities for the future. The thinking over all this and a hundred other things of this nature is enough to make the most sluggish nature 'feel spirited'. (Porter and MacDonald 90)

Maria Richmond's reflections on the way the perceptions of freshly arrived British women were being transformed practically from the onset of organized emigration to the new colony give us an insight into the uniqueness of New Zealand conditions, which encouraged women's participation, initially in the social and, subsequently, in the political spheres of activity. "Feeling spirited" that Richmond refers to can be interpreted as a symptom of a much greater self-confidence and belief in the future options that New Zealand women were developing in the new society. Moreover, on top of interactions and the rules that were created within the settlers' communities women were confronted with the patterns that already existed among native Maori tribes.

Despite the fact that many of the settlers were influenced by stereotypes according to which Maoris were uncivilized and their traditions could not be considered to be worth following, due to the close proximity in which two groups lived and cooperation and trade that developed quite naturally between them, the intercultural contact was inevitable. British women were bound to notice the intuitive gender equality common among Maori communities and,

even if they harboured a conviction the superiority of British culture and civilization, they could not help but be inspired by the fact that Maori women could not only own property and choose their own partners, but they also held positions of authority in their society. The complexity of these relations finds its reflections in the diaries, journals and letters that women wrote describe the reality of the nineteenth-century communities of New Zealand.

3.2. The coexistence of British colonists and Maoris: from land disputes to intermarriage

In the first few decades of permanent presence of British colonists in New Zealand the attitudes towards the Maoris displayed by women arriving to settle down in New Zealand can be broadly divided into three main groups. Some of the earliest emigrants who came as members of Christian missionary churches considered it their mission not only to convert Maori tribes but to “civilize” them by introducing British rules and traditions, with a total disregard for the values of the native culture. Women played a particularly important role in this process as they were expected to attempt to “seek every opportunity of influencing the Maori women” (Stock 215). What is more, the CMS officials at Salisbury Square issued official instructions according to which a missionary wife “should rank with those honourable women of old who laboured with even Apostles in the Gospel” (Stock 215). That kind of metaphorical ranking alongside the apostles, without, however, undermining the supremacy of their husband’s authority, gave missionary wives an enhanced status. According to Frances Porter: “with this sense of vocation went a conviction that they would walk confidently among the ‘poor heathen’ under the guidelines of their Heavenly Father” (55). What is more, however, as the efforts at conversion undertaken by the missionaries’ wives were based on close everyday contacts with Maori communities, they were regularly exposed to native beliefs and traditions, which tended to make them if not more appreciative than, at least, more understanding of the local tribes’ way of living.

At the same time, other female British colonists, whether they arrived in New Zealand individually or as members of a family were in a more difficult position as they could not rely on the power of absolute convictions displayed by Christian missionaries. Instead, all they were left with were stereotypical images of Maori tribes depicted by British journalists and writers of the period. For a majority of them this lack of reliable information meant that they approached contacts with natives with a large dose of apprehension, distrust and even fear which resulted in limited and stilted contacts between them and the local populace. Their

mistrust was exacerbated by the constant skirmishes and armed conflicts of greater magnitude between the tribes and the colonists caused by disputes over the ownership of land that plagued many of the New Zealand communities throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Finally, the last and the least numerous group consisted of women who were capable of looking beyond the simplified message concerning Maoris that colonists were provided with and considered Maoris to be interesting and their culture and traditions fascinating. It was these women who were the most likely to be influenced by the way Maoris organized their communities but it was not until a generation later that the actual intermingling, including marriages between British women and Maoris actually begun.

Missionaries were among the first waves of permanent British settlers in New Zealand, therefore most of the accounts of the Christianizing and “civilizing” efforts penned by their wives encompass the period between 1840s and 1860s when the rules governing the new colony were still in the state of flux and the living conditions of the pioneers spartan. Despite these factors, it is difficult to find texts by missionary wives which focus on the hardships of the reality they found themselves in. Instead, even the ones who were known to be of frail constitution or burdened with taking care of large families were convinced of the higher purpose of their presence in New Zealand and devoted a lot of time and effort to the introduction of British ways into the structure of Maori communities.

One of these women was Sarah Selwyn, the wife of the newly appointed Bishop George Augustus Selwyn who in 1842 arrived in New Zealand to become the first ‘Mother Bishop’ of New Zealand. According to various accounts Sarah Selwyn was not of robust health and was not particularly sociable by nature. Despite the frailty of her health and the fact that she colonial life was not easy for her as she did not hide her preference for peace and solitude, Mrs Selwyn approached her duties as the wife of the first Bishop of New Zealand very conscientiously as is evident both in her letters to friends and family back in Britain and in a diary that she kept throughout the twenty five years that she spent in New Zealand. Contacts with the natives and the civilizing mission among them were, from the start, an integral part of what she perceived to be her main duties. Even before she arrived at Paihia she took time and effort to learn the basics of the Maori language in order to try to make an instantaneous connection with the native populace. As she remembers in one of her letters when she and her husband arrived in New Zealand: “The Maoris gave us a hearty welcome, ‘Haere mai, Haere mai Mata Pihopa’ – ‘Come here, come here, Mother Bishop’, the whole party pressing round to shake hands which was a long process. I felt shy at airing my Maori learning before such numbers and indeed the business

in hand, or rather hands, left little time for further amenities, there was such a forest of them on either side” (Drummond 102).

That is not to say that Sarah Selwyn had much desire to immerse herself in Maori culture. To the contrary, she tended to interpret a majority of their behaviours and reactions through the lens of a stereotype which portrayed Maoris as uncivilized and childish. For instance, a few months after her arrival in New Zealand, Sarah criticized the lack of chivalry among the native tribes:

The natives used chiefly to bring their articles to sell on Mondays, a sort of Market day, but before business, they always came to Church. After Maori custom, the women were the beasts of burden to carry the heaviest loads, a huge basket of potatoes perhaps, while her stalwart lord stalked by her side with one fowl perhaps, or nothing! George demurred to this fashion so matters were reversed next time, but the rogues still made the wives do the heavy work and only changed when close to Waimate! (Drummond 105)

The bishop’s wife did not hold Maoris’ intelligence and work ethics in high regard and saw herself as role-model and a teacher who was tasked with improving their imperfect lifestyle. After the Selwyns set up their house in a typically British Victorian style, Sarah was happy to invite representatives of the local tribes to visit her home in order to incite them to start imitating “the civilized way of living”. The results were mixed, as she admits herself in an entry of her diary where she expressed her frustration about the fixation that her guests developed on the prints of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert as well as Madonna with the Infant Christ and Saint John the Baptist:

This picture excites the greatest interest and admiration among the Natives. At present we are all the fashion, being new, and having many things to shew and they always like new comers. The Prolixity or rather minuteness with which they relate one to another all that they see, and hear is marvellous. All ask for the same things and all the new ones seem to know all about the things they are shewn, and like children like to see everything in the same way in which it has been made known to them. I shall be glad when a regular method of intercourse with them has been organized, and when they shall come for some better purpose than ‘just to look’ as they say. All this desultory work does no good to them at all, and only helps on our knowledge of their language. (Drummond 106-7)

The cultural clash was clearly exacerbated by the lack of reliable means of communication, however, the greatest source of friction stemmed from the fact that Maoris and their way of perceiving the world were considered to be inferior.

Sarah Selwyn considers idealness and the lack of enthusiasm for the British way of organizing physical labour as the main reasons behind the amount of time and effort Maoris are willing to devote to fruitless activities. “They will not, I hope, ere long have quite so much spare time upon their hands as now they have,” she comments. Moreover, even though in the next

paragraph she acknowledges the deep appreciation that the natives appear to have for various forms of art, she finds it incongruous in the case of the native tribes whom she perceives as savage and uncivilized. “They always appear to be ready for literary pursuits I must say,” she notes “but any continuous labour is apparently distasteful” (Drummond 107). What is more, her opinions seems to be reinforced by the traditional clothing that practically Maoris she comes in contact with wore:

For the most part they wear Blankets gracefully thrown on, but sometimes huddled up over their shoulders, leaving the legs bare, as they like to have many folds round the neck wherein to bury their nose. It has an odd effect to come upon a party sitting (on their heels it would seem) in a circle with their noses hidden and only the black eyes and tattooed brows to be seen above. The blankets are commonly very dirty. Sometimes they wear native mats and in wet weather the N.Z Macintosh is always to be seen: it is either a shaggy mat looking as if made of porcupine quills, or like an old door mat. (Drummond 107)

The only time when the Maoris’ actions met with at least partial approval on the part of Sarah and her husband is when their code of behaviour followed the rules of British culture. One of such occasions was connected with Sunday services when the locals willing to convert attended the church: “Many of them have European clothing and on Sundays more than half the Congregation are in coats, waistcoats – some of the ladies in bonnets and shoes, unless it rains. It is a most pleasant sight to see these people at Church and to hear them repeat the responses. Such perfect time do they keep, so completely in unison are their voices that the sound is as the measured tread of a large body of men” (Drummond 107). Still, the appreciation can only go so far as Sarah once again deems Maoris and culturally inferior and incapable of producing genuine art on their own if not provided with a proper template: “Their singing is hideous, albeit they have some good voices among them, but they introduce a twang of their own, which is enough to spoil any harmony. Their perceptions of beauty are limited if they exist at all. They have no word in their language to express it. I wonder what effect a handsome building, a real Church properly adorned would produce” (Drummond 107).

Sarah Selwyn is also quite open about the strategy that the early British colonies employed to gain influence over the native tribes and convert them to the British way of living. Apart from setting up churches and schools for the local children, the efforts of the local authorities focused on the tribal chiefs and elders who could sway the opinion of the rest of their communities. For instance, Sarah relates the way the authorities in Wellington harboured a careful relationship with the notorious chief Rauparaha examples of which she witnessed while visiting the capital:

It was a populous place and we were much inspected by the inhabitants. An early morning School went on after the daily service in the chapel, a school duly attended by the great chief Rauparaha, who was one

of the Maori leaders in the Wairau, and was exceedingly hated by most of the English Settlers. I am not prepared to say how much he learnt, but he showed goodwill by coming, also he kept a sharp look-out on the rest of the class to keep up their attention and he certainly liked the English breakfast afterwards. The very hostile feeling towards him made him shy of the Settlers but not of the Bishop. He seemed to wish to be on friendly terms with the Colonists now. (Drummond 123)

However, despite the concerted efforts on the part of the authorities to convince Maoris to adapt to the British way of living, in many cases the cultural differences between the two groups proved to be too significant to find a constructive method of cooperation.

Moreover, the wives of the prominent officials of early colonial New Zealand tended to approach any misunderstandings or arguments with the natives with unwavering sense of superiority which resulted in the unwillingness to compromise or, at least, to understand the point of view of the opponents. Even the women who seemed to be sympathetic to the plight of Maoris. like Mary Ann Martin, the wife of New Zealand's first Chief of Justice, William Martin who was known for her active interest in bettering of natives' lives², described numerous incidents of such miscommunication in her book *Our Maoris*, which focuses on her efforts among the native population. For instance, she recounts a dissolution of a school for girls due to the discrepancies in the cultural perceptions:

We had a large girls' school near us, built by the Government on Church land. Many of the pupils came from the East Coast, 200 miles' distance, to be under the care of their old, loved missionaries, Archdeacon and Mrs. Kissling. We tried to get some children from Waiheke, and William Jowett and others entrusted five little girls to 'Mother's' care. But after a while the mothers came up and found their girls doing some little bits of house-work, and went back in high dudgeon to say that they were being made slaves of, and must return. So the fathers came up by canoe the next morning. The children were having lessons in our house, looking bright and happy in their print frocks and white aprons, with their hair smooth and glossy. We used every argument with the men in vain, and at last I cried out in despair, 'Why do *you men* listen to your wives in this way?' One of them, with a droll, sheepish look, caught up a bit of wood, and whittling it to a sharp point, which he prodded against his hand, said, 'Mother, your words are just; but, you see, though women's words are not powerful, they are very sharp, and they go on – on – on.' So we lost our scholars. (Drummond 169)

It is striking that even Mrs Martin, who devoted a lot of time and attention to the creation of numerable schools where both European and Maori girls could gain education equal to the one that British boys were provided with as a matter of course, acknowledged and kept to certain

² Throughout her stay in New Zealand Mary Ann Martin built a remarkable, if largely forgotten, reputation as a modest pioneer in social service. In the year of her arrival in New Zealand she organized Auckland's first hospital – a cluster of *raupo* huts and a blanket tent on the lower slopes of the bay. Here Maori patients were treated with simple remedies under homely conditions. Five years later a native ward was open by the Auckland Hospital, but it was difficult to persuade the Maoris that treatment by a qualified doctor had its advantages. Here with 'Mother' it was cheerful and comfortable, Maori was spoken and they wanted no better treatment. (Drummond 141)

tenets of the patriarchal stereotype. For her, the most shocking aspect of the situation connected with the withdrawal of Maori girls from one of the schools was the fact that it happened due to a decision made by women which Maori men did not dare to supersede. Despite the fact that Mary Ann Martin was an educated woman, who read French and history with the daughters of the earliest colonists in Auckland, and, without doubt had her own tastes and opinions, she seemed to consider her husband's authority to have automatic precedence over her wishes. What is more, it was almost inconceivable to her that men of other cultures, especially Maoris who were considered to be fierce and indomitable warriors, would even consider submitting to the will of women for whatever reason.

Still, as Chief Justice's wife, Mary Ann had also a keen sense of the importance of instilling the regulations of British law in the new colony both among the colonists and the natives. When it came to this aspect of New Zealand reality, Mrs Martin was aware and, seemingly, more accepting of the fundamental differences between the two cultures that had to be reconciled in order to work out a consensus:

It was wonderful to see how much strong commonsense our New Zealanders had, which restrained them in times of wild excitement. They had from the beginning of the colony shown reverence for law. When the Judge was returning home through the bush, in 1843, he stayed for two days at Taupo, in the heart of the country, and had much talk with a grand old heathen chief, named Te Heu-heu. He was a man of huge size and height, and of commanding presence. He had ten or twelve wives, was a regular autocrat, and was looked up to with awe by all the people of the district. He was very civil and friendly, but did not disguise his opinion that our laws were unnecessarily cruel. 'Why do you keep a prisoner for days and days awaiting his trial? If any one commits a crime here, I knock him on the head at once. Then, too, you put people in prison for such small things. Now, Judge, listen to me. If a man were to dare to take one of my wives or take this' (pointing to a beautiful hatchet made of green stone, and highly polished, which he carried in his hand), 'I should kill him, of course, at once; but if he pilfers little things, I take no notice,' and he drew himself up with an air of contempt at our 'mean white' notions of justice. (Drummond 165)

Even though Mary Ann Martin does not comment on Te Heu-heu's opinions, it must have been thought-provoking to be faced with a point of view which placed British culture and traditions in the position of the less civilized way of living. It is characteristic of the comments made by the wives of the early British officials in New Zealand that Mrs Martin does not choose to try and prove the superiority of the British way or belittle the chief's way of perceiving law and justice but limits herself to an objective account of the meeting between two men of authority representing the two communities. That kind of approach was a direct result of the sympathetic perspective on the Maori culture that these women developed over time as they interacted with the natives in various areas of everyday reality.

Eventually, despite the differences between the groups, some missionaries' wives developed a healthy dose of respect for Maoris which inspired them to advocate the fair treatment and negotiations in conflict situations. Bishop Selwyn's wife Sarah went as far as expressing criticism of the way the British government was treating the natives:

I do not pretend to justify the Maoris in all that followed from the Waitara purchase ... but here is the matter which George [Bishop Selwyn] feels so very strongly ... viz: of rushing into a bloody quarrel without trying all other methods of settling the dispute first; assuming that the natives are rebels before they have done one single thing to prove themselves to be so, and denying them the ordinary privileges of British subjects which the Treaty of Waitangi declares them to be. Would the Governor [Gore Browne] have so dealt with any Englishman who had resisted his authority and the Queen's authority – proclaimed martial law and sent off an army and navy at once to bring him to reason? I trou not. He would have had him up before the Court and let the law do its part. And why not here? ... Oh! We are sinking so low in the eyes of the Maories. Where is our good faith? Where are our assurances that the Queen would never do them wrong? It is a foul shame to mix up her name and lower the respect they are quite ready to pay her, with miserable degrading land jobbing ... It goes to the heart to see a noble race of people stigmatized as rebels and drawn to desperation by the misrule of those who are at the same time lowering their own people in their eyes. (Porter and MacDonald 121-2)

In addition, Mary Ann Martin expresses her indignation about the way the British government is trying to shape public opinion. In a letter to her friend, Mary Anne Palmer she compares Maoris to other nations suppressed by the British authorities over the course of centuries::

It is remarkable even now while *The Times* calls these fine people 'savages' and the *Guardian* dismisses them with a jaunty sentence to be exterminated like all 'savage races'! that the New Zealanders show such a singular temper and forbearance. Were they half as savage as Highlanders or Irish two hundred years ago, or less, they would have poured down in might upon our out-settlements, killed the men and harried the cattle. But these men meet – speak – deliberate – send messages to the Governor, and shew marvellous respect to law and order. Their forbearance too under the bullying and incivility of many of our uneducated settlers is most remarkable, and this the newspapers here begin to point out. (Porter and MacDonald 122)

Thus, she puts forward a claim that it is invidious to brand the local tribes as "savage" when they prove repeatedly that they are more than capable of being equal partners for political dialogue.

Unfortunately, these were predominantly only the wives of missionaries and other high-ranking British officials in New Zealand that tended to display such an open and accepting attitude towards the local tribes as they had the closest contacts with the local populace. On the other hand, for many the settlers, whose interactions with Maoris were limited to occasional trade, the armed conflicts that were regularly breaking out in various areas of both islands constituted a serious threat and were, therefore a reason for the deepening mistrust displayed

towards the natives. Admittedly, the colonists equally expressed their eagerness to see the end of conflicts as Mary Ann Martin notes in the ending of her letter to Mary Anne Palmer: “One comfort is, the people in the town [Auckland] take quite a different tone about the war. They are eager to see it come to an end. For why? Trade is at a standstill, emigrants hurrying away by every ship, merchants and shopkeepers bankrupt, prices very high” (Porter and MacDonald 122). What Mrs Martin fails to notice, however, is the fact that the uncertainty of the situation caused by the conflicts with the natives incited hostility towards both, the British officials and the Maoris on the part of the settlers, who worried about their own safety and the safety of their families. As a result, the anxiety and stress connected with this situation led some of settlers to voice opinions which tended to exaggerate all the negative stereotypes of the native population of New Zealand. For instance, Fanny Dillon, the wife of a New Zealand Company agent in Nelson, complained in a letter to her sister Lilly about the actions of the British government but for a complete opposite set of reasons to the ones expressed by the wife of the Chief Justice, Mrs Martin.:

They will give us no protection. The government at Auckland is both imbecile and weak; they treat Rauparaha like an independent sovereign instead of one of the Queen’s subjects and we are told not to resist him. The Maoris are very cunning and very treacherous and never to be depended on either for good or bad. If they promise friendship they may be sincere at the moment, but if any of them get up and make what they call korero, or talk, they instantly change from friendship to murder... (Porter and MacDonald 109)

Claiming that the officials were too indecisive in their treatment of the Maori tribes and did not employ the necessary harsh measures, Mrs Martin no doubt expressed a widely shared attitude.

The outlook on the nature of Maoris that Fanny Dillon presents in her letter is strikingly different to the image of a noble and intelligent race presented by Sarah Selwyn and Mary Ann Martin, as Dillon clearly considers them not only to be savage but also duplicitous, which makes them threatening and impossible to negotiate with. These two contrasting views that existed simultaneously among the British settlers in New Zealand in the early years of the colonial development demonstrate how confusing and, at the same time, exotic Maoris and their traditions must have been to the Europeans who arrived in New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth-century. What added to the confusion was not only the fact that native customs were completely strange and, frequently, impossible to reconcile with the Victorian values, but also the way in which the stories about natives circulated in the community. Even the members of settlements situated in close proximity to Maori villages tended to limit their contacts with their native neighbours and relied on the accounts of others to form their opinions on the intricacies of Maori social and cultural structures. One example of such a misinformed depiction of Maoris’

practises can be found in the reminiscences of Mrs Elizabeth Caldwell who lived in the area of Golden Bay in the 1860s:

I could scarcely estimate the number of the native population then residing in Massacre Bay [Golden Bay]. One night however, my eldest son who was an especial favourite with them and who understood their language pretty well, went down about six miles to Paramahoi a well known Pah where Edwin Stanton and his father the old Duke of York were chiefs. Tom counted 200 of them, male and female, the women are as talkative as the men, more so indeed they never seemed to doubt their right to the franchise in this parliament. There were long speeches for and against the propriety of joining in the rebellion against the Pakeha, and they did not arrive at a settlement, but left it an open question which did not add to our peace of mind, and as we had been that the Maoris always as a preliminary massacred their best friends, there was considerable reason for anxiety. (Porter and MacDonald 122)

Even though Mrs Caldwell was basing her opinions predominantly on the experiences recounted to her by one of closest members of her family, the overall image of the patterns of behaviour of the Maori community that she depicts in her memoirs is a mixture of facts, exaggeration and obvious fabrications and hearsay. What strikes her the most is not the fact that the supposed “savages” employ democratic mechanism of a political debate to decide about such serious matters as involvement in armed conflict, but the egalitarian character of the process which allows both genders to weigh in on the results of the talks. At the same time however, she is willing to believe a slanderous rumour which, illogically, places Maoris in the position of mindless beasts that turn on their friends at a slightest provocation.

This kind of contradiction reflects the complexity of the relationships between European settlers and Maori tribes caused not only by the problems connected with the disputes over the ownership of land but also the fundamental differences in cultural and social structures that existed between the two groups. Female colonists in particular, whose direct contacts with the natives were limited to occasional and superficial incidents, were bound to rely on other people’s accounts and opinions to create a frightening if not entirely accurate image of their Maori neighbours. Still, on the other hand, among the deluge of misinformation, they were exposed to some accurate information on the diverse living style of Maoris, which, in some cases, could give some of the freshly arrived British women an opportunity to start questioning the established Victorian social patterns they were used to back in Britain.

For many female settlers the cultural differences between the two communities were a source of fear and anxiety, but for a certain group of young and frequently ambitious young women, Maoris and their culture continued to be fascinating or even inspiring. First of all, they were frequently surprised by the quickness with which the natives incorporated elements of the British style of clothing and the way of behaviour into their everyday lives. For instance, Miss

Alice Lees who came from England to join her brothers who were sheep farming on the Teanaraki run shared her observations on the local tribes in a letter to her sister Kitty:

There are no Maoris about here, and the few who pass through the town are like southern Europeans, very handsome, they might easily be mistaken for Italians, and the young men dress like English University boating men. I don't mean with cap and gowns, but with perhaps a dark blue jacket and white mufflers and white straw sailor hats. Today we passed 2 old Maoris driving a spring cart. They always greet you with a smile and 'How do you do?' You may fancy how civilised Maoris are when I tell you that one old chief in the North became bankrupt, and passed through the court, just like other people not very long ago! (Porter and MacDonald 100)

The fact that Alice Lees finds the few Maoris she comes in relatively passing contact with attractive can be seen clearly in the way she describes the young men. In addition, the comparisons that she draws between the natives and the English gentlemen and the claims about all the elements of European culture that they have adopted, serve as a distinct attempt at legitimization of her admiration which, otherwise would be unthinkable. According to the Victorian standards, it would be impossible for a young, unmarried woman to express any kind of appreciation for savages, but if the natives were "civilized" to such a degree that they could be easily compared with their European counterparts, it would be less of a transgression to start to perceive them as potential future partners.

When the missionaries started to settle in New Zealand they promoted the idea of Christian marriage among the Maori population, but were generally against the intermarriage between the settlers and the natives. As in the first few decades of the development of the new colony practically all the European arrivals were men, the interracial relationships of this period involved solely Maori women. Some of the reverends like, for example, Henry Williams and Samuel Marsden actively refused to formalize such marriages as they considered the relations between the two races as going against the Christian values especially in the cases when women were not baptized. As the need for consolidation and strengthening of the European presence in New Zealand became more pressing, however, the support for interracial marriages gradually became one of the central points of the officials' strategy for advancing colonization. That is not to say that the official acceptance of intermarriage was a symptom of a suddenly developed tolerance on the part of British colonial authorities, as the officials were simply looking for the ways of furthering the agenda of the colonial state by encouraging positive relationships with the well-established mixed European-Maori families. As historian Angela Wanhalla notices in her article on race and ethnicity in New Zealand the advantages of such policy were obvious as men who forged intimate relationships with Maori women were an invaluable potential source of political information. In addition, as there existed a legal link between marriage and land

settlement, officials were sympathetic when it came to the investigation of the claims of white men occupying and cultivating land obtained by intermarriage. This practice, cultivated extensively in the 1840s and 1850s resulted in the Maori woman and her tribe losing control over the land and Europeans gaining even stronger foothold in the new colony (45).

Even though the marriages between white settlers and Maori women gradually became an accepted part of colonial reality in New Zealand, the possibility of relationships between white British women and Maori or mixed-descent men went thoroughly ignored by British officials. The notion in itself seemed to be inconceivable and impossible on both sides, as South Island Native Officer Alexander MacKay claimed in his 1881 census report. According to him, Maori men's "habits and modes of life preclude the possibility of intermarrying with Europeans" (Wanhalla 65). His estimation was not entirely accurate, however, especially when it came to Otago region in the South Island where possibilities of interracial marriage, in particular, between mix-descent men and British women actually increased when the settlement started to grow and expand in the 1870s.

Still, it is a fact that cultural and racial prejudice played a significantly limiting role in the increase of the number of intermarriages between white women and Maori or half-Maori men. For instance, when Agnes Reid married James Palmer, a mixed-descent man from Maitapapa in Dunedin in 1888, her wealthy farming family not only refused to attend the ceremony at Knox Church but also completely excluded the young couple from their circle. However, when it came to the marriages of that type, there were also wider economic and demographical factors that came into play. In general, native men had to be mobile in order to follow work opportunities which was not conducive to courtship, especially outside their immediate community. What is more, despite the influx of men caused by the gold rush in the area of Otago, in the 1881 there were 161 men to every 100 women in New Zealand, which meant that British female colonists had a privilege of wide choice when it came to the choice of a life partner and tended to prefer men from their own cultural circle.

Still, there were some European women in Otago region who, against expectations, formed lasting relationships with men of Maitapapa community. Among them was, Helen McNaught, who married George Brown at Henley in 1889. Helen, who was born in Scotland arrived in New Zealand in 1880 alongside her family and settled in the North East Valley. Other examples include Ellen Payne who arrived in New Zealand in 1874 at the age of six and married Thomas Crane, in 1888 and Mar List, who left London at the age of nine, arriving in Dunedin with her family in 1874 and married George Palmer in 1882 (Wanhalla 66). These women were exceptionally open-minded as they were under much more social pressure than their male

counterparts and faced potential exclusion from both European and Maori communities. Angela Wanhalla comments that in contrast to their male counterparts, who arrived in Dunedin during the 1840s and 1850s as single adults, majority of women travelled to New Zealand accompanied by their parents and siblings. That meant that their choice of marriage partner was much more likely to generate social disapproval, especially in their familial circles. The only such couple to have lived in Maitapapa for a lengthy period were George Brown and Helen McNaught. (67).

Even though there were relatively very few interracial long-term relationships between British women and men of Maori descent in the late nineteenth century New Zealand and they faced plenty of intolerance and even social ostracism, their example served to demonstrate that the two cultures could not only coexist, but also find enough of a common ground to merge, at least on a personal level. What is more, at least these few British women who made the decision of marrying native men were introduced to some of social structures and customs of Maori communities which must have made them realize the restrictiveness of the patriarchal Victorian stereotypes they were brought up with. In a world where one of the primary aims for newly arrived female settlers was to get married and set up a family the interracial couples were a living examples of the fact that there existed models of union between men and women that afforded both parties more freedom and equality. It was another of the factors which added up to boost New Zealand women's confidence and helped them in their future fight for recognition and equal rights.

3.3 The eligibility of women in New Zealand: from redundant females to colonial helpmeets

As a significant number of British women of various ages made their decision to emigrate to New Zealand in the hopes of finding a suitable husband and setting up a family it is possible to find numerous examples of letters and diary devoted to the subjects of courtship and finding a suitable partner. Undeniably, just like in Britain, marriage was one of central focal points in the lives of female colonist, the dynamics between the genders, however, was markedly different. While in the mid-Victorian British society the surplus of women of marriageable age contributed to the creation of the term "redundant women", in New Zealand the situation was reversed. In the new colony, throughout the nineteenth century, men outnumbered women by a significant margin which meant that all women were not only certain to find a husband, but had a much more power when it came to the acceptance or refusal of a potential proposal.

The redundancy in itself was a complex phenomenon and stemmed from a wide variety of elements that determined social conditions in Victorian Britain. What is more, it frequently determined the position that women could hold in the community. As Nan H. Dreher comments in her article on redundancy and emigration:

Redundancy had both tangible (statistical) and intangible (ideological) components. The 1851 Census initiated sex statistics and counted an excess of 500,000 women in Britain. This surplus was attributed to structural factors, including male emigration and employment abroad, higher male mortality, and a later male age of marriage. The well-known shortage of women in the settlement colonies then combined with these factors to inspire ideas of female emigration to achieve a balance. Yet in a British population of 20 million, the female surplus amounted to only 2-3% overall, only 10-15% of whom were middle-class. More significant were revelations that two-thirds of women aged 20-24 and one-third of women 24-35 were unmarried. Single women were not new to British society, but their increased numbers and visibility produced additional social unease in the newly established middle classes, which insisted on marriage for women. (4)

Therefore, redundancy was hailed as one of the ‘social evils’ by mid-Victorian society and debated extensively in the contemporary periodicals as it resulted in the social and economic marginalization of a large number of women, especially those belonging to middle-class. As, according to the patriarchal stereotype the separation between public sphere of male activity and private female sphere were supposed to be complete, those women who did not marry “failed in business” and paid work was “in default of a legitimate business for life” (Hollis 11). In addition the women who could not find suitable partners had to face a stiff competition for available positions. “The respectable alternative for single women, the governing profession, was oversupplied and underpaid. Reports circulated of hundreds of applicants for a single position”³ (Dreher 4). That only made pressure exerted on Victorian British women even more pervasive and the possibilities offered by the social dynamics in the new colony more enticing and empowering.

That is not to say that the institution of marriage lost its relevance completely in New Zealand. In fact, many rules and considerations remained similar to social expectations in other parts of the British Empire and was connected with multiple expectations and rituals. According to Frances Porter choosing a spouse for Pakeha families was a complicated and serious process involving a fine balance of considerations – feelings, prospects, an assessment of qualities, religious affiliations and constitution. Moreover, majority of these elements were practically

³ The Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women, an employment agency operated by Jessie Boucherett, reported 810 applicants for a position paying £15 per year, 250 for one paying £12 per year, and recorded 120 visitors to the agency in a single day (Rye in EWJ, November 1861 165).

unknown at the time of engagement. Even though marrying “well” for the sake of wealth or position was no longer acceptable, marrying primarily on the grounds of “being in love” was also frowned upon. Neither emotional or sexual compatibility were not principal basis or even prerequisite to marriage. It was assumed that “love” would be something to develop after marriage takes place, as a matter of course (188).

It is undeniable, however, that in New Zealand demographical reality it was not women but men who were much more determined to find a potential candidate for a spouse. Equally as in the case of women in Victorian Britain, the colonists in New Zealand were motivated not by romantic notions, but by practical aspects of the life in the new land. In fact, the handbooks for emigrants advised their male readers to marry before they set out for New Zealand, predominantly because of the difficulties they were likely to encounter in finding a suitable partner once they arrived in the new land, but also on the grounds of the fact that “a wife was undoubtedly a more valuable asset in the business of successful settlement than a plough” (MacDonald 140). The reality was that single men in New Zealand struggled to function without the help of a woman who would help them to deal with a majority of everyday domestic tasks of preparing meals, keeping a house clean and in order, as well as washing and mending clothes. Single men, had only two alternatives of performing these chores themselves or employing somebody to do it for them which made functioning in the colony considerably more difficult (MacDonald 141).

In some regions of New Zealand the shortage of young, eligible women was so pressing that there appeared calls for governmental intervention. For instance, in 1870 a letter was sent to *Otago Witness* by a male reader who introduced himself as ‘A Bachelor from Balclutha and insisted that the authorities should

inaugurate a marriage office in connection with the Labour Exchange; for I assure you, sir, that there are hundreds of worthy and respectable single men working in various parts of this country who are desirous of getting married and settling down, but have not the slightest chance of becoming acquainted with young women with a view to marriage, because of the nature of their calling. Mayhap they are shepherds, whose only companions are their faithful dogs; or a lonely digger delving away among gullies and ranges in search of the glittering metal. Their life is indeed a lonely and monotonous one. No kind word or smile greets them on their return from their daily toil. It is for such as these that I would suggest some such medium as I have mentioned. I am well aware that this idea will hardly be in accordance with our preconceived notions of courtship; but then the conditions of these involuntary bachelors are exceptional, and I fear that if some such system is not adopted many of us will soon merge into the sear and yellow leaf without a helpmate to cheer and sustain us during our declining days (*Otago Witness*, 24 Dec.1870 3).

Still, even in the new social reality of New Zealand, some of the male emigrants did not seem to realize that the dynamics of relationships between the genders in the colony placed women and not them in the position of relative power. For example, as early as 1853, Grace Hirst, who came to New Zealand with four daughters of marriageable age and had two young female cousins living with her family, in a letter to her sister Martha Bracken went as far as quoting a whole message sent to her husband by one Mr Arthur Remmington. The young man quite obviously saw himself as an attractive potential husband for one of Hirst girls:

Dear Sir,

The subject of this communication will doubtless somewhat surprise you. I am desirous of obtaining a domesticated wife and I wish to enquire whether I may be permitted to visit at your house with a view of paying my addresses to one of your daughters. Should you think favourably of my proposal I will do myself the pleasure of calling upon you and fully explaining my views and position. May I beg you will consider this note as strictly private and allow me to subscribe myself,

Yours very faithfully

Arthur Remmington

I called the six young ladies from their domestic duties and read the note to them, of course not mentioning the name. If you could have heard the screams of laughter (Porter and Macdonald 222).

Both the way in which the would-be suitor presents his case and the reaction of the girls to his note clearly demonstrate that the British patterns of courtship and the male-cantered approach to the institution of marriage could not be sustained in mid-nineteenth-century New Zealand. Mr Remmington did not seem to notice the fact that impersonal and transactional tone of his letter was highly inappropriate in the reality where any unmarried woman of practically any age could choose between two or even three suitors. On the other hand, the amusement with which the Hirst girls reacted to his proposal gives an indication of the awareness of the power of choice that the new colony afforded them. Women no longer had to be glad of any marriage proposal which, regardless of the value of a candidate, would help them avoid the dreaded status of a “redundant woman” but could reject outright those men who, like Arthur Remmington, objectified them or did not have much to offer much in the way of comfort or security.

That is why in New Zealand men found themselves in a situation which forced them to strive to impress not only their intended partners, but their families as well, which constituted an experience that stood in a direct opposition to the well-known patriarchal Victorian patterns. In nineteenth-century Britain, a family with a large number of daughters was in a precarious position of trying to attract the attention of a few eligible bachelors while simultaneously staving off frequently fierce competition, whereas in New Zealand, even in the case of couples who mutually wanted to enter the bound of matrimony, it was up to the male suitor to prove

that he had enough means to support a wife and prospective offspring at a risk of rejection on the part of the family of the intended spouse.

For instance, when, in 1842, Henry Tacy Kemp, the eldest son of the pair of respected CMS missionaries at Kerikeri, James and Charlotte Kemp, courted Maria Wilson, the younger sister of John Wilson, CMS missionary at Opotiki, he initially got rejected. The reason for this rejection was the fact that despite a good standing of his family, Henry did not have an independent income, which resulted in John Wilson questioning not only his suitability to get married but even his piousness and morality. It was only after Henry Kemp got a government job as an interpreter, which came with a house and the income of £300 a year, that John Wilson had a sudden change of heart and approved of his sister marrying him. Maria, who had been housekeeping for her brother since his wife's death in 1838, reacted to his brother's decision in the following way, describing the state of affairs in a letter to her friend, Charlotte Brown:

Mr Kemp has got a situation of nearly £300 per annum, house, etc. This quite authorises our being married and you will be happy to hear that John has of his own accord made the first advances towards reconciliation. He is quite agreeable to our being married. You do not know, my very dear friend, what weight this is off my heart. He told me yesterday that 'if he could have been sure that Mr K. was a pious young man, he should never have opposed it'. I feel so happy now that I have talked to him about Henry. What a change, is it not; it showed me how good the Lord has been to me in answering my prayers for, my dear Mrs Brown, you little know the state of anxiety my mind has been in ... My brother told me ... he wished us every happiness and blessing and that we should never want a friend as long as he was in the land (Porter and Macdonald 238).

On her part then, Maria did not dare to go against John's wishes, but was more than relieved when he changed his decision.

On the other end of the spectrum of conflicts connected with the marriages in the new colony were the situations which ended with disappointment for the women who still had to contend with the opinion of their families. Despite a wider variety of opportunities offered by New Zealand society, in many cases, these were still male relatives that had the last word when it came to the actual marriage. Especially in the first few decades of the development of European settlements, it was generally perceived as a natural course of things, because women were frequently deemed to be incapable of making important choices for themselves and, therefore, in need of firm guidance. In fact, allowing young girls too much freedom when it came to the choice of a potential spouse tended to be heavily criticized not only by men by older, married women used to patriarchal standards.

One of examples of such criticism can be found in a letter written by Mrs Helen Wilson to her friend Donald McLean in which she was commenting on the situation of one Annie

Flight. Annie, the daughter of a New Plymouth magistrate Josiah Flight, set her mind on marrying James Hirst, who proved to be impulsive, quarrelsome and unpredictable. Her family then intervened and refused to give their consent to the marriage. According to Mrs Wilson they did it too late, which was detrimental to the well-being of the young girl who refused to give up on the object of her affection and, consequently, had to be sent away, in an attempt to make her conform to her parents' wishes (Porter and Macdonald 238).

Nonetheless, despite the fact that it is possible to find cases of New Zealand marriages that, with mixed results, followed the rules outlined for both genders by Victorian patriarchal patterns, for a majority of couples the process of courtship was generally devoid of dramatic overtures and marriages were entered into willingly on both sides. Moreover, as the new society was developing quite rapidly, the number of marriage ceremonies could seem quite overwhelming for some residents. For example, in 1859, Helen Wilson wrote in another letter to Donald McLean: "Just now the rage for weddings is very strong in this our tiny Province. Sam King's [provincial registrar] pens are nearly worn out signing licenses [...] If the folks go on at this rate you government people must get more land for the province or we shall get overstocked with children as well as sheep and cows!!!" (Porter and MacDonald 241). In reality, however, according to statistical data, between 1860 to 1880, only around three-quarters of women above the age fifteen in New Zealand were either married or widowed and just over a half of single female emigrants married at least once after disembarking.⁴ What is more, despite the high demand for young, eligible girls and the fact that "while women were able to marry from the age of twelve (men from the age of fourteen), very few did so before the age of sixteen; the numbers begin to increase significantly only from the age of eighteen" (Pickens 184).

What is more, according to the study of Canterbury marriages between the years 1851 and 1877 conducted by Keith Pickens, women in New Zealand were marrying at only slightly younger age than their counterparts in the United Kingdom to men who were, on average, several years older. While, in mid-nineteenth-century England women married for the first time at around twenty-four, in Scotland at twenty-five and in Ireland at around twenty-six years, Picken's research, based on the sample of over 2,000 marriages, reveals a mean age at first marriage for women of 22.3 in the 1850s and 23 for both the 1860s and 1870s, with equivalent figures for men of 26.8, 27.2 and 27.9 years. The study also demonstrates that relatively few Canterbury women married before they turned twenty one (Pickens 184) Drawing on Picken's

⁴ According to survey conducted by Charlotte MacDonald, in the same period (1860-1880) more than half (2,293) of the 4,028 married at some point after arriving in New Zealand.

results Charlotte Macdonald concludes that the distinct patterns when it comes to New Zealand marriages in the decades from 1840 to around 1880 are not entirely explicable with strictly demographical data. She argues that while the disproportion of married men and women is a direct reflection of the underlying imbalance between women and men in settler population it does not entirely account for the age at which people chose to marry. Taking into consideration the fact that there was a large number of eligible men and women in New Zealand tended to be younger, it is striking that the age at which women married for the first time was not lower, and the proportion of young marriages not greater than it was (Macdonald 138-9).

One of the reasons behind the fact that a relatively large percentage of newly arrived European woman did not rush into early marriages was connected with the greater social mobility and opportunities offered by the new colony. As most colonists were motivated by the urge to find better conditions and, therefore, possessed traits of character which allowed them to choose to leave their country of origin and face a very real possibility of spending the rest of their lives in an unknown country, they were also more prone to depart from traditional expectations, including those pertaining to marriage. New Zealand women seemed to approach the option of marriage with a great deal of suspicion, which was in keeping with the ideas that were the initial inspiration for their emigration to New Zealand. As they were strongly motivated by the desire to improve the quality of their lives, it was unlikely that they would jeopardize attaining their ambitions by entering the restrictive matrimonial bonds too hastily. Independence and mobility afforded to them by their single status allowed them to seek employment options which, at that moment of New Zealand history, were abundant. Overall, even though full economic self-sufficiency was practically impossible to secure for most young women, they definitely did not have to rely on marriage for security (Macdonald 139).

In fact, during that period, many of predominantly middle-class women started to openly express doubts about the very structure of Victorian style marriage which envisaged joining two people based on their social and economic status and not on personal preference. For instance, Hannah Richardson who came to New Zealand with her parents in 1859, mused on this topic in her diary as she commented on the marriage of their servant, Jane. Even though Hannah was partially deaf and could not fully participate in the ceremony, certain elements of the proceedings impacted her deeply and inspired her to draw certain strong conclusions about the nature of the life-long commitment:

Mother did not go into the room during the ceremony; I did, I heard not a word of the prayer or passages of scripture I did hear them do 'I declare you man and wife and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder'. This quite upset me. I felt as if it were something horrible instead of an encouragement –

something like an imprecation or a doom pronouncement. I cried so and was glad to get out of the room as it was over. I daresay the ceremony would be beautiful to two people entirely suited to each other. I should not have the dislike to it were the words used to me and my brother but I cannot like it when two parties who know nothing of each other's opinions or feeling jump into such a bond. It ought to be the strongest affection alone to induce people to make such an engagement (Porter and Macdonald 240).

The controversial reference to the close relationship Hannah had with her brother shows that her perception of the institution of marriage went far beyond the constraints of the Victorian patriarchal stereotypes. Instead of focusing on social aspects of marriage, she clearly put more emphasis on the spiritual and emotional connection between people, which indicates quite a modern approach.

It is possible to surmise that Hannah's attitude was, at least partially, developed thanks to the unique New Zealand conditions which offered women more opportunities and allowed them to raise certain expectations when it came to marriage. It is especially visible in the she criticizes Jane, their former servant, for rushing into a relationship just to take an advantage of a chance to improve her social standing in the next entry of her diary:

Mother and I walked as far as Mr Sutton's and Mrs Sutton was sitting as fine as a fiddlestick. She really looked very neat and nice... Jane had on her best black head dress, her silk apron with six rows of velvet... and her best thin boots. The little parlour is very neat – a nice stove it is and bright fire on, the floor covered with black and white oilcloth. She has made a most excellent marriage I think, much better than she could have done at home...

Jane has never thanked mother for the trouble she took with her in making all her dresses, bonnets etc, or for turning the whole house upside down to give her a marriage party. She evidently takes it as a matter of course, as nothing more than she deserved. I consider Mother did far more for her than she deserved. Her passage cost us £35 and she has stayed with us six months and served us after a fashion for Mother was always working and actually helped with the washing. If Jane had any grateful feeling towards us she must have shown it. I think the least she could have done would have been to offer to come to help with the washing while we had no servant (Porter and Macdonald 240).

Clearly, Jane, a working-class girl who, thanks to the shortage of women in New Zealand, got a chance to marry "above her station" felt empowered by the fact and no longer felt subordinate to her former employers.

Immediately after the wedding, she found it natural to place herself on equal footing with the Richardsons, which would be unthinkable in mid-Victorian Britain. On the other hand, Hannah, despite the hopes and aspirations that she herself associated with New Zealand, could not help but feel quite a bit of resentment over what she perceives as ungratefulness and even presumptuousness of a woman who went from their inferior, socially and economically, to a mistress of her own, well-established household within few short months. Obviously, besides

the new opportunities and inspiration that the social flexibility characteristic of New Zealand community offered female colonists arriving from Britain it was also not devoid of sources of tension as boundaries were crossed and habits broken. It was inevitable that the sudden social advancement of thousands of working-class women had to incite negative feelings as it was perceived as a threat to the stability of social order and social standing of other classes. Once again, however, the living conditions of New Zealand, which forced close cooperation of all the settlers who had to rely on each other in various areas of everyday life, mitigated significantly the negative aspects of the social upheaval that was transforming New Zealand communities throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition, as all women were empowered when it came to the choice of whether to enter the bounds of matrimony or not, they were also equalized when it came to the nature and functioning of their relationships.

3.4 Marriage and divorce in nineteenth-century New Zealand

Despite a clear shift in the dynamics between the genders when it came to courtship, during the early decades of the nineteenth century “marriage was an economic partnership between a providing male head of household and a husband-tending and house-tending; it was the only legitimate place for sexual connection, and it formed the core social and residential unit” (Porter and Macdonald 253). In theory, the functioning of New Zealand marriages was supposed to reflect the values prevalent in Britain, the reality, however, was quite different and shaped the interactions between the genders. As both the North and the South islands were sparsely populated, many families lived in remote and isolated locations which, on the one hand, enforced close companionship between the spouses but, on the other, meant long periods of separations as men habitually travelled for business or in search of seasonal work. New Zealand was also, undeniably, a more dangerous place than Britain which made stability less attainable for majority of married couples. “Sickness, flooded rivers and shipwrecks made wives into widows at any age. Failure in business left families without means; goldfields and other new ventures drew husbands to distant ports, leaving wives to cope as they could” (Porter and Macdonald 254). What is more, as practically all the colonists had arrived in New Zealand in search of a better and potentially happier life, they were notoriously unwilling to persevere in a marriage which fell short of fulfilling their expectations, which, in some cases, tended to result in women being abandoned to fend for themselves and, frequently, for their offspring.

In addition, the status and functioning of New Zealand marriages were shaped not only by internal conditions, but also by the social changes affecting the Western world in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald by the of the century both male and female expectations towards marriage were beginning to shift. The changes introduced in law gave women unprecedented degree of control over their property and income. Pakeha families in New Zealand started to reduce the size of their families, which started to separate sexuality from reproduction and eventually led to the emergence of the idea of “modern marriages” based on sexual relationship and a companionable reciprocity (254).

Before “modern marriages” could become the norm, however, female colonists had to cope with the realities of the new colony which put them in unfamiliar and challenging situations which shaped not only their behaviour but expectations and ambitions. Geographical separation of spouses, which was among the most universal experiences for the New Zealand couples, rapidly became one of the defining elements for British women arriving at the new colony. For some, the solitude and the responsibility that arose from it, turned into a source of inspiration for attempts at independence, while for others, it was, unfortunately, exceedingly overwhelming, as they struggled to adjust to life that required stepping outside the constraints of the patriarchal stereotypes.

A prominent example of a woman belonging to the second group was the wife of Donald McLean who worked as government land purchase officer. Barely six weeks after their wedding in 1851 Donald had to resume his duties, which required him to travel extensively around both islands, leaving Susan to spend most of her time at her parents’ house, caring for an ailing mother. The only companionship that Susan could rely on was provided by the couple’s only servant, Jessie McKenzie, which left her feeling vulnerable and helpless. She expressed these feelings as well as her strong love in letters that she sent regularly to Donald:

I must write you a few lines this evening as it was this day six weeks that I became your wife and happy weeks they have been to me. Indeed they were the happiest I ever spent in my life, I can scarcely yet believe that it is reality that nothing but death can part us, it seems to be too much happiness for me, I trust however that I shall always be grateful to that God who has blessed me so much and I hope my own dear husband that we may never forget Him but serve Him with our whole heart through life... As I was sitting this afternoon at work beside Jessie in the kitchen I began to think of you and wonder if it was possible that you would be out in such stormy weather, the thought of this made me feel in low spirits and I was foolish enough to walk into the parlour and sit down and cry which was foolish I must acknowledge but you must forgive your little slave for indulging in such foolish fears. It is indeed a great comfort that I have Jessie with me she prevents me from feeling very lonely and she is as careful of me as you would be... (Porter and Macdonald 273)

It is clear that Susan was aware of the fact that her reliance on her husband bordered on excessive as she uses the word 'slave' to refer to herself in relation to her spouse. Moreover, as she repeatedly describes her own behaviour as "foolish", it is possible to surmise that, despite her passionate feelings for Donald on some level, she resents the dependency that she needs to dutifully submit to in order to fulfil the requirements of patriarchal stereotypes.

On his part, Donald McLean perceives himself as a protector and authority figure for his wife, which reflects his fundamental belief in Victorian dynamics between genders. He feels himself entitled to instruct Susan, in minute detail, not only on the way she should behave and the company she should keep but also on what she should feel and think:

Do dearest take care of yourself during my absence. Avoid being out after sunset, and above all do not spend time in idle gossip or talk. It is not rudeness to employ yourself at something more profitable than to listen to others' failings and misfortunes. Keep yourself above such folly and be not influenced or controlled by any person excepting Papa and Mama. Their advice you should always receive with the respect due to their age and experience independent of their being your affectionate parents... I trust your prudence will enable you to discover that any ladies who urge or advise you to do anything against your inclinations [are] not worthy of your acquaintance one single day longer after tendering such advice. I know you are easily led from a fear of giving offence, but as a married woman you must not relinquish a certain dignity and respect which is due to your station and which can only be upheld by well-regulated prudence and discretion on your part (Porter and Macdonald 274).

In some of his letters, Donald McLean goes as far as addressing his wife, who was pregnant at the time, as if she was a child. For instance on the 14th of January 1852 he wrote: "When pussy [Susan McLean] gets home she must take care not to lace her stays too tightly otherwise I shall be very much displeased with her. Remember your promise yesterday, pussy, and do not foolishly persists in injuring yourself from a most foolish desire to appear small waisted and genteel. Nothing is more ridiculous and ill-judged, therefore, give it up" (Porter and Macdonald 274). That is why, women like Susan McLean, despite being in stable relationships that gave them safety and stability frequently were unable to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the new colonies, as they were kept in the traditional roles of wives who were considered incapable of acting efficiently anywhere outside of the domestic sphere, especially not without the guidance and protection of their husbands.

On the other hand, some of the women, especially those who came to New Zealand with their husbands found the periods of separations to be inspiring as they were discovering that they were perfectly capable of functioning in the community without the immediate assistance of their spouses. It is especially visible in the case of the marriages in which the affection between the partners was limited or lacking altogether. Examples of such women include the

wife of Governor George Grey, Eliza who, initially, felt distinctively abandoned and resentful when the duties of running the colony took her husband away for long periods of time. It was not long, however, before she started to reassert her right to be treated as an independent adult. Soon after their arrival in New Zealand in 1846, she described her situation in letters to her friend, Maggie Watts:

The Governor is away again cruising about I know not where. I begin to think he is growing very fond of going about as a Bachelor – he has passed ten weeks of the 19 of our stay in New Zealand as such.

I am living in such a little bit of a cottage about as large as Mrs Hutchinson's only not nearly as comfortable and nice. I lead a most quiet lonely life – though I have a great many visitors, but as I am obliged to listen more than I wish to, they are not so entertaining as they might otherwise be. [...]

It is a dark stormy night and every sound resounds through this long wooden building. Luckily I am not a very nervous person and I am getting quite callous about my husband's leaving me here. If [I was] only advanced a little more in years so as to be more independent and less talkable about I should be better off.

The natives look upon me with great contempt calling me a mere child (Porter and Macdonald 270).

It is important to remember, however, that despite physical dangers and frequent lack of luxuries and even everyday comforts, by the mid 1860's New Zealand offered one of the highest standards of living in the world. (Dowie 124) Therefore, women, separated from their husbands for long periods of time and forced to take on new duties and challenges, could draw additional satisfaction from the fact that their independence could extend to the betterment of the financial standing of their families. According to Raewyn Dalziel: "Both working class and middle-class women could expect a high degree of material rewards to accompany their duties. In performing these duties many colonial women found self-respect and satisfaction they had failed to discover in their earlier lives" (117). As a result, female colonists, who had experienced severe restrictions when it came to various aspects of social life in Britain, were given a chance to enjoy not only more extensive variety of matrimonial opportunities but also to discover their skills and capabilities when it came both to private and public spheres.

Jane Maria Richmond was one of these middle-class women who found fulfilment in both areas thanks to the New Zealand conditions. She arrived in the colony in 1853, at the age of 29 when she was already considered to be a spinster. Back in Britain her chances of finding a suitable husband were practically non-existent, as she possessed none of the accomplishments that were desirable in a young, eligible lady. In her letters to family, Jane admits that she was not comfortable in her circumstances in Britain as she could not play the piano in a style worth listening to, neither could she sing or paint nor do anything "elegant in a satisfactory manner". In New Zealand, on the other hand, not only did she get married within a year from her arrival

and had children, but also revelled in the new-found sense of purpose she found in the colonial way of life:

I am afraid I have the soul of maid of all work, and whether I shall ever be anything better seems doubtful ... but I consider myself a much more respectable character than I was when I was a fine lady, did nothing for anyone but made many people do things for me. The worst part of the life for me is that it makes me fearfully conceited, I am so proud at finding how easy it is to be independent. Lely [her mother] talks about not being able to bear my being a slave, but I really feel myself less a slave now that I see I can do everything for myself, than I ever did before. When my pantry shelves are scrubbed, and it contains ... a round of boiled beef, a roast leg of pork, a rhubarb pie, 1 5 large loaves and 8 pounds of fresh butter ... I feel as self-satisfied and proud as mortal can. ... I am much more in my element here than I ever was before (Scholefield 133-4).

Moreover, it was not only the area of the domestic sphere that brought Jane Maria Richmond profound satisfaction. In her other letters that she sent to Britain till the end of her life, it is possible to find traces of intelligent and lively interest in all the areas of the colonial life. She readily comments on the current developments in literature and art as well as social, political and economic developments and politics.

In the last few her decades of her life, Jane became an ardent supporter of not only of the creation of secondary schools for girls, but also of the campaign for granting women the right to vote. In fact, in the early 1890s, at the age of almost seventy, she became one of the speakers at several of the large suffrage meetings that preceded the passing of the female franchise by New Zealand Parliament. That is not to say that Jane Maria Richmond was a feminist who considered the abolishment of the boundaries between the private and public spheres a matter of the utmost urgency. To the contrary, as Raewyn Dalziel comments, Jane Marie was firmly entrenched in the familial values and believed that women's "own special functions" in the world included the roles of wife and mother. Therefore, her support of education for women and wider vocational training in professions such as nursing, was not extended with the intention of promoting enabling them to compete with men but to give women more tools to fulfil their role and mission (118).

The example of Jane Maria Richmond clearly demonstrates that for a majority of early New Zealand women the involvement in politics derived from the sense of self-worth and fulfilment that they could develop thanks to opportunities encountered in the new colony. The initiative that they took in order to support their families in the periods of their husbands' absence gave them the confidence to try and shape the legislation of the colony to reflect the unique importance of women for the community. In addition, apart from learning how to be

self-sufficient the female colonist also learnt the value of cooperation with other women, which helped them to organize the associations which promoted the emancipation of women.

The spirit of cooperation that suffused the communities of the British colonists was especially important in the situation when women were forced to take care of their families when they became widowed. As accidents were commonplace in all areas of New Zealand industry, any woman had to be prepared to deal with permanent solitude in case her husband died suddenly. Surprisingly enough, a large number of the early female colonists who found themselves in that particular position did not decide to seek shelter with family or friends back in Britain, but chose to stay with their new communities in New Zealand, which is the testament to the strength of the net of support that existed among the colonists, especially among women. It is possible to find examples of both young wives with children to support and elderly women, living in New Zealand in the second half of the nineteenth century, who believed in the possibilities offered by the new colony and felt that they could count on the help of others to such an extent, that under no circumstances could they imagine going back to Britain. As Lizzie Heath wrote to her sister Anne after her husband, Charles died without leaving many provisions for his wife and two young sons:

But what should I do [in England] to keep myself and children? I must either put the dear little things out to nurse and take a situation which would be very bad after having had a comfortable home, or I must struggle and work at my needle and keep them with me. The living is so much more expensive there and you are so governed by fashion whereas here everything is thought fashionable and everyone can wear what they have without being thought peculiar ... *Lizzie considers running her own store at Kaipara*. I ought not to flinch from working hard to make the best of what I have and although for a year or two I may have the feeling my little is going out and still less coming in I feel sure in time I shall be able to make it pay (Porter and Macdonald 333).

Lizzie Heath was an educated middle-class woman who analyzed all the aspects of the life in the new colony before making a rational decision to stay in New Zealand.

It is important to remember, however, that it was women of all walks of life and social spheres that preferred not to go back to Britain after they became widowed. What is more, for some of them staying in New Zealand was more instinctual and based on the predominant sense of hope for a better future. One of such women was Mary Coster who came to Nelson in 1842 with her husband John, enticed with the stories according to which “the pigs in New Zealand grew fat on wild peaches, and waddled about helplessly, simply asking to be killed” (*Tales* 142). As John had been a valet in London and did not know anything about farming, the couples’ life was initially much less idyllic than they had expected, but with the help of their neighbours, the Redwoods, the Costers managed to settle down comfortably in a little

community of Waimea West. Unfortunately, soon after they welcomed their first child, Agnes, John volunteered for the unit that went out help out the surveyors in Wairau Valley and became one of the victims of the Wairau Massacre. Within one short year Mary had become a wife, a mother and a widow. Later in life, as she recounted these events to her granddaughter, Mary spoke of the great kindness of her neighbours which helped her decide to stay in New Zealand:

Mrs Redwood found me work to do [...] so that I could be independent and earn for myself and my baby girl; and perhaps this was the best of all. But I was very sad and unhappy, and must often have been a trial to live with. A neighbour would sometimes come and sleep with me to ease the loneliness. News travelled slowly in those days, and it was over a year before an answer could come to the letter telling my mother of John's death. Then one day in the spring, when I was nearing my twenty-first birthday, it came, and was filled not only with loving words, but also with money for return passage to England. Many tears I shed over this letter. I longed for my mother, but I could not leave the country where John lay buried. Perhaps I would send the baby. She was such a dear, happy, healthy little thing, and I knew mother would love her (*Tales* 145).

Eventually, despite the hardships that she was certain to face, Mary decided to keep her daughter with her in New Zealand proving her resilience and the belief in a better future that she could build for them in the new colony. She was correct in her predictions as her granddaughter summed up the events of her life after Mary passed away: "Some years later my Granny married again and brought up a big family, and before she died, in her 90th year, she had the satisfaction of seeing her descendants carrying on the work of the country in every branch of the building trade, farming, commerce, the teaching profession, and in various departments of Christian effort" (*Tales* 146).

For some of the colonist women, however, the challenges connected with the solitary and independent existence were brought about not by the death of their husbands but by the dissatisfaction and disagreements that drove the spouses apart. As many of the early New Zealand marriages were quite hastily arranged it was inevitable that some of them eventually "encountered troubles which could not be contained by duty or the surrounding social, legal and religious framework. Wives did not always find their husbands to be faithful, sober or reliable companions, or adequate providers. Husbands did not necessarily find their wives satisfactory life companions" (Porter and Macdonald 258). On the one hand, the success of a nineteenth century marriage was not considered to depend on the happiness of an individual and strong sense of duty frequently kept the spouses together long after the affection or attraction ran its course. Still, in New Zealand where the opportunities for starting a new life were what attracted many of the colonists in the first place, both genders were less likely to accept the unsatisfactory or abusive relationships.

However, as men were generally more mobile and could enjoy greater financial independence, it was much less complicated for them to make a decision to separate from their wives. As Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald comment: “Colonies offered many temptations to husbands inclined to stray, to venture, to slip off the shackles of domesticity, to search out opportunities for greater fortunes” (259). In the case of married women the situation was significantly more complicated as it was much less acceptable socially for a female to leave her spouse in an effort to start a new, happier relationship. On top of that, due to the fact that most married women were, to a large extent, financially dependent on their husbands,⁵ they tended to be more cautious when it came to the severance of the marital ties. That is why, even though there existed numerous routes out of a failed marriage, inevitably, they were, inevitably, much more accessible to men. As wives were legally and financially dependent on their husbands it was incomparably more difficult for them to find secure independence. On the other hand, husbands were relatively free to act towards their wives as they pleased or abandon them with little external restraint. Still, by the end of the century, a limited range of means was developed which allowed women to find a way to establish a livelihood after the dissolution of their marriages (258).

Until 1867 the only way for a New Zealand citizen to become legally divorced from their spouse was to apply to the English courts, which was a costly and time-consuming procedure, in practice available only to the richest strata of the society. In 1868, New Zealand Parliament passed the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act which made it possible for the applicants to go through a hearing at the Supreme Court in Wellington. Still, official divorce proceedings remained an unpopular option for the colonists⁶, partly because the regulations which were introduced in the act reflected the double standards when it came to the treatment of genders. For instance, all a husband had to do in order to have grounds for divorce was to prove his wife’s adultery. In the case of a wife applying for a divorce, however, a proof of infidelity on the part of her husband was merely a starting point as the circumstance had to be aggravated by documented cruelty, assault or other factors in order to be considered a valid cause for a dissolution of a marriage. For all these reasons, even though the legal option for

⁵ Before 1860 married women had no power to own, control or dispose of property. The statement ‘my wife and I are one and I am he’ reflected the legal situation for all but a tiny minority of wealthy women whose family funds were protected through a property agreement in equity law. Laws introduced in 1860 and amended in 1870 and 1884 gave married women a greater degree of control over property – the most important being the 1884 Act. While this change was of significant benefit to married women who ended up living apart from their husbands, from whatever causes, the general situation of married women remained one of substantial economic dependency. (Porter and Macdonald 260)

⁶ In 1868 there was one petition for divorce. In 1900 there were 111 (teara.govt.nz).

divorce was introduced in 1867, throughout the nineteenth century the cases of divorces remained relatively rare as the whole procedure was expensive and was connected with public exposure in the courts. That is why, couples who wanted to enter new relationships tended to do so outside the law taking advantage of mobility that was possible in the nineteenth century through regular coastal, trans-Tasman and international shipping (Porter and Macdonald 259).

In some New Zealand communities the issues connected with the abandonment of wives became so severe that it became necessary to create organizations that provided financial help to these women who struggled to support themselves and their children. The Onehunga Ladies, the Otago Benevolent societies, church societies and the early charitable aid boards were among the first to offer any form of systematic aid to destitute women. (Porter and Macdonald 260). Still, not all the female colonists who fell on hard times due to abandonment could count on the assistance from state charities as their regulations reflected the Victorian principles which distinguished between “deserving” and “undeserving” causes. It was relatively difficult for many of women whose husbands were erratic providers or the ones who left their philandering or abusive spouses themselves to prove their need (Porter and Macdonald 260).

First of all, in order to be able to apply for the help of a charity, they had to go through a prolonged court procedure to try and force their husbands to pay support, which in most cases proved to be ineffectual. Just one of many examples, Sarah Pickering of Wellington went to court, on several occasions over the course of 1888 and 1889 in an attempt to get her husband, Matthew, to provide for her and their seven children. *Evening Post* reported on the outcome of one of her appeals on the 1st of August 1888:

Constable Grey last evening arrested on warrant a man named Matthew Edward Pickering, who was charged upon the complaint of his wife, with having failed to support his wife and family. The defendant was brought before Mr. Robinson, R.M. this morning when the complainant deposed that she had seven children, six of whom were under the age of 12 years. Her husband had only a short time since come out jail for refusing to provide for his family. Work had a short time ago been found for him by the Relieving Officer but he had refused it. In reply to the Bench the defendant said he had ‘nothing particular to say in defence’. His Worship – ‘six months’ hard labour’ (Porter and Macdonald 323).

Even when the authorities could trace the men who had made the choice to abandon their families it was exceedingly difficult to get them to take responsibility for the well-being of their dependents as custodial sentences did not serve as a deterrent. That is why, just like in the case of widows, it was the local support of other women that the wives who found themselves abandoned, could fall back upon most reliably. This situation continued until 1894 when the

Destitute Persons Act was passed by Parliament.⁷ It was this piece of New Zealand legislation that attempted to protect women from physical and economic abuse that became one of important means to fully legalize their independence and address the traumatic experiences that frequently led to their establishing independent households.

The law itself was introduced partly due to the spate of applications for protection and maintenance orders that the abandoned wives were filing in New Zealand courts in the 1870s and 1880s. It took tremendous courage for many of them to admit and describe in detail the experiences that led to the dissolution of their marriages. For instance, Frances Hamilton who applied for a protection order against her former husband in Magistrate's Court in Wellington needed to establish a separate financial identity in order to borrow money for setting up a business. In order to do that she had to tell the court about her marriage that, for all intents and purposes, had finished seventeen years earlier:

My name is Frances Winder Hamilton I am the wife of David Gavin Hamilton formerly of Geelong. We were married at St James's Church in Melbourne on the 20th June 1854 and I subsequently resided with my husband until about July 1864. I think the 15th July – I woke suddenly in the night and found my husband standing by the bedside with an opened razor in his hand apparently about to cut my throat – I jumped out of bed and fled to a neighbour's House. This was I think on the night of the 15th July 1864 – I have never seen him since. I have from that time to this earned my living by my own industry. Before this event occurred on that night, my husband had been drinking. He had been for some time drinking heavily and continually illtreating me. He had beaten me. He once caught me by the throat. He several times previously to the 15th had threatened to murder me – and I was in fear of my life – I do not know where my husband is, I have not previously asked for any protection order I do so now because my brother-in-law has offered to lend me a sum of money for business purposes if I get an order for protecting my property but will not do so otherwise. (Porter and Macdonald 320)

It is striking how much the applications submitted by Frances Hamilton and numerous other women in similar situation diverge from the nineteenth-century image of female respectability. Even though, it was still late Victorian age which constrained genders with strict expectations and restrictions putting women firmly within the domestic sphere, the petitions for protection and maintenance orders which kept appearing in courts all over New Zealand in the last few decades of the century were a clear indication of the fact that a sizeable percentage of female population could no longer fit into the frames of the patriarchal stereotypes. On average, it was not ideology that inspired these women to seek an official confirmation of their financial and

⁷ Under section 22 of the Act a wife could charge her husband with abuse. Several applications under this law are included. The provision was extended when replaced two years later, in 1896, with the Married Persons Summary Separation Act. This effectively dissolved marriages by releasing wives from the legal obligation to cohabit with their husbands and by giving them protection over person and property (Porter and Macdonald 318).

personal independence, either, as there are no references to the fashionable “New Woman” concept that was perceived as a threat in many circles of the society. To the contrary, in a majority of cases, the court petitions included solely stories of women who had been put in trying circumstances. More often than not, they had been subjected to physical, financial or emotional abuse by their husbands but managed to find a degree of normality on their own merit. The purpose of the court hearings was to not to champion the cause of emancipation of women, but to gain an acknowledgment of the circumstances that the female plaintiffs found themselves in when they were abandoned or separated from their spouses. In this respect the introduction of the new laws protecting women’s right to independence was another example of how the conditions of the new colony were gradually influencing outlooks on reality and social standards that could no longer be confined within Victorian patriarchal standards.

Moreover, it was not solely the cases of obvious and unacceptable abuse that met with the resistance of New Zealand women in the second half of the nineteenth century. While in the late-Victorian Britain male indiscretions tended to be glossed over as it was expected of married women to ignore or, preferably, accept her husband’s extramarital affairs⁸, in New Zealand the situation was more complex as women were equally likely to separate from their spouses over issues of infidelity. It was true even in the case of conservative couples who were outwardly advocates of the sanctity of the institution of marriage that the trial of an extramarital affair frequently ended in separation or divorce.

One of examples of such outcome was the notorious case of William and Elizabeth Colenso in the 1850s. Born in New Zealand to a couple of CMS missionaries, Elizabeth Fairburn married William Colenso, who was a member of CMS church himself, in 1843. By all accounts it was a marriage based not on affection but on the mutual belief in the importance of the CMS mission in New Zealand as William Colenso recalled in his *Autobiography*: “Nothing was more clear and plain to me at that time than this – that we two had no love for each other; still I hoped, aye, I fully, firmly believed that mutual affection would surely follow, for all I wanted was a suitable partner, particularly in mission work – this was ever uppermost and this I had plainly told Miss Fairburn in my first letter” (Bagnall and Petersen 150). Passionate as he was about his faith and duties connected with the mission of Christianization of the natives, Colenso was also known for his difficult disposition and lack of social graces which was noted

⁸ According to most popular marriage manuals of the Victorian era, practically all men were inherently predisposed to constantly and selfishly satisfy their needs, the need to prove their masculinity being among the prominent ones. For example, see Elizabeth Lanfear’s 1824 book *Letters to Young Ladies on Their Entrance into the World* (71-72).

from the moment of his arrival in 1843. He was conscientious, energetic and fiercely evangelical as well as self-assertive and openly critical of his colleagues. Even though he did not seem to enjoy women's company, he seemed to be determined to enter a matrimony. Eventually, Colenso found a wife in Elizabeth Fairburn even though neither admitted to loving the other (Porter and Macdonald 296).

Still, despite its inauspicious start the marriage between William and Elizabeth proved to be successful or at least functional enough, as it lasted for almost a decade and resulted in the birth of two children. In 1851, however, Elizabeth discovered that her husband had been having an affair with their Maori servant and children's nanny, Ripeka, and fathered a child with her. Whether fuelled by hurt feelings or the indignation at William's duplicity, Elizabeth's reaction was decisive and went against all the norms of behaviour expected of a Victorian wife. Not only did she immediately move out after returning her wedding ring in a sealed envelope, but was also instrumental in the initiation of disciplinary action that resulted in Colenso's dismissal from the CMS service. In the next few years, the Colensos stayed in regular contact, while Elizabeth reluctantly took care of Wiremu, William and Repeka's son but even though William repeatedly expressed his willingness to reconcile with his wife, Elizabeth was adamant in her decision to remain single. Her steadfastness was, to a large extent, motivated by what she perceived as William's refusal to acknowledge her position as an equal partner not only in their marriage but also in the missionary efforts. In one of her letters she tried to explain her feelings to him:

The bitter regret you expressed (the day we parted) at having done what had brought you to that condition, excited in my mind deep feelings of commiseration and pity, and had your subsequent letters shown in the smallest degree a feeling of compunction for the irreparable injury you have done to the Cause, these feelings would still have existed in my heart towards you. But the palpable self-justifying spirit exhibited in every page of your letters has completely destroyed every feeling of that kind on my part. You surely cannot deceive yourself so far as to suppose (after ten years intense misery and suffering on my part, solely and most deliberately caused by you) that any other feeling than pity can exist in my mind towards you.

I assured you repeatedly that I would never return to you. I returned you the ring which only reminded of misery. I told you the 'spell' which bound me to you was broken... You surely cannot have forgotten these and numerous similar expressions, though in general, I avoided conversing with you because you were so overbearing dogmatic and bitter, and I left so weary and worn and spirit-crushed that I could not stand against it... (Porter and Macdonald 301)

In addition, Elizabeth emphatically refused to accept financial support from her husband after their separation as she declared: "With regard to my support and that of the children, we do not want a farthing's worth from you. [...] if you send anything I shall return it..." (Porter and

Macdonald 302) Even though, initially she had to fall back on the help of her father, Elizabeth clearly believed in her own abilities to make the most of the potential offered by New Zealand that would eventually let her to make a living not only for herself but her children as well. She was correct in this assumption as she gained employment as a teacher in the CMS school for native children at the Kaitotehe Mission near Mount Taupiri in the Waikato a few months after the separation. Moreover, Elizabeth seemed to enjoy the independence she found in the colony to such an extent that even after the First Taranaki War broke out in 1860 and forced her to seek shelter in Britain, she came back to New Zealand as soon as she was able to do so. In her later years Elizabeth worked as an interpreter and translator in various CMS missions on both islands before she settled down in Paihia, where she opened a school for Maori children.

New Zealand's legislation and the growing social acceptance of women living outside the traditional bounds of marriage had undeniably positive effect on the female colonists' self-confidence and courage to get involved in the public sphere. Still, it is possible to find opinions which portrayed the departure from the Victorian patriarchal patterns as detrimental for New Zealand society and bemoaned the "moral condition" of the colonial communities as a result. It was not only men, either, who expressed opinions and concern to that effect as the example of a letter sent by Caroline Abraham, the wife of Bishop of Wellington, Charles Abraham demonstrates. While she focused her attention on the scandal surrounding the divorce of Governor Grey from his wife, Mrs Abraham was also inspired to comment on the morality of the entirety of the colonial community:

Oh my dear Soph, it seems to me that one hears such dreadful things every day – at least I do out here... It is said that the divorce Court has exposed the monstrous sham of the morality of the middle class in England, and I suppose the licence of Colonial freedom does the same and that our upper class is in fact out of the middle class and as little trained and educated as they. But the horrid and disgusting immorality in what are called respectable families – among Boys and Girls almost – that one cannot avoid hearing of, makes one shudder. There seems a skeleton in each house almost... and as for the young men sent out to push their way, it makes one's heart ache to think of their Mothers and sisters at home. Of the number we have seen here with introductions to us and requests to befriend, there are only two about whom one has any comfort. (Porter and Macdonald 308)

However, despite certain misgivings and unwillingness to except the gradual shift in social norms on the part of the conservative members of New Zealand community, it is undeniable that for a majority of predominantly middle-class women the conditions prevalent in colonial settlements were gradually improving over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. What initially started as enforced independence due to widowhood, abandonment or separation, was exerting effect not only on the way women thought about their skills and

capabilities but also on the social perception of the position that the female gender should have in the community. In the last decades of the century these changes started to affect not only the employment prospects but also some of the aspects of family life in New Zealand, such as bearing and rearing of children.

3.5 Family life in New Zealand: from giving birth to the hopes for the new generation

The question of the connection between the marriage and the resulting offspring was not an issue that was pondered over or associated with any option of choice by women brought up in the Victorian society. As Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald comment: “Marriage and family life went hand-in hand for women through most of the nineteenth century. The physical embrace of husband and wife was one of the certainties, and indeed duties, of married life. [...] Bearing and rearing children occupied a large part of the time and energies of women through their adult years” (337). This aspect of family life of early New Zealand colonists is particularly difficult to analyze as in all of their texts female colonists tended to be elusive when it came to issues connected with sexuality and resulting pregnancies. Topics such as menstruation were not mentioned at all, not even in private journals or diaries as the Victorian perception of female respectability, allowed for the acknowledgment of physical and sensual spheres only in the case of “fallen” or “uncivilised” women.

In addition, as a majority of both British and New Zealand nineteenth century women entering the bounds of matrimony for the first time had only a very general idea of realities of sex, pregnancy and childbirth, it is hardly surprising that they were not used to expressing or sharing the complexities of their feelings on these topics. The language that they use in their letters, diaries and journals is full of allusions, metaphors and understatements: “the veil, thus discreetly but firmly drawn. From behind it, however, come sometimes coded messages, sometimes more forthright statements, and written to sisters not mothers, that for women all was not well within Victorian families” (Porter and Macdonald 339). In fact, when any references to sexuality or reproduction appear in letters or diaries at all, they are almost uniformly negative in tone. That does not signify that New Zealand women did not want to have children or were not happy once they were born, however the difficulties connected with pregnancies and birth were a source of constant concern for married women in New Zealand. Due to the fact that the living conditions in the colony were spartan and the access to qualified

medical care relatively restricted, women frequently felt isolated and overwhelmed when faced with the challenges brought about by consecutive pregnancies and confinement combined with taking care of the needs of growing families.

That is why, the remarks that can be found in a letter sent by Lucy Johnson to her sister after the birth of her fourth daughter are hardly surprising as she expressed her reluctance to welcome future potential additions to the family. “She is a nice baby and I am fond of her”, she remarks, “but not of so many girls! I do hope to have no more. I would put up with the trouble of two more if they were to be boys for old Randall’s sake, because he would like it, but personally I don’t want any more. It is so nice when there is no squaller in the nursery. I can pet and kiss them all the time – they all seem to like it just as well as ever they did” (Porter and Macdonald 366). Lucy Johnson was not alone in her sentiments as many among her contemporaries wrote about being “heartily sick of the business” even though they were under much pressure to find fulfilment in motherhood, more often than not exerted by other women. For instance, when Emily Richmond complained to her mother-in-law, Lely about acute pains in her back and legs during her sixth pregnancy, her response was scathing: “I cannot understand your constitution being exhausted by child bearing and raising. There has always been reasonable space between the births of your children and none of them have depended for any long period wholly upon your sustenance, and child bearing and raising being the natural occupation of women ought not, one would think, to wear them out prematurely” (Porter and Macdonald 358).

Still, despite the fact that nineteenth century New Zealand women were expected to be nurturing and focus attention on their families, the approach that many of them had to miscarriages and pregnancies that resulted in stillbirths reflected their emotional resilience and flexibility that allowed them to adjust to the harsh conditions of their new country. One of the women who lost a child at birth, Emma McGregor calmly described the situation in a letter to her father-in law:

We had a little stranger since I wrote last time, a bonnie little girl, not a bit like me. I think if she had lived she would have been just like Peter with fair hair inclined to curl, but she only lived a quarter of an hour. I just heard her cry once and then, as the nurse said nothing about her. I asked if she was dead for I felt as if she was but I suppose she was afraid to tell me. [The nurse] said ‘the baby was all right’, but in my own mind I knew better and when Peter came in the room I asked him as I knew he would not deceive me. I felt as if I durst not look much at the little pet for I did so long to keep her. When they had laid her on a box in the bedroom she looked just like waxwork (Porter and Macdonald 364).

As inclement weather or distances between settlements could easily result in unexpected deliveries, a tragic outcome was a very real possibility for all married women and, in majority of cases treated as a fact of life.

Future mothers were also aware of the dangers to their own health and life that reproduction and birth, in particular, carried with them every time they found themselves pregnant. Maria Atkinson from New Plymouth who got married in 1855 at the age of 30 and got pregnant a year later, was perfectly aware of the fact that her age made her considerably more mature and therefore more vulnerable than a majority of women expecting their first child at that time. She wrote to her cousin, Mary asking for her help in case she did not survive the experience:

I let myself plan for the near and far future, but I am not at all sure that I shall see either. I don't feel in the least despondent, however, but I know I am not very young and the next month must bring its risk. I cannot but trust and pray that the Almighty may spare the child for Arthur if he sees fit to take me away. You must come and comfort Lely (Maria's mother) and be a mother to the little one if anything does happen to me, dearest Mary, as soon as you can. You will be her best and sweetest daughter whether I live or die, of that I am well convinced, and you will love her as she desires and be a child after her own heart! I am afraid this conclusion to my letter may read very gloomily thousands of miles away, but I am really very happy at heart (Porter and Macdonald 337).

It was actually a common practice among wives and mothers to make provisions for an eventuality of a confinement resulting in their death especially when they already had young offspring that had to be taken care of or were of an age or health condition that predisposed them to complication. Once again, however, this rather grim perspective did not result in alarmist or hysterical reactions as early New Zealand women seemed to be quite stoical and accepting of the risk.

On the one hand, the combination of additional risk factors which meant that even young and healthy women could not be certain of safe delivery and the increased pressure on married women to produce as many children as possible, contributed to what could be interpreted as reluctance or at least emotional detachment when it came to consecutive arrivals of new members of family. These sentiments were frequently expressed in letters to friends and relatives where news of pregnancy or birth tended to be casually interwoven into the accounts of everyday activities and problems. For example, Jane Buttle wrote to her mother circa 1856: "Our own family are all well; little James is turned two years old. I had begun to think I should have had no more but I find I am mistaken. Well we must not murmur. We are in the Lord's hands, he gives life and he will give strength" (Porter and Macdonald 350).

On the other hand, however, once the uncertainties and perils of giving birth were over, children were seen as the symbol of the vindication of the decision to start a new, perilous life away from the confines of Britain. On the other hand, offspring evoked hopes and fears that stemmed from the increasing fluidity of social norms and expectations. Pakeha women who witnessed their children growing up in New Zealand were acutely aware of distinctly colonial patterns that shaped them. For many of them, observing their children became synonymous with finding a way to assess the success of the new society they had forged. In fact, the attitudes towards the first generation of New Zealand-born children, reflected the whole range of reactions Europeans had to the life in colony: some were applauding the freedoms afforded by a community unencumbered by the strictures of entrenched institutions; others bemoaned the lack of absence of sophisticated social and cultural structure. While writing back to relatives and friends in Europe, parents had an opportunity to express their pride or anxieties incited by their children and the way the new country shaped their physique ad character. As Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald comment (Porter and Macdonald 382).

That was the moment in the social history of the nineteenth century New Zealand that marked the beginning of departure from the notion of the unity of interests when it came to families. For the most part of the nineteenth century in Britain, the interests of an individual were of lesser importance when balanced against the welfare of the family as a whole. Childhood was a relatively short period, with children expected to take on responsibilities of household tasks or even work from an early age, and looking after younger brothers and sisters were regular parts of growing up. In New Zealand, however, children started to be gradually perceived as individuals with distinctive needs as the period of compulsory education was extended and opened not exclusively to boys but to girls as well. Due to these changes, women of various generations were gaining the perspective that allowed them to see the possibilities of separating their interests from their families and expanding their patriarchal roles of wives and mothers. For instance, Maria Atkinson, who after raising four children turned to teaching, explained her decision to campaign for a girls' college in Nelson to equal Nelson Collage for Boys in the following way:

Whatever influence I might have in the world I should wish to use it in the cause of education. I want my girls to have a boy's education because it is a better education than what is called girl's, since it better exercises the faculties God has given girls as well as boys. I certainly approve of any woman studying medicine or anything else she selects provided she does it earnestly. I only wish I had studied medicine myself, the mental training would have made me an infinitely more valuable member of society, to say nothing of the advantages knowledge of that kind would have given. I don't see how any study which strengthens the mental powers can do otherwise than make fitter for their own special work, sick nursing

included, and I believe that Nature has so provided that their own desires and affections will always lead them to discharge those duties first, except in cases where luxury, idleness and frivolity destroy Nature's promptings. My experience in the Colony shows me that the most solidly educated women are the most useful in every department of life, and the so-called 'feminine refinement' is fatal to female usefulness. [...] I believe the more we are educated, the higher we aim intellectually, the better we shall discharge our own special functions in the world. Just take my own imaginary case. Had I studied medicine till I was 28 when I left England, would it have prevented my marrying? I believe not, but it would have made me a ten times better wife and mother and a more respectable human being altogether (Porter and Macdonald 400).

Maria Atkinson's letter to her sister encapsulates the essence of the changes in the perception of the acceptable social roles for women in New Zealand throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Maria, what fuelled the campaign for the opening of a quality college for girls was not ideology of fighting for women's rights on principle of gender equality but the needs of colonial communities which could not afford to keep educating only the half of the population. In a sentiment that unconsciously mirrors arguments of thinkers such as Marquis de Condorcet and Olympe de Gouges, Maria refutes any possibility of education or involvement in public having an adverse effect on the domestic roles of wives and mothers that she considers to lay at the core of femininity. Using herself as an example, she argues that it is possible for any woman to combine education or even a profession outside the confines of domesticity with the duties of taking care for a family. Moreover, personal development is actually beneficial when it comes to bringing up children as both boys and girls can look up to their mothers as role-models when it comes to their own choices for the future.

Still, despite Maria Atkinson's assessment of the influence of the educational and professional opportunities on the structure of New Zealand families and the women's duties within them New Zealand families thrived, which was reflected in uniquely high birth rates throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In the first few decades of the new colony between the 1840s and 1870s the birth rate in the New Zealand families was consistently high. The average of six to seven children per family put New Zealand well above the birth rate in most parts of the British Isles and continental Europe, which at the same period oscillated between four and five children per household. In the last few decades of the century, however, the essential shifts in the expectations towards women and children resulted in Pakeha families limiting the size of their families. "Where the average family size had been six or seven children, by 1913 it had dropped to just over three, and continued to decline to reach an average of between two and three in the 1930s. Between 1878 and 1901 alone, the birth rate for the Pakeha population dropped by 30.2 per cent" (O'Neill 125-49). While the drop in the number

of children being born mirrored to a certain extent the demographic transition or revolution, as it was dubbed that was occurring in other Western-style populations at the same time, the same decline was not observed among the Maori tribes whose birth rate remained high well into the twentieth century. According to Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald the reasons for this shift remain debatable but the general consensus is that it was a combination of a general shift from a population with high fertility and high mortality to one characterized by low mortality and low fertility. In addition, factors such as changing expectations of marriage, the desire for enhanced standard of living, a more urbanised population and declining reliance on family labour have all been proposed as possible causes for this process (340).

Whether we perceive the tendency to reduce the size of colonists' families as a part of a wider trend present in many of the British commonwealth countries or as a factor which resulted from the conditions typical for New Zealand communities, it is undeniable that it relieved married women from a significant portion of duties connected with consecutive pregnancies and births which took up most of their time and attention. Combined with the growing educational and professional opportunities and the acceptance of women's presence in public life, the increased amount of disposable time and flexibility that New Zealand women gained in the last few decades of the nineteenth century enabled ambitious female pioneers to not only seek financial independence, but also to pursue careers in the fields that would be inaccessible to them in Britain.

3.6 New Zealand women's ventures into public life: business, education and the professions

In Victorian Britain only the working-class women were reluctantly allowed to pursue employment outside their domestic sphere predominantly solely due to the pressing financial needs of their families. Even in their case, however, the controversies continued to surround their presence in factories and workshops and there were many critics who considered their suitability and even respectability questionable, especially when it came to married women and mothers. As, in the first half of the nineteenth century all women were regarded only in the light of their potential as future mothers, a female worker with her own wage was, accordingly an affront and even a threat to male protective instincts. Therefore, all arguments that could be raised against the practise of employing women were summarily brought forward. Considerations as to the fragile female health, the conflict between long, factory hours and domestic life as well as the danger of the moral and spiritual degradation which might result

from employment of women outside their homes roused general concern. In addition, the most contentious battle was fought over the effects of factory labour upon mothers. The opponents to factory work for women claimed that female pelvises were negatively affected by the employment in the mills making childbirth difficult and dangerous. They were also vigorously attacking the practise of employing pregnant women quoting frequent miscarriages, varicose veins, ulcers on the legs from overwork (Wanda Fraiken Neff 37-40).

While employment for working-class women was allowable if controversial, for their middle and upper-class counterparts an attempt to earn a living on their own could jeopardize their status as gentlewomen and was, therefore, practically unheard of in Victorian Britain. The only exception to this rule was employment in the role of a governess, which was considered to be at least a semi-respectable path to find financial independence open to an educated middle-class woman. Still, even that choice was fraught with considerable downsides and associated with genteel poverty that was obviously undesirable and practically unmentionable in polite society. According to M. Jeanne Peterson: “the independent earning it (governessing) enabled was largely negated by house-bound dependence. The position of governess was anomalous, neither below nor above stairs, so that pride and self-respect were always in jeopardy” (26). For all these reasons, becoming a governess was usually not a matter of choice but necessity for most of the women who worked in this role in the nineteenth-century Britain.

In New Zealand, however, governesses could expect a marked improvement in both the regard and financial conditions that the profession afforded them. Maria Nicholson and Katherine Brind were both middle-class women forced by circumstance to work as governesses who decided to come to New Zealand in the hope of bettering their situation. Unlike in Britain, governesses were treated as valued members of the households in which they lived and worked even if it was temporary. Not only were their earnings considerably higher than most other working women, but they enjoyed a social status on par with their employers (Porter and Macdonald 420).

It was not only the universally socially acceptable occupations, either, that could bring New Zealand women an opportunity at finding fulfilment and social acceptance. That is why, ambitious women who were willing to push beyond the limits of their contemporaries could find numerous options which fit their temperaments and aspirations. For instance, Mary Taylor, who, together with her cousin, set up a drapery shop in Wellington in the early 1850s was not perceived as a scandalous threat to the social fabric of the society, as she would probably be in her native Yorkshire, but as a kind of a novelty that added to variety in the community. Her business turned out to be a success as well, giving Mary the sense of finding purpose in life

which she extrapolated on the rest of women of all social backgrounds, arriving at a conclusion that finding employment and financial independence should be a much more advantageous choice than marriage for a female not only in New Zealand, but in Britain as well. Using her success as an example, she went as far as to castigate her friends for expressing an adverse opinion. For instance, in a letter she wrote to Charlotte Brontë in 1850 she wrote boldly:

I have set up a shop! I am delighted with it as a whole – that is, it is as pleasant or as little disagreeable as you can expect an employment to be that you earn your living by. The best of it is that your labour has some return and you are not forced to work on hopelessly without result. Du reste – it is very odd – I keep looking at myself with one eye while I'm using the other and I sometimes find myself in a very queer position.

I have seen some extracts from *Shirley* in which you talk of women working. And this first duty, this great necessity you seem to think that some women may indulge in if they give up marriage and don't want to make themselves too disagreeable to the other sex. You are a coward and a traitor. A woman who works is by that alone better than one who does not and a woman who does not happen to be rich and who still earns no money and does not wish to do so, is guilty of a great fault – almost a crime... (Porter and Macdonald 424)

Mary Taylor's views were radical especially for the mid-nineteenth-century gender standards and her militant and uncompromising approach was difficult to accept even for people who supported the presence of women in the public sphere. For numerous New Zealand women, however, the issue of earning a living was more of a question of necessity than ideology, especially when it came to situations when they found themselves without the support of male relatives they could rely on. Moreover, an important element in their favour, was the fact that, thanks to the growing acceptance of women among New Zealand working force, the range of employment opportunities available to them kept growing steadily throughout the last few decades of the century. The possible options ranged from governessing to laundry work with seamstressing, dressmaking, shop work, dairy work and abundant domestic service as live-in work for single women, in between. As woollen mills and larger industries were established in the 1870s positions in factories became more available. Similarly, office work expanded from the 1890s and married women started to seek for positions keeping an establishment, such as hotels, boarding-houses and refreshment rooms where they could raise their children as well (Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald 419).

That is not to say that the employment situations and work conditions offered to New Zealand women were unitarily favourable and devoid of serious downsides. To the contrary, as New Zealand experienced a prolonged period of economic depression in the 1870s and 1880s, both genders had to contend with the significant lowering of both pay rates and privileges

afforded to the workers. The recession became especially visible in the fledgling wool industry where the working environment quickly deteriorated so badly as to resemble “old world” sweating⁹, which was supposed to be done away with in the New Zealand system. The problem did not escape notice of contemporary social activists and philanthropists such as Reverend Rutherford Waddell, who campaigned tirelessly against the worsening of standards in New Zealand industry. “For has it come to this,” he wrote in one of his articles “that we are willing to permit in our midst a system that in this young fair land threatens to reproduce [...] those very evils that are eating the heart and soul out of the older countries? And shall we sit down here and allow it to suck the soul out of our women and girls?” (McLintock 724) It was such fiery opinions combined with a series of articles by Silas Spragg in the *Otago Daily Times*, documenting cases of women and girls struggling to survive on their starvation wages that inspired both the government and the public to undertake initiatives aimed at the assessment of the situation and introduction of countermeasures which would assure the quality of conditions in New Zealand factories and the fairness of workers’ wages.

In January 1890 the Royal Commission on sweating, composed of nine men, was appointed to investigate the cotton mills in Dunedin. Among the conclusions included in the Commission’s report was that the Employment of Female Act 1873¹⁰, originally introduced to limit the amount of hours women were required to work, was in fact, adhered to only in theory. In addition, even though the majority report clearly stated that the Commission did not find any compelling evidence of the existence of the London system of sweating in Dunedin factories, the minority report submitted by Reverend Waddell and two other members of the Commission maintained that “the overcrowding, long hours and low wages detailed in the report did indeed amount to sweating” (Coney 220).

Another important conclusion that can be found in the Commission’s report is the finding according to which wherever a union had been formed both the wages and the work condition had improved considerably. As in the nineteenth century New Zealand Dunedin was the most highly industrialised city in New Zealand, with twenty-seven per cent of the city’s

⁹ Sweating originally referred to the British system whereby work was subcontracted through middle-men, reducing wages to below subsistence level, but the term came to be applied to any method of employment where workers were meantly paid and overworked (Coney 220).

¹⁰ The Female Act 1873 was the first piece of legislation in New Zealand legislation that was passed with interests of working women in mind. It regulated not only the amount of hours female workers were supposed to be employed for each day but also assured their right to proper ventilation in every workroom. Even though the conditions of the act were frequently disregarded by employers and officials alike, the passing of the law was a landmark moment in New Zealand social history as it acknowledged the importance of the growing presence of women in industry.

workforce employed in the clothing industry and eighty per cent of these being women, it quickly became “the pioneering centre of the new Labour movement” (Harper 7; Coney 220). It was also during New Zealand’s first national congress organized by the Otago Trades and Labour Council in 1885 several speakers called the attention to the exploitation of women in the local factories. The pressing need to address this issue was the main motivation behind the creation of the Dunedin Tailoresses’ Union on the 12th of July 1889. Even though it was an organization created with the aim of promoting the rights of all the workers of cotton mills and initially the male clothing workers were invited and even encouraged to join, few of them came forward which inspired the union to restrict itself to the interests of women making it the first women’s organization of this type in New Zealand. In the years following its creation, however, the Dunedin union did much to encourage the formation and maintenance of similar associations in other industries all across the country (Lintock 695).

Initially the Dunedin Tailoresses’ Union’s actions were driven not by political by charitable premises aimed at improvement of society. As A.H Lintock comments: “The creation of the Tailoresses’ Union reflected the concerns of Christian philanthropists, humanitarians and radical socialists who aimed to improve the lot of the working class encourage more amicable relations between Capital and Labour and eradicate social evils” (696). For instance, Harriet Morison, who was the union’s second secretary and later its vice-president, worked tirelessly alongside Reverend Waddell and other philanthropists distributing food and clothing to the unemployed from the relief depot set up by the church. It was not long, however, before the union started to use the threat of strike action to force the local employers to reduce working hours and raise the wages by at least 2 percent, and in some cases as much as 40 percent. The first unequivocal successes in improving the economic situation of the tailoresses was an incentive for the authorities of the organization to expand their goals to include: “organizing women workers nationally, promoting women’s training to ensure tailoresses were skilled workers and were paid appropriately, and supporting legislation which was in the interest of women workers” (Else 209). The union also declared its full support for the campaign promoting female suffrage, which significantly broadened the appeal of the movement, simultaneously emphasizing the direct connection between the interests of women looking for financial independence and the rising consciousness of the need to grant both genders equal political rights.

It is important to remember, however, that even though it is a fact that a majority of nineteenth-century New Zealand women worked employed as domestic servants, factory workers or as shop assistants, there was more to the story of women’s employment during this

period. A small but enterprising group of women succeeded in setting up and running, frequently very successfully, a surprisingly wide range of small businesses. In most cases, these women worked as art or music teachers, dressmakers, or kept lodging houses, tea rooms or shops. According to the 1901 census, around one quarter of all store-keepers were women, mainly drapers, fruiterers and grocers. The clear indication of the sizes of their enterprises is visible in the fact that only just over 3 percent of women in the paid workforce were employers with staff and another 13 percent were in business of their own, but did not employ anybody else. What is interesting, some of the women worked in unusual categories of business as numbers included in the census show 84 female money brokers/financiers, 7 butchers, 2 wine merchants, 2 brewers, 1 tanner and 1 coal merchant. The variety of independent businesses pursued by the New Zealand women at the turn of the centuries is quite striking, especially when the small size of the population and relatively short history of the colony up to this point is taken into consideration. It was this kind of resourcefulness and readiness to go beyond the social expectations in search of independence that campaigners for granting women voting rights were trying to encourage in their texts. It was working women, in particular that they perceived as capable of initiating changes in national legislation for it to reflect the equal rights of both genders.

Still, the most prominent factor that contributed to the creation and development of the suffrage political movement in New Zealand was the fact that both male and female New Zealanders were well educated by the nineteenth-century standards. Thanks to the Education Act 1877 a system of free, secular primary education for Pakeha children was created across both islands. Even though full attendance was not required and in rural areas parents tended to keep girls at home more than boys,¹¹ in 1890 seventy six percent of Pakeha women could read while at the time the female literacy in Britain was at fifty-six percent. The increased access to secondary education meant that women could hope for a chance of a successful career at professions which used to be exclusively male domains. Many of New Zealand women were also perfectly aware of the fact that good education offered another path to financial, social and personal independence and encouraged young girls to take full advantage of this opportunity. For instance, as early as 1877, Annie Hill wrote to her friend, Anna Richmond encouraging her to follow in the footsteps of her sister, Margaret Richmond, who was staying at the pioneering

¹¹ Historian Kay Matthews' study of primary schoolgirls in Hawke's Bay showed that in 1883 fewer girls than boys regularly attended school, and 33 per cent of girls did not attend a school at all (Middleton 20-30).

Newnham Hall and attending lectures at Cambridge University, and qualify for a teacher's certificate:

What a cultivated young woman Margie will be when she comes back to you; won't she go in for medicine or something to set a good example to other young girls who have the means and opportunity to study and emancipate themselves from the state of subjection and dependence in which we women still are. Each woman who strikes out of the conventional path does something to widen the track that is to become the glorious future, the honourable road of a woman's life. Then 'old maid' will no more be a term of pity and contempt and a position of dependency. Then we shan't have women sneered at for their weakness and folly and for 'husband hunting', for marriage will not then be the only and most honourable position for women past the first flush of youth. Then women's lives will not be the dull and aimless ones they are when they have no family of their own to care for and occupy themselves with, and we shan't have girls rushing blindly into matrimony to escape the ennui and weariness and dependence on their friends who hardly conceal that they feel they are a burden and [are] aggrieved that they have not gone and done what most women do – get an establishment for themselves (Porter and Macdonald 437).

In the following paragraphs of her letter, Annie Hill touches upon the issue of emotional and mental maturity of both of partners who enter the bounds of matrimony which was rarely discussed or even considered among by social commentators in the nineteenth century. According to her, the period of time spent by women at a university and the accompanying broadening of their horizons could serve as a way of improving not only their professional prospects but also the quality of their future marriages as they would commit to them with more awareness and knowledge. Moreover, in a long run it would benefit not only them but also men who would gain more dependable and loving partners:

Then marriage will be one of many professions and only entered into when all the circumstances are favourable (as they ought always to be) and especially when women are of mature age and mind (as they would not leave off study till they were 21 or 22) and more able to judge the character of the man and weigh the responsibility of such a step.

Just think of the folly of trusting one's whole future peace and happiness to the immature judgment and capricious fancy of oneself as a girl of 18, who is quite another creature at 28 and who would admire and like quite a different character in a man at that age when judgment is ripe and one's knowledge of the world more perfect. It is a mercy that such young marriages do not always turn out terrible failures, but it is more by luck than good management. It is a pity too to see men throw themselves away on mere girls. It leaves them mere commonplace creatures with uncultivated minds to be a drag and dead weight to [their husbands] for ever after, instead of their ideal wife and companion of their life they had fondly dreamt of. (Porter and Macdonald 437)

The educational opportunities that New Zealand women could enjoy as early as in the second half of the nineteenth century appealed strongly to both female colonists born in Britain and arriving on both islands in search of the more flexible social system that would allow them to find fulfilment outside domesticity and to young girls born and raised in the new colonial

reality, and, therefore more aware of their intellectual potential that gave them a chance to expand on their traditional roles of wives and mothers. When the first women started to graduate from universities they were lauded in girls' schools and presented to pupils as role models that should be admired and followed. In the 1890s the ambitions of the female pioneers in the field of education allowed them to break into the male bastions of law, medicine and even politics. Earlier than anywhere else within the bounds of the British Empire, Ethel Benjamin was the first female lawyer who was allowed to represent a client in court; Margaret Cruickshank did not only qualify as a doctor but ran a practice treating patients; and Elizabeth Yates held the office of the Mayor of Onehunga, if only for one year. All these women were not only a source of inspiration but a living proof women's capabilities which constituted another important step in the development of the ideas and, eventually, the campaign promoting emancipation and gender equality.

It was these well-educated and increasingly independent women that became the backbone and the driving force behind the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union, which started as a social organization determined to improve the living and working conditions of women but quickly turned to the agitation for female franchise as the leaders were swift to realize that political rights were the best path of securing leverage and changing of the gender balance in the society. That is why, even though for some of the NZWCTU's leaders temperance was a matter of principles, they decided to change the tactics in order to achieve a wider goal of gaining the passive electoral right to be able to – indirectly - influence political decisions shaping the realities of everyday life. Especially Kate Sheppard, who was very skilful at reading and anticipating public reactions, advocated the initiation of a campaign aimed at female enfranchisement. In their writings, Sheppard and her colleagues were careful not to aggravate men and the conservative section of the female population, but instead played on the elements of the well-known patriarchal stereotypes combined with comments on the realities of the New Zealand and the vital role women played in the new communities. Much emphasis was also put on all the potential avenues of cooperation that both genders could pursue in order to balance the social dynamics. What is more, they used humour, gentle sarcasm and even elements of reverse psychology to convince the politicians and general public of the non-confrontational character of the movement which turned out to be the right approach to gain them the eventual victory.

3.7 Summary and conclusions

The emergence and development of remarkably successful New Zealand's Women's Christian Temperance Union within the first few decades of the existence of the new colony would not have been possible without the combination of the traits of character displayed by early female colonists and the conditions that they found in New Zealand. British women who made the decision to seek better opportunities for themselves and their families on the other side of the world were undeniably courageous and fiercely resilient, which allowed them to preserve in harsh colonial conditions. What is more, adversities did not deter them even in situations when they could not rely on support of their partners and or family. In addition, the conscious choice of financial and social independence that an increasing number of early New Zealand women made, was bound to influence the social perceptions of gender roles in the settlers' communities. The important role that women played in the colony was also reflected in the willingness of New Zealand authorities when it came to granting both genders equal privileges when it came to areas such as education and employment.

The shift in the standards of the colonial society which, initially, had been firmly rooted in Victorian values, became more visible as the first generation of girls born and educated in the new land started to enter, for the first time, the world of professions traditionally associated exclusively with men. At the same time, as New Zealand industry started to flourish and the economic situation of the colony improved considerably, well-educated and ambitious middle-class women had more time and energy to get involved in social and political activities. The employment options for women became increasingly available as settler society grew and matured. On top of that, more goods were produced and domestic help could be easily employed. That means that in growing towns a new situation was shaping as middle-class women delegated majority of household chores to working-class women which gave them time and energy to enter the domain of public life by forming various associations dealing with the current social problems. Thanks to their efforts, female concerns about the health and welfare of Pakeha women and children were brought to public attention and the potential for improvement of settler community. As a result, more affluent women came together to improve the life conditions and support the less fortunate while learning the political skills necessary for successful campaigns for change (Brookes 111).

What is more, the NZWCTU's activists could count on the support of a majority of the well-educated women who helped them to popularise the idea of granting women the right to vote as the best path to gaining and strengthening independence among the representatives of the working-class. Even those who were not interested in direct involvement in political activity or did not fully identify with all the points of the NZWCTU's agenda were an important source of inspiration and constituted essential support network that contributed greatly to the success of 1893 Electoral Law which, in turn, emancipated of all New Zealand women regardless of their age, ownership of property or race. In the next chapter analysis encompasses both the biographies and writings of three of these remarkable women who exemplify the opportunities that nineteenth century New Zealand offered to its female citizens as well as the range of male attitudes to the question of women's emancipation, as shaped in New Zealand's patriarchal society.

Chapter 4

The support network of the New Zealand suffrage movement

In this chapter I will discuss the implications and effects the entirety of the conditions in New Zealand had on the female experience. In the first part of the analysis I will focus on the way in which the unencumbered access to comprehensive education facilitated the participation in public life of all the women who had intelligence, will and stamina to venture outside the confines of domesticity. In order to demonstrate this, a short comparison of the state of female education systems in the United Kingdom and New Zealand will be followed by a discussion of the lives and writings of three remarkable women: Kate Edger who won the first Bachelor Degree in 1877, Ethel Benjamin who was the first female lawyer to represent their client in the court of law and Elizabeth Yates, the first female mayor to be elected in Commonwealth. The experiences of these particular women can be instrumental in finding an explanation to the fact that female presence in public life met with more tolerance and appreciation of the male colonists.

The second part of the chapter will be devoted to an analysis of a selection of texts penned by male authors and expressing their attitudes towards individual as well as organized participation of women in public life. The above-mentioned opinions were expressed in articles, Parliamentary debates as well as pamphlets which offer a wide range of various reactions to the changing gender roles in the new society which eventually contributed to the validation of the suffrage movement as a legitimate political movement to be reckoned with. Especially press, that was the medium offering a common platform used to unite the scattered communities of the new colony, offers an informative insight into the reception of the increasing active role that women played in New Zealand.

4.1 Women's education in nineteenth-century England and New Zealand

One of the greatest obstacles that the British suffrage movement encountered in the development of their campaigns for female franchise or even in garnering wide support for their demands among women of various social backgrounds was the gender restrictions in access to comprehensive education that were in place for the greater part of the nineteenth century. As

the patriarchal stereotypes did not encompass the intellectual needs of women, the educational curriculum for girls was constructed in a way that was supposed to reflect the differences between the genders and the diverse expectations that the society had for men and women. In the case of middle-class women, as the influential writer Elizabeth Sewell said in 1865:

The aim of education is to fit children for the position in life which they thereafter to occupy. . . . Girls are to dwell in quiet homes, amongst a few friends; to exercise a noiseless influence, to be submissive and retiring. There is no connection between the bustling mill-wheel life of a large school and that for which they are supposed to be preparing. This alone is a sufficient reason for supposing, even on cursory glance, that to educate them wrongly (Vol. 2 219).

When it came to working-class women, the educational efforts were supposed to “prepare working-class schoolgirls to become *good women*, capable and efficient mothers – who could do all their own housework and organize their homes in a competent manner” (Purvis 104). Therefore, both the primary and secondary education were heavily segregated and focused on practical skills when it came to girls’ schools. As a result higher education in nineteenth-century Britain was not only formally inaccessible to women but also rendered a majority of female population woefully ill-prepared to undertake the rigours of university lectures. For all these reasons, all efforts aimed at changing the status quo met with resistance and was perceived as impractical and disruptive. As June Purvis comments: “The universities were strongholds of masculine privilege, denying entrance to the female sex. There were a few isolated examples where women were granted access to certain lectures, but they were usually denied the right to follow the same courses as men, to sit the same examinations and be awarded a degree” (106). Even though there were exceptions, most notably at King’s and University College in London that allowed women to attend the men’s lectures, the standards that the potential students had to meet excluded all but the most extraordinarily talented or unorthodoxly educated women.

That kind of educational depravation that generations of women were subjected to had a very real influence not only on their participation in public life but their willingness or even readiness to support all types of emancipation and suffrage movements. The link between these two factors was recognized by the leaders of the campaigns for granting women the right to vote who included the issues of education and lack of employment opportunities. For instance, Millicent Fawcett appealed to the authorities in one of her essays: “In like manner, we say, remove the artificial restrictions which debar women from higher education and from remunerative employments...; and the play of natural forces will drive them into those occupations for which they have some natural advantage as individuals, or at least into those for which their natural disadvantages are the least overwhelming” (352). What is more, after

Ladies' Colleges, such as Queen's College and Bedford College started to be created in mid-nineteenth-century in order to provide an alternative for women's higher education a remarkable number of the graduates became involved in the women's movement or in public life.¹

On the other hand, in New Zealand women had a more straightforward path when it came to the university education the economic factors or unwillingness of parents to send their daughters to secondary schools constituting the main barriers in the access to universities. Admittedly, the oldest university in New Zealand, University of Otago, agreed to admit women to lectures and classes by unanimous decision of its council after only two years after its creation in 1869 with a proviso, however, that they would be awarded only certificates equivalent to degrees and not actual degrees. This gender inequality did not last long either, because as soon as University of New Zealand was set up in 1874² as the sole degree-granting institution in the country the right to pursue a full qualification was granted to both male and female students. The change was possible partly due to the fact that there were many among New Zealand male scholars who shared the opinion of Professor Macmillan Brown the tutor of the first woman in the British Empire to graduate MA with honours, Helen Connon, when he said during the speech at the prizegiving for Nelson College for Girls in 1884 that "there were many women whom it would be cruel to confine to the sphere of home, where they had no opportunity of bringing their intellect into play" (*Nelson Evening Mail*, 1/3/1884, 2).

The favourable atmosphere surrounding the issue of allowing women the access to higher education was so strong that in 1890 it was suggested that the University of New Zealand should confer its own degrees on Cambridge and Oxford women graduates as "a pretty broad hint" (*NZH*, 12/07/1877, 4) that New Zealand considered their policies old-fashioned and quite behind the times. In fact, a year later, the University Council of the University of New Zealand sent a memorial to the University of Cambridge pointing out the injustice of this systematic gender inequality. It was this kind of attitude that allowed a group consisting mainly of middle-class women to graduate with a degree within the first few years of the creation of New Zealand university system and resulted in high numbers of women enrolling in all colleges on both islands. For example, when the last of the four early university colleges, Victoria, was opened

¹ Among the early graduates of Queen's College it is possible to find distinguished individuals such as, for example, Dorothea Beale and Frances who became influential headmistresses of academic schools for girls; Sophia Jex Blake, a future pioneer in the medical education of women.

² New Zealand University was initially set up in Christchurch, Canterbury in 1870. It had a federal structure consisting of several constituent institutions at various locations around New Zealand. It was the only degree-granting body in the country from 1874 (when it joined with the University of Otago) till 1961.

in 1899, women enrolled as a matter of course. They made up one-third of the first student intake and were well represented on the first committee of the Students' Association. (Coney 205). As Patricia Grimshaw notices in her history of the women's suffrage in New Zealand, by 1893, all New Zealand girls were given an opportunity to gain primary education, then some of them received secondary education of a reasonably high standard, and a small, but influential group went on to university (4).

Another characteristic trait of the presence of women in early New Zealand universities and colleges was that they constituted a remarkably homogenous group, as they came from similar backgrounds and shared aspirations and ambitions. They came from families which were "neither rich or poor nor socially prominent", as working-class girls did not have the resources to go to university, while neither upper-class girls were rather to marry well than get a degree (Coney 205).

Many of these female students were determined to earn degrees in order to forge a career in public life even though "some professions, like architecture and engineering, were not opened to women for decades; others, such as medicine and law, were open but presented difficulties" (Coney 206). That is why, in general, the women who were ambitious and talented enough to enrol at a university tended to focus on their studies and, after graduation, on overcoming potential prejudice among the male professionals in the field they were trying to enter. Active participation in politics was rarely high on the list of their priorities. Still, as the lifestyles and career choices of educated women in New Zealand frequently reflected the ideals promoted by the NZWCTU, on top of serving as examples of an alternative, successful life outside the bounds of domesticity, they generally supported and identified with the efforts of the leaders of the suffrage movement. Throughout years this support helped to attract both the attention and increasing numbers of supporters and recruits for the organizations campaigning for female franchise.

It is difficult to underestimate the influence of the example set by female pioneers in professional fields on the younger generations as a sizable portion of university educated women chose careers in education and generally held important positions in various schools. These positions allowed them to shape not only the curricula but the minds of young girls under their care. Philippa Mein Smith names Helen Macmillan Brown³ as a role model for earlier

³ Helen Cannon married John Macmillan Brown in December 1886 seven years after he proposed because she prioritized the education of her two younger sisters and the establishment of Christchurch Girls' High School as the foremost girls' school in the country.

generations as she epitomised the new type of new urban woman who possessed beauty, gentility and intelligence and could be the best proof that critics of women's higher education. The peak of career included preparing girls for university in her role as the second principal of Christchurch Girl's High School, while raising the family of two small daughters. Moreover, the first female graduates tended to go against the grain as 55 per cent of Canterbury women graduates in the university's first 50 years chose not to get married, and those who did typically had small families. In this way, they became pioneers in the process of change in family size that transformed families across European world (88).

Due to all these factors, it is undeniable that many of the educated women, even if they were not active feminists ready to get involved in politics, were an integral and potentially one of the most important elements of the support network of the New Zealand suffrage movement which contributed greatly to the eventual early success of the NZWCTU. That is why, it is worthwhile to analyze the biographies and texts written by some of the female pioneers in these professional spheres which allowed women to pursue their careers in the second half of the nineteenth century. The life experiences and texts penned by female pioneers such as Kate Edger, the first woman who graduated from a New Zealand university with a BA degree, Ethel Benjamin, the first female lawyer and the first woman to become a mayor in the British Commonwealth Elizabeth Yates constitute a perfect illustration of the changes that shaped the early New Zealand society and made it more receptive to the arguments of suffrage movement's activists. Moreover, in order to get a comprehensive picture of the conditions and attitudes which the suffragettes had to contend with, in the second part of the chapter we will analyze the texts that reflect the attitudes of the male part of the New Zealand populace with the special focus on those of conservative beliefs who found it difficult to accept the rapidity of the transformations that were affecting the traditional gender roles in the community.

4.2 The first female graduate: Kate Edger (1857-1935)

Kate Edger was a representative of the first generation of New Zealand Pakeha women. Born on the 6th of January 1857 in Abingdon in Berkshire, England as the third daughter of the Reverend Samuel Edger, a Baptist minister and his wife Louisa (born Harwood), she emigrated with her family to the Albertland settlement in Northland and, shortly later, to Auckland when she was five years old. By all accounts, from a young age she was an intelligent and creative student even though she was not enrolled at a school but taught at home with her sisters. When she grew older and started to show academic promise, her father, himself a graduate of the

University of London, encouraged her not to give up on her potential, despite the lack of scholarly opportunities for women. On his advice, she applied to the Senate of the University of New Zealand for a possibility of sitting the exam for a scholarship, citing her age and qualification but not her gender. Her application read: “I am a candidate for one of the mathematical scholarships of the University of New Zealand to be awarded at the examination in May. My age is within the specified limits and I have received instruction privately and also in Latin and Mathematics at the Auckland College Evening classes” (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 202). The Senate accepted her application, which allowed to pass the exam and proceed to study at the Auckland College and Grammar School.

Even though the members of the Senate were unanimous in their decision to let Kate Edger to attend what was up to that point an exclusively boys’ school, she was still issued a strict instruction “to enter classes with downcast eyes” (Coney 205). Kate did not find these restrictions difficult to adhere to as, being shy and reserved she did not fit the image of a typical rebellious trail-blazer. Her admittance to the Auckland university was entirely devoid of controversy and protests on the part the faculty or the fellow male students. Three years of her studies passed without an incident and, in July 1877, Kate Edger graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree (specializing in mathematics and Latin) as the first woman in the British Empire to earn a BA.⁴

Kate Edger’s graduation ceremony attracted a great deal of attention on the part of women supporting the gender emancipation, other students, and New Zealand authorities and the ceremony was well attended and reported on, quite enthusiastically by all the major New Zealand newspapers. For instance, *New Zealand Herald* described the turnout and the atmosphere in the following way:

The Choral Hall was crowded yesterday, for the purpose of witnessing the ceremony of admitting Miss Kate Milligan Edger, a student of the Auckland College and Grammar School, to the degree of Bachelor of Arts of the University of New Zealand. There was evidently the greatest interest taken in the occasion, for three-fourths of the space of the large hall was occupied by ladies, for whom sufficient sitting accommodation could scarcely be found. The remaining space in the body of the hall was occupied by male spectators of all classes. The students and pupils of the Auckland College and Grammar School occupied the gallery, and were not a little demonstrative of their satisfaction that a lady fellow-student should be the recipient of competitive honour. They clapped their hands, and cheered heartily when the lady was observed among the large assemblage of spectators (*NZH*, 12/07/1877, 2).

⁴ A Canadian, Grace Annie Lockhart earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1874 from Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick.

The ceremony was also attended by numerous important figures including Reverend Bishop of Auckland Dr Cowie, Mr Justice Gillies, Principal of the Wesleyan College at the Three Kings, Mr T. Buddle, Chairman of the Board of Education, Mr Lusk followed by “clergymen of all denominations, professional men, influential citizens, and settlers” (*NZH*, 12/07/1877, 2). All the participants seemed to be aware of the uniqueness and importance of the ceremony as Mr Hugh Hart Lusk, who served in the double capacity of the Chairman of the Board of Education for this provincial district and the representative of the Chancellor of the University presiding over the proceedings noticed in his opening speech:

The occasion on which we are met together this afternoon is, I need hardly remind you, one of no ordinary importance and interest. It is the first occasion of the kind which has occurred in the history of this part of New Zealand, and, in some sense, the first occasion of the kind that has occurred in any part of the British dominions. (Here, here) This occasion is for the purpose of formally admitting to the academical degree of Bachelor of Arts a student of the Auckland College, which is affiliated to the University of New Zealand. This in itself would be a most important landmark in the history of this part of the colony; but in addition to this there is a much more remarkable feature in the present occasion to distinguish it from occurrences of the like kind. This is the first time that any University in the British dominions has admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Arts a young lady. [...] ... If we are ever to become not merely a community, but what I hope we shall become, a nation, no small credit will be due to those who, in their conduct of the affairs of New Zealand, founded the educational establishments of the country; chief of which its University has behaved with a liberality which has not as yet characterised the older institutions in other parts of her Majesty’s dominions, by opening wide the door of academical distinction, without regard to differences of grade or sex (*NZH*, 12/07/1877, 2).

The perspective presented by Mr Lusk in his opening speech is quite striking as it placed the policy of admittance of women to the institutions associated with the University of New Zealand in the wider context of young New Zealand society’s efforts to forge its identity and independence. When approached in this way, the issue of gender equality ceases to be a relatively insignificant problem that was of a concern only to a group of suffrage activists and their supporters and easily dismissed by the rest of the society as was the practise in many of the countries that belonged to the British Empire. As the above address illustrates, in New Zealand the acceptance of women outside the sphere of domesticity was acknowledged as an integral element of the structure and identity of the new nation, not only by a significant portion of general public by the representatives of the authorities as well.

His sentiments were seconded by the Bishop of Auckland, Dr Cowie who not only assured the audience of his opinion that the Bachelor degree offered by the University of New Zealand was already “quite as good, in some respects more valuable than the ordinary BA degree conferred by Cambridge” but disparaged the frequently used nickname of “blue-

stocking” used frequently in Britain in reference to women attempting to pursue any form of comprehensive education. In fact, the Bishop devoted considerable attention to the traditional arguments against allowing women equal access to education on all levels that were frequently repeated in patriarchal societies and he refuted their validity in order to emphasize the modern approach embraced by New Zealand. According to him:

The ordinary arguments against the cultivation of the intellect of women are two: -1. That high cultivation of the intellect involved the sacrifice of those qualities which are prized in women – above all, their tenderness. But it was not the cultivation of the intellect that which produced this result, but the neglect of cultivating the affections. Whenever any point of character is neglected, then the symmetry of the man or the woman must suffer. [...] Sara Coleridge, daughter of the poet was one of the most intellectual women of her time, and she manifested no want of tenderness. It was next said that it put an end to the subjection of women to men – whatever that may mean. We see large numbers of men who are rather in subjection to good and clever women (laughter and cheers), and to say that women would be less in subjection, because more highly cultivated, was a *reduction ad absurdum*. Let us remember that that subjection, in the proper sense is subjection through the affections, not the intellect. (NZH, 12/07/1877, 2)

In the second part of his speech, Dr Cowie focused on both the gains and potential drawbacks brought about by the new social order as he admitted that “the advantages of cultivation of the intellect are both positive and negative – positive in that it makes her a more help meet for man, and negative because it will probably set some limit to the sacrifice of valuable time which a woman gives up to conventional usages.” Still, the Bishop steadfastly advised all New Zealand parents not to hesitate whether to allow their daughters to attend a university as it brings nothing but benefits to the whole community. “I can assure parents”, he said “it will not occupy more time, or be more expensive to have daughters competitors for such an honour as is about to be conferred. I shall be glad to help any of my young lady neighbours.’ These enthusiastic endorsements were followed with even more personal statement when he added: ‘I look forward to make my own daughter a candidate for such a degree” (NZH, 12/07/1877, 2).

Kate Edger, on the other hand, chose not to make any statements about the significance of her graduation. Her failure to address the audience can be interpreted as a sign of reluctance on her part to accept the status of a symbol of the fight for gender equality and the desire to be perceived as a regular graduate of the University of New Zealand. On the other hand, it is feasible that Edger, who agreed with many of suffragettes’ arguments, simply became overwhelmed by the unusually large turnout and the praise heaped on her by the representatives of New Zealand authorities. Still, regardless of the fact that the first female BA graduate in New Zealand did not use the opportunity provided by her graduation ceremony to promote the cause

of gender equality, the importance of the fact that a female student proved to be on par with her male colleagues when it came to intellectual skills and capabilities was universally recognized and lauded as the *New Zealand Herald's* journalist stated in the subsequent editorial (*NZH*, 12/07/1877, 2).

In order to emphasize the general approval of Edger's graduation and the fact that "pecuniary reward as well as honour attended successful studies" (*NZH*, 12/07/1877, 2). Mr Lusk finished the proceedings with the announcement that she had already been offered a position of importance in a school in the Canterbury region with an annual pay of £300. Soon after the graduation Kate Edger left for the South Island to work as first assistant at Christchurch Girls' School where she stayed until 1882 simultaneously studying for a Master of Arts degree at Canterbury College. After being awarded the second degree, Kate was appointed the headmistress of newly established Nelson College for Girls which opened in February 1883. The extent of responsibility involved in the task proved to be quite a challenge for Edger, who was only twenty-six years old at the time, as on top of creating and sustaining the structure of the school, dealing with logistical problems such as badly designed buildings and underperforming staff, she taught English grammar, composition and literature, physical science, Latin, geography, and singing. She also prepared girls for university for university scholarships. Still, despite all the burdens and the financial strains, she managed to put Nelson College for Girls on a very sound footing and won the appreciation of the board of governors. On top of that, her calm and sympathetic nature made her very popular among her female students who, from the beginning of the existence of Nelson College for Girls loved and admired her (*Book Of New Zealand Women* 202).

Kate Edger's life changed its course in 1889 when Reverend William Albert Evans, a Welsh Congregationalist minister arrived to take over a parish in Nelson. Within a year the couple got married and even though initially Kate Edger informed the board of governors that she intended to keep working, after barely two months she was forced to resign her post at the college, as it turned out that it would be impossible to combine all her professional duties with the responsibilities of a vicar's wife. Still, that does not mean that Edger devoted herself solely to the domestic tasks, as from the outset of her life in her husband's parish she frequently preached during services. What is more, after William the family moved to Wellington, Kate became the principal bread-winner. By this time the Evanses already had three young sons so Kate could not go back to teaching in the kinds of schools where she had previously worked. Instead, working out of their family house in Mount Victoria, she ran a private school for girls at secondary level in the mornings and coached adult pupils in the evenings. On top of that, she

also found the time to help out in the charitable work in which her husband was involved by visiting and helping people in need in Wellington slums and giving an occasional lecture (*Book Of New Zealand Women* 203).

It is a testament to Kate Edger's dedication to the teaching profession that, even when her husband got appointed to the charge of Newton Congregational Church in 1904 and the family's financial situation stabilized she continued to coaching private students until 1912. Moreover, her work for the university examination council that had started in 1891, continued with occasional breaks until 1929, and during the First World War she spent two years working for the Department of Education. Edger was also very active when it came to supporting her husband in his work at the Congregational parish as she taught in the Sunday school, helped with choir practice and, at the age of 52, learned to play the organ to accompany the parishioners during hymns. By all accounts, even though she was devoted to her husband and sons, Kate never excelled at housekeeping and preferred to employ servants to help her with everyday chores, which freed up time and energy that she could devote to teaching and volunteering work. Her life experience was a perfect illustration of the claims put forward by the gender equality activists according to which women could thrive when allowed to find fulfilment in both private and public spheres of life and should therefore follow their talents and inclinations (*Book Of New Zealand Women* 203).

After she moved to Wellington, Kate Edger also got involved more actively in the campaigns of the suffrage movement, presiding over meetings and making speeches on behalf of the cause. In the period between 1897 and 1928, she was president and vice president of the Wellington of the New Zealand Society for the Protection of Women and Children. In addition, until the early 1930s Kate was also involved in the Women's Christian Temperance Union of New Zealand in various capacities: in the Nelson branch, as dominion recording secretary from 1916 to 1920 and 1922 to 1930, as president of the Miramar branch, and as associate editor for some years of the union's journal, the *White Ribbon*. She was a member of the Newtown school committee and was dominion secretary of the League of Nations Union of New Zealand, as well as secretary of its Wellington branch. (teara.govt.nz) On top of that she was a founding member of the Prison Reform Association. Kate Edger's tireless charitable and volunteering activity won her the admiration and appreciation of numerous New Zealand communities and overtime placed her in the position of a role-model for the future generations of girls, showing that marriage and motherhood do not have to impose limitations on women's ambitions. (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 204).

Still, despite her involvement in the suffrage movement and the tendency to portray her as one of the symbols for the female cause displayed by various groups, it is not possible to call Kate Edger a feminist by the standards of the present day. Her attitude towards the female right movement is visible in the article that she wrote on the occasion of the Canterbury University College jubilee: “Has the higher education of women justified itself? It is too soon yet for a complete answer to be given to this question, but thousands of university women are proving by their lives that it has not unfitted them for homemaking, the noblest sphere of women’s work” (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 204). Clearly, even though she worked tirelessly to promote equal chances for both genders, Kate was far from a revolutionary who would want to abolish the traditional social order. Instead, she believed in making the most of skills and talents even if it meant finding fulfilment in the sphere of domesticity.

Throughout her life, however, Kate Edger proved that successful combining of marriage, motherhood and career was feasible for any New Zealand woman in the second half of the nineteenth century. What is more, it did not even require an outgoing or outspoken personality as the public acceptance of the women’s presence and activity in the public sphere was already at a much higher level than anywhere else within the bounds of the British Empire. “Although small and slightly built, with a quiet, reserved manner, she showed throughout her life remarkable stamina and a determination to achieve her ends” (teara.govt.nz). Kate remained active even after she became widowed in 1921 and was no longer officially involved in the activities of her husband’s parish (*Book Of New Zealand Women* 204). The appreciation for the input that its female members had on the New Zealand society was also reflected in the fact that shortly before her death in 1935, Kate was awarded the King’s Silver Jubilee Medal in recognition of both her status as the first female graduate in the country as well as her long-term charitable and volunteering work in Wellington communities. When she passed away on the 6th of May, her death was remarked upon by all the major New Zealand newspapers with obituary articles which emphasized her contribution to the development of New Zealand as one of the leading pioneers for women’s education as well as her popularity in various social circles stemming from her agreeable and charming nature. For instance, an *Evening Post* article described Kate Edger Evans in the following way:

A large circle of friends among the women who have worked, and who care for the good of humanity, will hear with sincere regret of the death of Mrs. Kate M. Evans, a social worker and educationalist of eminence both in this city, where she lived for many years, and throughout New Zealand. Mrs. Evans had a gentle and charming personality which, in a way, masked her power and determination to work for what was right and just. She was not one to make any noise about her works, but they were carried through

with ability and energy. [...] Mrs. Evans will be long remembered for her varied and useful work and for her unfailing readiness to serve in any good cause (18).

The universal acclaim evoked by the example and the activity of the first New Zealand female university graduate serves as a clear example of the forwardness of thinking and flexibility of both the authorities and the members of the general public who, as early as the 1870s were ready to accept the fact that the refusal to give women access to higher education and employment options would be detrimental to the whole community, since it meant failing to make use of skills and talents of half of the population. That is not to say that New Zealand society was unequivocally tolerant of the presence of women in all areas of the professional world as some of the female graduates met with reluctance or even active resistance when they made their first forays into male-dominated areas of the public life. Regardless of some setbacks, however, women's educational and professional situation in New Zealand was markedly more favourable than in Britain of the period where: "middle-class girls were not expected, unlike their working-class sisters, to engage in paid work of any kind, although it was assumed that they would also one day become economically dependent future wives and mothers. Consequently, [...] the content of education for middle-class girls tended to stress ornamental knowledge that might attract and impress a suitor" (Purvis 64). In New Zealand, on the other hand, girls were much more free to follow their inclinations when it came to education and potential professional careers.

4.3 Ethel Benjamin (1875-1943): New Zealand's first female lawyer

Ethel Benjamin was born on the 19th of January 1875 in Dunedin, as the eldest child of Henry and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Benjamin, both of whom were of Jewish descent and first-wave immigrants. In the 1880s and 1890s the Benjamin family grew to quite a substantial size as Ethel had nine younger siblings, which meant that her school education was subject to gaps, as she was periodically required to stay at home to help out with housework and childcare. Still, she was the only girl among her brothers and sisters who had the opportunity to attend Otago Girls' High School where she excelled as a conscientious and disciplined pupil. In 1885, at the age of ten, she won Miss Dalrymple's Victoria Prize for Punctuality, Order and Diligence and in the second form she was awarded a certificate for English and for French. According to her own memories, ever since she was a child she had a peculiar interest in legal texts and discussions which were far beyond of the scope of interest of her peers:

When I was quite a little girl I used to pick up any law papers that came in my way, and for hours would read and ponder over their meaning, delighting in their many subtleties, marvelling in their logic and revelling in their intricacies. I was a strange child, and when very young would amuse myself with a dry old deed rather than with the dolls and other toys which usually help to while away childhood's happy hours. [...] When my elders were discussing the doings in the Law Courts, I would listen with rapt attention, and usually in silence; but sometimes when the conclusion arrived at seemed to me erroneous I would 'chip in' only to be told that 'Little girls should be seen and not heard.' (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7).

The way in which Ethel describes her childhood clearly demonstrates that she considered herself to have a natural inclination or even talent for law which determined her choice of a degree when she applied for the university. Ethel did not seem to consider her gender to be a factor in the choice of profession even though, since the Kate Edger had been admitted to the university nearly twenty years earlier, all of the thirty women who had taken degrees had chosen general qualifications, which led to traditional fields of employment, especially teaching.

In 1892 Ethel Benjamin was granted a university scholarship and enrolled for a law degree a year later, showing an unusual determination because, throughout her studies, she had no guarantee that she would be allowed to practise after graduating. As she put it herself, the fact that women still could not practise law when she studied served only to strengthen her resolve: "When I heard that being a woman, I could not be admitted to the practise of the law, I was very indignant, and I suppose, being a true daughter of Eve, the fruit, because forbidden, became all the more attractive and desirable, and I grew all the more determined to follow the legal profession" (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 75). Fortunately for Ethel, and other women who wanted to follow in her footsteps, when she was in the last year of her degree, after several bills had been unsuccessfully introduced in Parliament, the Female Law Practitioners Act, abolishing the gender ban in law professions, was finally passed. The legislation was met with much enthusiasm on the part of the women's rights movement as well as by publicists and commentators. As the suffrage magazine *The White Ribbon* commented: "our New Zealand Portias have now a clear field for their powers" (*The White Ribbon*, 01/09/1896, 6). What is more, Ethel and Stella Henderson, who was at the time a law student at Christchurch University were frequently linked with and even credited with the success of this legislative initiative. (Brown 25-26).

Despite the systematic discrimination still present in the field, however, Ethel's experience at the university was generally positive. At the time when her female peers at the medical school met with derision and, sometimes even hostility of their male colleagues, Ethel's participation in the classes was welcomed by other students and did not cause any resentment.

On the other hand, it was the Otago Law Society that put most obstacles in her way making her access to studying materials as difficult as possible. For instance, the members of the society claimed that there was “no rule applicable to your case” and banned her from using the Supreme Court library allowing her to read in the Judges’ Chamber Room and borrow books only with an express permission of a member of the society’s council. Ethel responded to this rule in a polite and courteous way, but not without a hint of tart irony: “As ‘there is no rule applicable to my case’ I must ask you to convey my thanks to the Council for what is then their very liberal treatment of me. For the present it will answer every purpose and I am more than satisfied to be allowed to consult your many valuable Books even though apart from the Library and the Profession” (November 57). Even that restriction, however, was quietly removed shortly after the Female Law Practitioners Act 1896 became law.

Ethel excelled in all her subjects from the beginning of her studies at the university, coming first in the first-class division of constitutional history and law and in jurisprudence in 1894. She received outstanding results even when it came to the subjects that students at the Otago University were forced to prepare for without the instruction of a tutor. It was commented in *Otago University Review* that her “position as the first lady lawyer in the British dominions is presumably unique” (1897, vol. 11, no 3, 83) For some of the commentators Ethel’s academic successes were an excuse to once again bring up the issue of the burden of academic duties and possible overstrain exerted on the female health by the demands of higher education. Ethel, herself, decidedly rejected any possibility of female fragility which could prevent them from facing the challenges of academic discipline and schedule. After she started her first practise in 1897, she was asked in an interview if her health had suffered as a result of her studies to which she answered indignantly:

Do I look an invalid? I went to bed at 11 o’clock every night, and gave myself an allowance of nine or ten hours rest, and, as you can see, this plan has agreed with me pretty well. I believe if students would give themselves a more liberal allowance of resting time they would do better work, and injure their health less. The minimum time in which the LL.B. degree can be taken is four years, and I did in that time. (*White Ribbon*, vol. 3, no 26, August 1897, 1)

Ethel Benjamin completed her degree in 1896 and graduated LLB the following year. Her graduation ceremony was used by the university authorities to acknowledge the gender changes in the student population by asking Ethel to make the speech on behalf of the graduates. It was a ground-breaking decision as up to that point, all the speeches were made not by a new, but by a former graduate. On top of that, Ethel’s address was also the first occasion that a woman made a speech of any kind at the university. The graduation itself was presided over by

the Vice-chancellor, Edward B. Cargill who also made the opening address, in which he made sure to bring up the graduations of female students, in particular Ethel Benjamin at Otago University law school and Margaret Cruickshank at the school of medicine. In his opinion, it was especially the fact that Otago University was the first institution in Australasia to admit women to law degrees indicated its modern and progressive character that contributed to the social transformation of the “sheltered woman” into the “self-sufficient woman” that was happening in New Zealand and allowed women to carry their influence into various extended spheres of public life. In addition, he expressed hope that Otago University managed to equip all its graduates, regardless of their gender with not only intellectual abilities but also with principles of truth, courage and respect for others, presenting the person of Queen Victoria as the best example of devotion to such principles. Cargill finished his speech with the presentation of twenty-four graduates; the introduction of Ethel and Margaret was met with enthusiastic applause (November 34).

It was Ethel’s turn next to reply to the Vice-chancellor and address the other graduates and the audience. She took this opportunity to take a subtle dig at the Otago University’s authorities who decided to go against the tradition in order to present the first female graduate of the law degree as a symbol of the university’s forwardness while the gender equality was still far from everyday reality among some of the members of faculty and male students. “But, I knew that little would be expected of me,” she declared, “and even if I succeeded in talking nonsense the charitable verdict would be: ‘Oh well, it is all that can be expected from a woman’ (laughter) At the present time my knees are shaking under me. I never knew until this time what weak members they were” (*Otago Daily Times*, 10/07/1897, 6). The next part of her speech, however, was a testament to the fact that her opinions and arguments were anything but shaky. She addressed the issue of advancement of women, which clearly became the main theme of the graduation ceremony. She started by listing all the professions in which women were already present in New Zealand: “lady butcher, her lady commercial travellers, her lady auctioneer, her lady opticians, her lady dentists, her lady watchmakers, even her lady blacksmiths”. What she wanted to dispel, however, was the assumption that women ventured into professions out of ideological motivation as she quoted American dramatist, Isaac Zangwill: “The woman of the future is simply the working woman. All we really want is to make girls economically independent of marriage, able to choose their mates from love instead of selling themselves for a home” (*Otago Daily Times*, 10/07/1897, 6).

According to Ethel, the need for economic independence was the main driving force behind the increased presence of women in public life. She criticized the Victorian patriarchal

stereotypes which forced women to assume that they should marry at any cost in order to succeed in life and called for the creation of a larger variety of employment options which would allow all women to become fully integrated human beings. The right to employment and independence was, as Ethel claimed, inalienable and enriching element in the lives of New Zealand women at the turn of the centuries. In the conclusion of her speech Ethel Benjamin made a final plea for the appreciation of individuality of women and the understanding for what could be perceived as rebelliousness: “For centuries women have submitted to the old unjust order of things, but at last they have rebelled, and as Sarah Grand has it: “It is the rebels who extend the boundary of right, little by little narrowing the confines of wrong and crowding it out of existence” (*Otago Daily Times*, 10/07/1897, 6). These sentiments serve to sum up the overall tone of Ethel’s address which was enthusiastically supportive not only when it came to the issue of the question of admittance of women to higher education at all degree,s but also within the frame of discussion of female economic and professional independence. Even though Ethel was clearly not interested in being presented as a symbol of a novel and possibly slightly whimsical approach which placed women in the role of exotic novelties in the predominantly male environment, she firmly promoted a version of a social order in which the equal contribution of women to public life is seen not as an exception but as norm.

The reactions of commentators to what was perceived as a relatively radical speech varied quite significantly. On the one hand, *The Otago University Review* reported on “The Capping Ceremony” in some detail and a large dose of approval of the fresh female graduates:

A pleasing innovation was this year made as regards the speech in reply to the Vice-chancellor, the speaker this year being New Zealand’s only lady-lawyer, Miss E. R. Benjamin LL.B who, on behalf of the new grad.s thanked the Vice-chancellor for his advice and congratulations, and, in a neat and pointed speech, reviewed the recent advances made by women in the professions, notably law and medicine. (1897, vol. 11, no 3, 70-71)

On the other hand, however it is possible to find cautious or even ostensibly unfavourable opinions in the reviews of the event even within the same issue of *The Otago University Review* which reported on the occasion in its general section. For instance, in the “Cloakroom Notes” the general approval of the capping ceremony was tinged with doubt about the stance on the female issue presented by Ethel Benjamin:

The Capping of 1897 will long be remembered as the occasion of the first speech delivered by a lady in our Academic halls. Opinions may differ as to the advisability of women’s speaking in public on such occasions, and as to some of the sentiments expressed by Miss Benjamin, but all must acknowledge her courage and admire her ability; both of which augur well for her future. (1897, vol. 11, no 3, 70-71)

Still, regardless of the tone assumed by commentators, the 1897 graduation ceremony at Otago University was a momentous and historical moment, as it saw the admittance of women into two professions which, up to this point, had been a bastion of male dominance in public life. As Ethel Benjamin and Margaret Cruickshank started to practise in their respective professions the gradual female presence in public sphere became a fact which the communities got accustomed to and accepted as a new social norm.

Ethel's determination to live according to the sentiments on working-women as the future of the gender included in her graduation speech were put to a test soon after she passed her degree and was allowed to practise. In the same year, her father, Henry Benjamin decided to take their family back to England either in connection with his wife's death a year earlier and the familial ties in London where Ethel's grandparents resided or due to the prolonged period of recession that affected New Zealand in 1890s. Ethel, however, preferred to stay in New Zealand even when it meant venturing into a male-dominated profession without the support of her relatives. Going against the expectations that all cotemporary women were subject to she did not seem to even consider marriage as a viable option for her nearest future (November 66). Ethel did not lose any time before she launched her barrister's practice either. On the 11th of May 1897 the *Otago Daily Times* announced: "Miss Ethel Rebecca Benjamin, LLB, was on Tuesday admitted by His Honour Mr Justice Williams as barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of New Zealand". The swiftness with which she started to forge her niche in the profession seemed to have taken Otago District Law Society by surprise as evidenced by a resolution recorded in the minutes of one of its sessions, calling for a regulation of the formal clothing of female lawyers (Cooke 337).

The issue of appropriate attire for female lawyers appearing in court and the regulations which would introduce norms regulating the problem turned out to be more contentious and difficult to solve satisfactorily than the members of the society initially envisioned. as is evident in a note included in the correspondence files of the Otago District Law Society for 1897. The text, entitled "Attire for Lady Barristers" that was copied from a newspaper clipping reporting a court session in front of Mr Justice Williams devoted to the question of the appropriate manner of dress for lady lawyers representing their clients in front of a judge. The proposal included a black gown with white collar and cuffs and no wig or other headdress, which evoked controversy as, at the time, wearing a bonnet was a prerequisite for a respectable woman. According to the journalist, going bareheaded in the case of female lawyers was deemed hardly fair as it could provoke pitying glances or even contempt of other ladies present in court. Eventually Mr Justice Williams declined to pass a judgment and in consequence the matter was

dropped and remained unresolved. As there were no official guidelines, Ethel decided to take the matters in her own hands and settled on the exact same pattern of gown, bib and wig worn by her male counterparts for her court appearances. This kind of decisiveness once again shows the independence and courage of the freshly appointed first New Zealand female lawyer, especially in the light of disapproval and even opposition on the part of her future colleagues.

When it came to the professional set-up of her office and the running of her practice, Ethel seemed to have a pragmatic approach focused primarily on making a good impression on potential clients who, as she realized perfectly well, were bound to treat a female lawyer with a healthy dose of scepticism and were, therefore less likely to trust her with their legal quandaries. In August 1897, Kate Sheppard, writing under the pen name “Penelope”, interviewed Ethel for the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement’s magazine the *White Ribbon* and gauged her stance on not only her personal situation of a female pioneer in the field of law but on the general situation of women in New Zealand. First of all, Penelope made a note of Ethel’s suitably professional attitude and a positive first impression that she made on her on their first meeting: The conversation began with the assertion on the part of Ethel according to which she did not expect undue kinship or preferential treatment on the part of the interviewer solely due to the fact that both of them were women. To the contrary, in the response to the question about this issue she replied: “Oh, well, it is said that women are less lenient towards women than men are”, which, according to Penelope was a “cautious, lawyer-like reply”. Moreover, in her next response, she showed her modesty and the reluctance to turn her experience into any kind of symbol of an ideological fight when she noted: ‘Yes, I am the first lady lawyer south of the line, but not the first British woman lawyer. There is, you know, one in India and another in Canada’. Still, she also acknowledged the fact that the achievements of the New Zealand suffrage movement contributed to the way her professional options were shaped as she reflected on the period of her studies at the Otago University: “It is true that the Legal Profession was not then open to women, and that the franchise had not yet been granted but I had faith that a colony so liberal as our own would not long tolerate such purely artificial barriers. I therefore entered on my studies with a light heart, feeling sure that I should not long be debarred from the use of any degree I might obtain” (*White Ribbon*, vol. 3, issue 26, August 1897, 6).

Ethel’s professional plans for the future were equally clearly defined, but also realistic as she told Penelope: “I particularly wish to practise as a barrister, and hope some day to make my mark at the Bar. Of course, at present, I will not refuse any law work.” In the response to the next question she also declared her active support for the further activities of the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement: “Yes, I am deeply interested in the Women’s Right

movement. Up till now I have been too busy to take any active part in the proceedings of the National Council. Some of the subjects have my heartiest sympathy” What is characteristic, however, Ethel was determined not to associate herself with anything that could be regarded as radicalism or chauvinism directed against either of the genders. This approach was clearly emphasised when she told Penelope about the potential for her personal involvement in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union: “Yes, I was asked to read a paper on “Laws affecting Women and Children” at the next meeting of the Women’s National Council, and thought at the time that was rather a large order. I therefore suggested that the title of the paper be altered to ‘Some of the Inequalities of the Law as regards Men and Women.’” (*White Ribbon*, vol. 3, issue 26, August 1897, 6).

In addition, Ethel declared her full support for all initiatives aimed at bettering the social and economic position of women of all classes in the wake of the granting of voting rights to vote. Clearly, she was aware of the need for more action before full equality could be achieved and was happy to volunteer her time and skills in what she considered to be worthwhile efforts on the part of suffrage and other charitable organizations: “No I have not heard that there was an idea among the members of the National Council to raise a fund for legal assistance to poor and friendless women. I think it is admirable suggestion. One of my own pet ambitions is to be useful to my own sex, and I hope to be able to arrange to set aside a certain hour of the day for giving advice gratis to men and women who cannot afford legal fees”. This kind of attitude evoked a reflection as to the possible advantage that the female lawyers could have over their male counterparts on the part of the interviewer who commented: “I realised also that in the legal profession there exists a noble opportunity for service by women whose hearts are touched with sympathy for the weak and helpless” (*White Ribbon*, vol.3, issue 26, August 1897, 6).

Altogether, Penelope was genuinely impressed with the intelligence, professional conduct, sensitivity and even stamina of the first female lawyer, who “passed through her college course with such credit, and evidently with so little mental or physical strain” (*White Ribbon*, vol.3, issue 26, August 1897, 6) and after some friendly chit-chat left Ethel’s office with the firm belief that she would have a bright future in New Zealand law. Unfortunately, not everybody shared Penelope’s conviction as Ethel soon started to encounter difficulties in establishing her practice. The male law professionals seemed to have closed ranks against Ethel who was perceived, at best, as an exotic novelty and, at worst as an intruder in the legal world. The ambivalence with which Ethel was treated by other members of the profession was seen, for example, at the occasions of the bar dinners, held in 1898 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Otago, and again a year later.

Even though these instances were relatively trivial yet they are symbolically resonant as in both cases Ethel Benjamin was excluded from the proceedings. In 1898, the invitations were sent to all active practitioners and Ethel, initially expressed her intention of attending but, for the reasons that are not entirely clear, was prevented from participating. Her absence was not coincidence or a simple oversight as evidenced by the fact that in the following year she did not even receive an invitation. With her characteristic determination Ethel decided to write to the Law Society in order to enquire as to the reasons behind the fact that she was not extended the full privileges of the membership:

I write to you to ask you why I was not notified of the Bar Dinner recently held under the auspices of the Law Society. I am exempted from none of the obligations imposed on members of the Profession, and I consider all privileges extended to them as such, should be extended to me. Whether or not I avail myself of those privileges is surely a matter for me to decide. It may be, of course, that the omission of my name was an oversight, but, if purposely omitted on account of my sex, I have to enter a protest against such treatment. As a matter of fact I should not have attended the Dinner, but that does not lessen my right to be notified as were all other Solicitors practising in the District and I resent the omission of a courtesy which I consider my due. Moreover, I do not think that without protest I should allow a precedent to be established that may affect the rights of other members of my sex who will follow in my footsteps (November 68).

Unfortunately, it does not seem that Ethel's missive had much effect on the other members of the Law Society, for Ethel was once again missed from the list of invitees at another bar dinner held in 1902 in connection with the ceremony of the official opening of new buildings of law courts in Stuart Street. She wrote another complaint to the secretary reminding him of his duties towards all members of the society, but it is not known whether she was successful as the attitudes towards her participation in any parts of the opening ceremony were verging on hostile. The proceedings, led by the acting Premier, Sir Joseph Ward, included a procession of all members of the bar, arrayed in wigs and gowns who were supposed to meet at their old quarters and march, in pairs, to the new court. This arrangement presented a problem as, according to Lord Cooke: 'Miss Benjamin again proved something of an embarrassment, as none of the profession was anxious to be paired with her in the procession, but J.M Gallaway, who had always been a champion of her cause, came to the rescue and walked with her' (Cooke 339).

Still, despite all the affronts that she was subject to, Ethel persevered and proudly took part in the proceedings alongside her male colleagues. Her fortitude was remarkable as Janet November comments in her description of the celebrations:

In the photo of the bar outside the new courts Ethel stands dignified, petite and smiling in the centre of the front row, next to the acting Premier, Sir Joseph Ward.

We can picture her, small and slim and almost swamped by the gaggle of mostly bearded barristers, as they assembled ready to march. She stands her ground with pluck and determination. Quite possibly her knees are shaking again (as they did at her graduation speech), but she sets a victorious precedent for members of her sex who were to follow in her footsteps. Some of those conservative, bearded barristers may have respected her assertiveness, even if they did not approve of her joining their ranks. (69)

Regardless of any feelings of reluctant admiration that her male colleagues might have felt when faced with Ethel's determination, a majority of them steadfastly refused to support her in establishing her practice. The fact that Ethel had to rely solely on herself when it came to finding employment as a lawyer left her little choice but to advertise her services to the public. Practically from the moment she obtained her qualifications, she began to place discreet but regular advertisements in the *Otago Daily Times* offering the support of a barrister and solicitor available for all types of legal work. She encountered very similar problems when she went to Wellington in 1907 and tried to set up a business there and she had to resort to even more intensified advertising campaign due to the fact that, as she stated herself, she was quite unknown there (November 55).

Both in Dunedin and later in Wellington District Law Societies issued official statements which deemed her advertising practices "unprofessional" and "unacceptable". Ethel defended herself in a decisive and logical way pointing out that if she had agreed to desist from advertising in newspapers she might have had to abandon her practise altogether, even before she had a chance to build up her professional reputation. She also reserved her right to conduct her business as she saw fit and, as she outlined in a letter to the Secretary of the Wellington District Law Society she had no intention of changing her methods: "I know from experience that no business will be put my way by other solicitors, and I must look to the public for support. I consider that it is imperative that I should make myself known by constant an attractive advertising. I intend to push my business all I know" (November 69).

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to assume that the lack of approval for her presence among New Zealand law practitioners, which forced her to be practically completely self-reliant, extended to acts of open hostility. To the contrary, as Ethel openly admitted in the aforementioned letter to the Wellington, she enjoyed amicable relations with most of lawyers working in Dunedin. Moreover, J.M Gallaway who was one of her staunchest supporters and, at the time, a Vice-president of the Otago District Law Society maintained that Ethel was generally respected and received some support and assistance from the legal profession in the city. This claim can be supported by the sentiments included in a letter that Ethel wrote to her older colleague and a sometime committee member of the Otago District Law Society, Mr

Turton, on the occasion of his retirement, which happened during her early years in practise. The message was written as an apology for not giving him a “last handshake” and expressed profound gratitude for his warmth and support which, according to Ethel, went beyond the bounds of conventional politeness (November 70).

Overall, however, Ethel had to embark on her career alone, under close scrutiny of the press and her peers and without solid support of other representatives of the profession, which required an enormous amounts of courage and determination. She was aware of the challenges connected with practising law, especially for a woman but saw the only solution in perseverance and determination, which she expressed in an interview for the *Christchurch Press* in 1897:

Do I think that women will be successful as lawyers? As with men, there will be many failures; few successes. The profession is already overcrowded; in numbers there are assuredly more than enough lawyers already. But there is always room at the top. If women are determined to succeed, if they are diligent and ‘pushing,’ if they make the most of every opportunity that presents itself, sooner or later success will crown their efforts. Determined men and women are not likely to fail; their very determination to succeed inspires confidence and carries with it the conviction and assurance of success. In the study and practice of the law, as in all else; there is no royal road to success. It can be reached only by hard work and perseverance, by infinite painstaking, and by untiring concentrated effort. (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7).

Once again Ethel was determined to present herself as generally neutral when it came to the question of gender in law professions, as she emphasized the importance of skills and talent and refused to support the right of women to enter the profession based solely on their gender: “The average woman with average ability had, I think, better leave law to her more gifted brothers and sisters. But where a woman is specifically fitted by nature for the practise of the law by all means let her become a lawyer”. At the same time, however, Ethel stated categorically that, in her opinion, there are no areas in law which should be inaccessible to female lawyers: “There is no department of legal work in which I could not conceive women successful. Of course the average woman would be helplessly at sea in intricate mercantile suits, and involved equity cases of every description, but so I take it, would be the average man” (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7).

Simultaneously, Ethel was of an opinion that in certain areas and particular clients, especially in case of women, female lawyers would actually have an advantage over their male colleagues. Apart from the fact that, when it came to delicate matters women tended to confide more freely in other members of their gender, female lawyers could display sensitivity, sympathy and attention to detail, which could make all kind of clients more comfortable and determine their eventual success:

Is it not desirable that women should be able to consult members of their own sex regarding the many delicate questions on which they daily have to be advised? To the woman lawyer women can speak without reserve, and many whom modesty has compelled to suffer in silence rather than confide their troubles to one of the opposite sex, will now have an opportunity of going to a woman for a legal advice. And surely the woman lawyer will be welcomed by many of her 'fallen' sisters; the woman lawyer with her varied knowledge of human nature, of its frailty and weaknesses, and of the many temptations which are placed in women's way may be relied on to hold out her hand to her erring sisters, and to do her utmost to lead them back to the narrow path of virtue. [...] She will gladly hold out a helping hand to all women who have strayed from the path of right, and if the warm and sympathetic touch of the woman lawyer's hand will sometimes bring comfort to a down-trodden heart-broken woman-sinner, then I maintain the existence of the woman-lawyer is more than justified. (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7)

Still, despite the fact that talented female lawyers were, according to Ethel, predisposed for certain specific areas of law, they could not afford to rely exclusively on work with women requiring legal assistance. As Ethel claimed, the reasons for this are twofold: "In this colony it would be hardly practical for women to devote all their attention to one or more particular departments of legal study. Our population is not large; there is not sufficient ground to work on" (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7). However, the effort to specialize could also be seen as way of forwarding a career of a female lawyer as "it might not be inadvisable for women practitioners to make a speciality of those branches of the law which especially affect their own sex". Whichever road a female lawyer chose, they had to be prepared to face difficulties and disapproval of male peers as their status as pioneers in the field also meant increased amount of scrutiny and frequently unwelcome attention:

It will be a long time, I think, before many women achieve great things at the Bar. In the first place, the rude stares of the crowded Court will do their utmost to disconcert the woman-pleader. When it is known that the woman-barrister is to appear the Courthouse will be filled with an eager and curious throng. The ordeal will be a trying one. Caricaturists will gather in full force. *Tit Bits*, *Punch*, and 'funny' papers generally will one and all be represented, each anxious to obtain a graphic 'par' about the latest craze. Her every peculiarity exaggerated, her every fault held up to the public gaze! (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7)

For all these reasons, Ethel considered all aspects of the profession important when it came to female lawyers, including appearance which was not a factor that male lawyers were habitually judged on. In the case of women, however, the situation was, in her opinion, radically different as "if under such trying circumstances, the woman-barrister fails to appear at her best – yet at her best she must appear!" (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7). It was important for all the pioneers to present themselves not only for their own sake but for the sake of all women who would want to join the profession in the future. She must show from the beginning that it is

possible for women to become successful barristers. *Experientia docet* in this, as in all things, but if “failure” be applied to her first chance will probably be her last. That is why, how a female lawyer presented herself and what first impression she made on the people present in the courthouse was of utmost importance as “the eyes of the public will be upon her; she (and in her the woman-barrister) will be on trial, and then, if ever, she must make a favourable impression” (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7).

That is not to say that the appearance was the most important element and decisive element when it came to the performance of the female lawyers. To the contrary, according to Ethel, she would also need not only theoretical knowledge which constituted “but only a small part of the necessary equipment of a would-be successful woman barrister”, but a great deal of general knowledge and tact:

The successful barrister must first and foremost be endowed with good sound common sense. She must be the possessor of more than an average share of tact. The lawyer with talent may gain the admiration of his ‘learned friends’, but it is to the lawyer with tact that briefs will come; the former may be regarded as an able barrister, but the latter will be known as successful one. The woman barrister must be shrewd, quick, and full of hidden resources. She must be a keen observer of the world and of human nature. She must be able to gauge her opponent in an instant, and the advantage to a barrister of being able to sum up her man in a moment cannot be over-estimated. Different persons must be differently handled. Some must be ‘bounced’, with others this treatment would be suicidal – these must be coaxed, cajoled, wheedled into saying just what they most strive to hide. Others, again, seem wound up and warranted to go the distance. With those her task is an easy one; she has just to let them talk, and they will tell all that is wanted. (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, p: 6-7)

Ethel was clearly aware of the fact that her profession required a wide variety of skills and characteristics, such as the knowledge of human character and great communicative abilities.

At the end of her comments on the status and perspectives that women had in New Zealand when it came to entering the professions connected with law, Ethel decided to share several pieces of advice, once again, urging future female lawyers to be patient and display perseverance. As she noted: “If, then, women become lawyers, they must not expect to encounter no obstacles on their road to success, and when they find them blocking their progress they must not get disheartened, but must cheerfully set to work to overcome them one by one”. The indispensable qualities that any lawyer needed to arrive at their goals, included indomitable will, unswerving purpose, unfaltering courage and the ability to focus on a goal as, according to Ethel: “the man or woman, [...] with these qualities will sooner or later achieve success in whatever sphere of life he or she may be placed”. To sum up, in order to support her words, Ethel quoted Goethe who said: “He who has a firm will, moulds the world to himself” which

emphasized her opinion that, regardless of gender, the most important factor contributing to the success in any profession was perseverance in the face of inevitable obstacles” (*Christchurch Press*, 13/09/1897, 6-7).

Even though there is no primary source material as to the early years of Ethel’s practice, it is possible to find evidence supporting the claim that she strove to put her convictions into action and chose initiatives which promoted women specialists acting on behalf of interests of their own gender. She was especially aware of the need for protection of vulnerable members of society and was a staunch supporter of the creation of organized forms of help for vulnerable women and children which included the New Zealand Society for the Protection of Women and Children. Initially, the society was formed in Auckland in 1893, with a branch formed in Wellington in 1897.⁵ It was therefore natural that in February of 1899 the *Otago Daily Times* suggested that another branch should be formed in Dunedin. The treasurer of the Auckland branch, Mr George Fowlds, who happened to be visiting Dunedin at that time wrote to the *Otago Daily Times*, commending the proposal and describing the importance of the Society’s work in alleviating suffering and promoting a beneficial moral influence on the community, which also saved ratepayers hundreds of pounds per year by compelling husbands and fathers to recognize their obligations. In addition, he added, his opinions were warmly supported, among others, by Ethel Benjamin, who was “offering her services as honorary solicitor, and promising to assist the proposed movement in Dunedin to the best of her ability” (Siedeberg McKinnon 6).

It was not long before Ethel voiced her own opinion on the topic. On the 13th of February 1899, she sent her own letter to the *Otago Daily Times* confirming her support for the cause but also politely questioning the desirability of choosing a male president for such a body:

It seems to me that work of this nature comes peculiarly within woman’s province, and while agreeing with your correspondent, Mr Fowlds, that a great deal depends upon the ability and management of the occupier of the chair, I think it would be preferable in such a society that a capable woman should preside. And surely there are many women in Dunedin quite fitted for such a position, and willing to give their time and services in such a good cause.

⁵ The main objectives of the Society were:

1. To institute proceedings in cases of cruelty, seduction, outrage, or excessive violence to women and children.
2. To give advice and aid to women who had been cruelly treated.
3. To provide neglected children with homes.
4. To agitate for improvement in the law in respect to protection of women and children.
5. To organize Girls’ Clubs. (Siedeberg McKinnon 6)

If, as I hope will be the case, a society be formed here for the protection of women and children, I shall be glad if they will permit me to become their honorary solicitor and to do what lies in my power to help make it a success. (*Otago Daily Times*, 13/02/1899, 4)

Ethel repeated the same sentiments during a public meeting which was held in the Town Hall on the 1st of March. Ethel, in her address, she stressed, once again, that a woman should have control of the cases that fell within the scope of interests of the society. According to her argumentation, some of the matters that the society would have to deal with would be of rather delicate nature and any woman who needed to seek its help would rather confide in woman than a man. The Dunedin branch of the New Zealand Society for Protection of Women and Children was finally formed during the next meeting on the 10th of May 1899. The Mayor, Mr Chisholm was appointed the president of the society, and the positions of vice-presidents were given to the Reverend Curzon-Siggers and Mrs W.H Reynolds. The committee that consisted predominantly of women included Ethel Benjamin, acting as one of three honorary solicitors and Dr Emily Siedeberg, an honorary medical officer. According to the rules that were established during the meeting, the “visitor” who would be responsible for contacts with vulnerable women and visiting them in their homes would need to be a woman, but other positions in the committee were opened to both genders. Clearly, the argumentation presented by Ethel was considered valid and convincing which encouraged the Dunedin branch of the New Zealand Society for Protection of Women and Children to adopt the policy of gender sensitivity when it came to dealing with the problems of the vulnerable members of the society.

The extensive work that Ethel Benjamin did on the behalf of the Society, which involved the cases of wife abuse, arranging the conditions of separations, divorces and adoptions as well as enforcing of maintenance payments, gave her plentiful opportunities to expand both her knowledge and experience, especially in the fields connected with the areas of law reflecting and affecting the social position of New Zealand women. As Carol Brown observes: “Placed within the context of evolving social legislation and an emerging women’s movement Ethel Benjamin’s casework provide insights into the status of women within the family unit and within the law” (41). Moreover, the nature of a majority of cases also fell within the scope of Ethel’s personal interests and her beliefs as to the importance of female lawyers’ involvement in certain types of cases. What is more, it allowed her to take advantage of her position of a trail-blazer to promote a certain model of a socially aware female lawyer who was supposed to focus her attention on the issues connected with social problems affecting predominantly women and, by extension, their children.

That is not say that Ethel uncritically followed and supported the causes promoted by the New Zealand women's movement. In fact, at times she could be actually quite scathing in her opinions on the ideals and methods employed by organizations promoting the equal status of women in the society. For example, in 1898, Ethel fulfilled her promise to write a paper on behest of the National Council of Women that she mentioned in her interview with Penelope, but it did not meet with appreciation on the part of the leaders of the organization. The paper entitled "The Inequalities of the Law regarding Men and Women" included warnings as to the dire consequences which were bound to ensue if women regarded men as their natural enemies. "In my opinion this view has no foundation on fact", she said "on the contrary, my small experience teaches me that women have less to fear from men than from their own sex. The majority of enlightened, broad-minded men perceive that by raising the women they are raising the race, and if women will but prove themselves worthy of equal rights there is no right or privilege that will long be denied them" (*Press*, 02/05/1898, 5). Moreover, according to Ethel women still lacked political maturity which would allow them a wider perspective on social issues and act responsibly in public life context. She expressed a direct disapproval of practices employed by the National Council of Women as, in her opinion, it was "really absurd for a few women, as yet political infants, to meet and in a moment "carry unanimously" motions which few of them understand, which in all probability are quite impracticable, or which, if given effect to, might revolutionise society in a way which few of them thoroughly appreciate" (*Press*, 02/05/1898, 5).

Admittedly, in the following sections of her paper Ethel made an attempt at expressing her support for the cause of gender equality, but always made sure to stress the fact that she perceived it as separate from the National Council of Women's agenda and completely divorced from their methods:

Not that I am not a warm supporter of the women's movement – no one takes a keener interest than I in the true advancement of my sex. At the same time, I do not think that the world can be entirely changed in a day. *Festina lente* is a good old motto – follow it. It appears to me the height of absurdity for a few political tyros to settle in a moment questions of gigantic import, questions which would merit the earnest and careful consideration of politicians of life-long experience. And I would especially warn the Council against seeking to meddle with the relations husband and wife. For instance, the Council glibly talk about the Economic Independence of Married Women, and after a short and totally inadequate discussion unanimously pass resolutions which, I venture to affirm, few, if any of them, thoroughly convinced that the possible good to result will outweigh the probable evil? In my opinion, until you are sure of these facts, and know that your motion could be carried into effect, no one of you should vote in favour of it. To do so calls forth the ridicule and scorn of all sensible men and women, and works more harm than thousands of such motions could ever do good. (*Press*, 02/05/1898, 5)

Ethel's comments were so undiplomatic and patronizing that, unsurprisingly, the National Council deemed her paper to be opposed to the spirit of the Council's work and rejected it.

The situation rapidly evolved in a very public conflict with both sides publishing letters in *Evening Post*. Initially, it was then Vice-president and the Honorary Secretary of the National Council of the Women of New Zealand, Margaret Sievwright who felt compelled to explain the that the Council's decision not to read or publish Ethel Benjamin's paper was based on the fact that "The Executive [...] did not ask to be informed of, and were not ready to accept, Miss Benjamin's opinions and views on matters regarding which they did not consider her an expert, and which had nothing to do with the subject in hand" (*Evening Post*, 07/05/1898, 2). What is more, Mrs Sievwright expressed the annoyance on behalf of herself and other members of the Council who were all veterans of the fight for the female suffrage in New Zealand as to the arrogant and preachy tone assumed by Ethel in her text:

With regard to her strictures on the "economic independence of married women," I can only ask does the poor child fully understand what she talks about— so "glibly." The "political infants" — those of them, at least, who have taken a prominent part in the discussion — are grey-haired women who for a quarter of a century or more (before Miss Benjamin was born) have been working for the emancipation of women, and, through them, of men. (*Evening Post*, 07/05/1898, 2)

In turn, Ethel wrote a public reply that was published in *Evening Post* on the 18th of 1898 in which she continued her criticism of the approach assumed by the members of the Council in a methodical manner, which took into consideration all the arguments used by Mrs Sievwright. First of all, she addressed the issue of the discrepancies when it came to the contents of the speech requested by the Council. In the opening paragraph of her paper she stated clearly: "In reply I may say that this is the first intimation I have had that any expression of opinion by me was to be limited it to matters in which the Council considered me an expert. My paper was not an opinion taken of counsel. Had it been so, I should certainly have limited it to matters within the scope of a professional opinion" (*Evening Post*, 18/05/1898, 2). In addition, Ethel disagreed with the Mrs Sievwright's opinion according to which her remarks "had nothing to do with the subject in hand" as she wrote extensively about the inequalities in the law regarding married women with her recommendations as to the potential alterations that the Council was planning to promote to the authorities and Parliament. It is clear that the refusal to accept her criticism of what she considered to be errors on the part of the Council was perceived by Ethel as the lack of the willingness for a constructive discussion, which would contribute to the further development of the social equality of genders. "I thought it my duty to speak as I did", Ethel states in her reply and adds "I did not expect my opinion to pass without discussion, and I was

ready for any honest unbiased criticism. If my statements were incorrect, why did the Council not prove their falsity? If I had unjustly condemned their actions, why not hasten to justify them?" (*Evening Post*, 18/05/1898, 2)

The heated exchange of arguments and slights between Ethel Benjamin and a representative of the New Zealand National Council for Women, Mrs Sievwright demonstrates the way in which the irreverence and the spirit of independence displayed by many of women brought up in the communities shaped by the colonial conditions frequently influenced the way in which they approached the organized forms of promoting equality between the genders. Even though Ethel was an ardent supporter of women's right to comprehensive education and then a professional career in the field of their choosing, at the same time she did not hesitate to express her doubts or even strident criticism when she was faced with the gender narratives or proclamations that she could not agree with. While this kind of approach could induce friction and even public conflicts, as evidenced in the case of Ethel's paper on the inequalities of law when it came to men and women, it was helpful in expanding the horizons of the female rights activists and, therefore, broadening the scope of the equality debate.

Moreover, despite the differences of opinions between her and the members of the National Council for Women and Ethel's reluctance to subscribe to an organized agenda, she spent a greater part of her professional career championing the causes which affected the welfare of vulnerable women. By extension she was making a concerted effort at setting certain standards and precedents which would facilitate the path that the future female lawyers had to take which actively helped to further the NZCW's campaigns for equality. Still, as a professional woman in the world dominated by men, Ethel had to find her own balance, which meant that she was unable to follow all the ideals promoted by the women's rights organizations. For instance, even though the majority of the activists were firmly in favour of prohibition, Ethel was one of the most effective lawyers who represented the hoteliers in the battle against the prohibition of alcohol at the beginning of twentieth century. That decision may be perceived as the outright contradiction of the ethos of the feminist movement in New Zealand but, according to Janet November such a view is overly simplistic. Women, in general, were not universally or consistently in favour of either the women's movement or prohibition as their support was a matter of personal choice and preference. In case of Ethel, even though she was sympathetic with many of the aims of the women's movement but prohibition was not one of these aspects as she was a pragmatist and opportunist, independent of particular political causes (113).

Still, Ethel's involvement in anti-prohibition cases did not mean that she was not aware of problems caused by overindulgence or that she supported unconditional right to imbibe. To the contrary, throughout the years of her career, Ethel penned numerous letters on behalf of women complaining of their husband's excessive drinking, cruelty or drunken habits or foul language. In fact, she had no patience with habitual drunkards as is evident in a letter to one of her long-standing hotel clients: "Tell Mr McKay to be careful not to allow drunken men to remain on the premises and on no account to permit any man the worse for liquor to be served" (November 114). Despite her aversion to the drunkenness, Ethel strove to retain her impartiality when it came to the availability of alcohol (November 114).

The independence of opinions and outlooks on the social problems connected with the equality of genders displayed by Ethel Benjamin in her professional activities was characteristic for many of the first-generation New Zealand women who started to enter the public life in the second half of the nineteenth century. That is why, even though they could be seen as examples of female capabilities and skills outside of the domestic sphere they tended to follow individual paths rather than following the route promoted by female organizations. That does not mean, however, that the inevitable friction induced by the various approaches to the gender issues was uniformly detrimental to the development and functioning of bodies such as the New Zealand National Council for Women. In fact, rather than hurting the feminist prerogatives, the conflicts like the one accompanying the submission of Ethel's paper, challenged the feminists activists to confront their established convictions and agenda with the realities of the dynamically changing dilemmas facing women venturing into the public sphere of activity or trying to find a better life in the New Zealand communities. As a result, the discussion of the necessary adjustments in law which would forward the case of gender equality could remain grounded and relevant to the actual needs of women in the society.

Ethel Benjamin proved that it was crucial to assume a more individual approach when it came to the willingness or readiness of each woman to get involved in the public or professional life. In 1910, Ethel and her husband, Alfred came to England to visit her family and travel around. Even though there is no direct evidence as to their intentions it is not likely that they had planned to emigrate when they departed for Europe. However, when World War I broke out. Alf was offered a position at the "New Zealand offices," which he accepted out of the sense of a patriotic duty. The professional situation was more complicated for Ethel as she could not practise law in England. At some stage during the war, she obtained a position at the Midland Bank in London followed by a transfer to Sheffield as a bank manageress, the first woman to be given a post of this kind in England. We cannot be sure whether Ethel practiced

law during the years she spent in Europe through, for example, assisting her husband as a clerk or legal executive. As Janet November notices: “The Ethel we know from her business letters would have wanted to take the reins, and not been contended with a back seat, but she would not have needed to be in the public limelight, having learnt to negotiate her place in an environment that was not always welcoming” (185). Still, for reasons that will forever remain private, Ethel decided to spend the rest of her life in England where she was tragically killed by a car in 1943. It was that freedom of choice which allowed each and every woman to elect freely the degree of involvement in public or professional life that Ethel promoted throughout her life as the best model of gender equality New Zealand society could hope for.

4.4 Elizabeth Yates (1809-1918): the first Lady Mayor in the British Empire

On a balmy, summer evening of 29th of November 1893 a large crowd gathered in front of the Council Chambers in Onehunga, New Zealand in the anticipation of the results of elections for the position of the mayor of the town. Just like in the case of the general election that took place the day before, this particular voting in Onehunga held a historical significance. It was in 1893 that New Zealand women were allowed to actively participate in the voting for the Members of Parliament for the very first time and Onehunga, a small town on the outskirts of Auckland, could boast its first female candidate for the mayoral seat. Even though, Elizabeth Yates, the wife of the previous mayor, was promoted by her supporters on the strength of her qualities such as “a ready wit, unbounded energy, a sound knowledge of local body procedure, a will of her own, and courage” (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 31) her candidature met with extremely mixed reactions. As Gregory Mitchell, a historian who in the 1950’s collected information from Yates’ contemporaries, stated in one of his articles, Elizabeth’s opponents were “loud in their protestations against the arrogance of a woman, who so far forgot her place in a man’s world as to dare to poach on his anciently acquired provinces”. They dubbed her a “disgrace to her sex” and perceived her as “one of those hateful new women” who were “most unwelcome in any council capacity and quite unsuited to occupy the mayoral chair” (Mitchell 7).

It was not the first time, either, that Elizabeth Yates caused a stir among the members of Onehunga community as together with her husband, Michael she was actively involved in the campaigns concerning the most pressing issues facing the inhabitants of the town. One of such initiatives that Elizabeth considered to be of utmost importance was the problem of

waterworks that dominated the local council's activities in the second half of the 1880s. The doctors practising in the town urged the need for a reticulated water system as the only way to get relief from epidemics of typhoid. A plan was put forward as early as 1883 at an estimated cost of £5000, but the council was hesitant to ask the ratepayers to pay an increased tax to cover the loan that the town would have to incur. The public debate on the topic caught Michael's interest and inspired him to run for a council seat which he managed to win in 1884. According to Judith Devaliant the council work became increasingly important for Michael: "He worked hard, taking a lead in discussions and expressing his views forcefully. His name appeared in the newspapers so often that Councillor Robinson complained that, "Mr Yates was frequently reported fully while he and other members of the council were not noticed". [...] Michael was a colourful personality with his beard and status as a retired sea captain. His outspoken comments at council and public meetings continued to attract attention" (28).

By all accounts Elizabeth was actively involved in the campaigns to push forward the plans for the introduction of waterworks against the opposition of some of councillors and a sizeable group of Onehunga's inhabitants even though it is not clear what her exact input into the promotion of the investment was. According to one of the accounts, one of the accounts penned by Gregory Mitchell, a council meeting on the 28th of June 1887 provided an opportunity for her to make her debut as a public speaker:

A lady arose to speak whose name was literally to ring around the world in a few years time. Mrs Yates' action in daring to speak at a public meeting was so repugnant to the vociferous majority present, that even though she mounted the platform and the mayor somewhat dubiously appealed for a fair hearing for the lady, the assemblage kept a constant 'din' which drowned her voice. With that indomitable spirit which later carried her through many a stormy session of the Council she stood on the platform for almost an hour, and it almost 10 o'clock before she was persuaded by the mayor to leave the platform, without being allowed to speak (2).

It is not entirely certain whether the events of this particular meeting unfolded in the way recounted by Gregory Mitchell as there is no mention of Elizabeth's supposed attempt to speak publicly in the accounts published in *The New Zealand* and *The Auckland Star*. Both of these newspapers printed detailed reports on the proceedings as "one of the rowdiest that has ever taken place in sleepy hollow" (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 31) so an incident which ended with a wife of a councilman getting booed off the platform was sure to have caused a sensation which both journalists and the members of the community would have discussed extensively. Still, even if Mitchell's not totally credible when it comes to Elizabeth's first public appearance, the atmosphere of the meeting that he conveys in his version of the debate on the issue of waterworks is, in all probability, an accurate depiction of the small town's community reaction

to a woman, even a respectable wife of a councilman, trying to voice her opinion on public matters in public. According to him, she was greeted with cries of “Go back to the wash tub” but suitably replied with a quotation from Disraeli’s maiden speech in the House of Commons: “Although I sit down now, the time will come when you will hear me” (Mitchell 2).

Despite the fact that New Zealand society was generally accepting of the idea of emancipation of women and their right to take an active part in public life, for small rural communities like the one in Onehunga these progressive changes were slightly more difficult to accommodate and get used to. That was probably why, when the town clerk finally announced that Elizabeth had won by 120 votes to 107, few feeble cheers were drowned out by cries of protests and calls for a recount. The new mayor was not asked to give the speech she had prepared as was customary for the new town officials but was reduced to a modest celebration with a group of friends at her own home. The very next day after the elections four councilmen and the town clerk handed in their resignations in protest over what they perceived to be an outrageous role-reversal. This constituted a truly inauspicious beginning to a brief but remarkably turbulent term of office which incited a great deal of interest, close observation and comments not only on the part of the local populace but all over the Commonwealth.

Elizabeth Yates, who succeeded in breaking into the field of politics as the very first woman in the British Empire, was actually born in Caithness in England around 1842 as the daughter of George and Eleanor Oman. Her father was a career soldier which meant that Elizabeth and her sister Eleanor spent their childhood in a series of army towns. By the time she was seven, however, George, whose career in the army up to this point had been rather undistinguished, decided to enlist as a fencible soldier and seek a better future for his family in New Zealand⁶. The Omans travelled to New Zealand on board of *Berwick Castle* in 1852, as part of one of the last fencible contingents. There were 40 families on the ship, including 68 children. When they arrived in New Zealand, they became part of a group of 25 families assigned to settle in Onehunga, which, at the time, was a small village of mainly military character with a few tradesmen and adjacent farms. The settlement was situated on the edge of the Manukau Harbour approximately 12 kilometres from Auckland and, initially, served as a

⁶ The fencible soldiers were retirees from the Imperial Army who were recruited to provide protection for Auckland in the event of an attack by Maori tribes from the Waikato. Fencible villages were established at Onehunga, Otahuhu, Penrose and Howick in 1847. Each man was given a small cottage with an acre of land. For seven years they had to train, attend church parades and be ready to defend Auckland, but at the end of that period they were released from service and given the freehold of their cottage and land. The men were able to supplement their army pensions by working as labourers on public works and neighbouring farms, and with hard work and economy most fencible families prospered (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 16).

trading post for Maori who supplied food for the Auckland market. The gradual arrival of the fencibles and their families stimulated the growth and development of the town which, over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, became a small but thriving community.

The Omans were given a cottage and land in Selwyn Street where Elizabeth and her sister could grow up enjoying both the township and the nearby beach. They grew up watching Onehunga develop from a military settlement to a township of around 3000, with a busy wharf, a rail connection to Auckland and several industries. According to Judith Devaliant's description:

By the 1860s Onehunga was a pleasant place to live. Queen Street (now the Onehunga Mall) was levelled and widened and had replaced Princes Street as the main shopping area. It ran uphill from the wharf, providing a quicker route for horse-drawn drays and the omnibus service to Auckland. Parliamentarians James Richmond and Arthur Atkinson from Taranaki preferred to live with their families in Onehunga, as the air was 'more bracing' and provided some relief from 'the heat and humidity of Auckland's summer. (20)

Apparently, both Elizabeth and her sister Eleanor were lively, young women with a large circle of friends. As their father did not take an active part in local affairs there exist relatively few clues as to how exactly they spent their time although they must have learnt a lot helping their mother in the house and garden. They must have looked back at that time with fondness as a valuable formative period as Elizabeth boasted that she was very skilled at churning her own butter and had made her own and her husband's clothes when times were hard. Still, the only direct description of Elizabeth in her youth was penned by George Joseph Garland in his reminiscences published in 1947. George, who was a member of the Legislative Council in the 1920s, grew up in Onehunga and met Elizabeth in the 1860 when she was friends with one of his sisters. He remembered her as a striking and popular young woman, who was known as Lizzie to her friends. According to his account, she was "a very handsome person to look at", tall and graceful with "a clear pleasant speaking voice, an olive skin, dark brown eyes, straight features and a wealth of very black hair". Even though she was not considered to be a beauty in the most accepted sense of the word but her looks were classical, "of the Diana type". When it came to her personality, George depicted her as "full of good spirits, vivacious and unquestionably attractive". He particularly admired her dress sense, saying "she knew how to wear clothes" (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 21).

There is not much information available on the particulars of formal education that Elizabeth received but both George Garland and Gregory Mitchell both suggest that Elizabeth was "carefully educated", with Mitchell saying she "read widely" under her father's guidance. In all probability he encouraged her to use the library and attend lectures at the Onehunga

Institute. In addition, her familiarity with the works of Shaw, Ibsen and the poetry of William Morris which she often used to mystify “the homely wits” of councillors while she was the mayor of Onehunga with quotes from poems and novels resulted from her active and passionate membership in literary societies. In general, Elizabeth was perceived as an independent young woman who, despite the fact that, in her youth, was surrounded with plenty of suitors was not interested in getting married until she met Michael Yates when she was in her thirties. However, even as a married woman she never lost interest in the public life of Onehunga and considered her own, active participation in the communal affairs as natural. That is why, she fully supported her husband when he decided to run for the mayor of Onehunga in 1888 and, after four one-year terms in office Michael’s health deteriorated she put her name forward in order to be able to carry on with his projects.

When she decided to become a candidate for the seat of the mayor, Elizabeth insisted on stressing the fact that her involvement in the local politics came through Michael. As they tended to work together on the most important issues when Michael was in office, it only seemed logical to her to offer her candidature for the election and continue the policies they both considered essential for the development of their town. In addition, even though she was not seeking to make a point on the issue of gender equality, she was acting on her belief that women who educated themselves could do as well as men. In lieu of preparation for the job of a mayor, she studied the Municipal Corporations Act and the local government manual and, although she had no experience of committee work and had never actually entered the council chamber prior to her being elected, she was confident that she understood what would be expected of her and was convinced that she was more than capable of performing all the duties connected with the position with efficiency in no way inferior to the performance of previous male mayors of Onehunga. When asked about the detailed reasons for running for the office of the mayor, Elizabeth said that there was no “special event” which influenced her decision. She confirmed, once again, that her interest in local politics was stimulated by the fact that Michael was elected for the town council for the first time. What is more, when he became mayor she “was able to be of considerate assistance to him in the exceptionally hard work of that time.” Her decision to run was made with no thought of notoriety but “in the interests of the town and the ratepayers”, and, although she was aware of potential opposition to the idea of woman mayor she was confident of being able of fulfilling the mayoral role “providing the cordial cooperation of the councillors was extended to her” (*New Zealand Graphic*, 16/12/1893, 507).

Elizabeth’s candidature was formally put forward by a group of Michael’s friends because, as she stated, “there seemed no chance of the right sort of man coming forward”. Her

claim is supported by Gregory Mitchell's account who concluded that, initially, the group was working hard on ensuring that the next mayor of Onehunga was a Liberal who would support the projects connected with waterworks and the re-opening of the town cemetery. However, according to Mitchell, after interviewing several possible candidates, they concluded that Elizabeth had a better knowledge of borough affairs than anyone else and, on top of that, possessed traits necessary for mayoral office such as "a ready wit, unbounded energy, a sound knowledge of local body procedure, a will of her own, and courage" (Mitchell 3-4). One of them, James Sullivan, was also convinced that Elizabeth could garner the support of Liberals and female voters and hoped that "the novelty of a woman seeking office would tempt many to vote for her merely to see the outcome" (Mitchell 3-4).

The reactions to Elizabeth's nomination varied greatly and caused quite a stir among the Onehunga inhabitants and the journalists commenting on the upcoming elections. Her opponent was a local draper and sitting councillor, Frederick Court and when the names of both candidates were officially announced, councillors immediately declared that "they would be glad to work with" (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 41). Clearly, it did not even occur to them that there existed a possibility of a woman winning the mayoral elections. The newspapers' reports on the candidates also expressed confusion and contradictory opinions. Some of the commentators went as far as suggest that the only reason for Elizabeth's nomination was the fact that she had been the power behind the throne during Michael's terms in office. For instance, *The New Zealand Observer* claimed, not entirely truthfully, that it "has been a standing joke at Onehunga for some time that Mrs Yates was virtually mayor of the borough for several years but the honour was appropriated by her husband" (*New Zealand Observer*, 25/11/1893, 7). On the other hand, *The Auckland Star* thought that the elections of a "lady mayoress" was "likely to become reality", but *The New Zealand Herald* seemed to have shared the Onehunga councillors' inability to accept the idea of a woman running for a prominent public office as it announced a spirited contest between Mr Yates and Mr Court. Still, the mistake was cleared up with the statement that "Parnell had the honour of being the first district in which a lady contested a seat in the Borough Council but Onehunga has improved upon that by a lady coming forward as a candidate for the mayoralty of that township" (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/11/1893, 5).

There was also a significance divergence in the opinions as to Elizabeth's chances of winning. While some of the commentators embraced the possibility of a woman becoming a mayor, *The New Zealand Observer* said that the ratepayers of Onehunga were "understood to prefer Fred Court, the Police Court or any kind of court to petticoat government" (*New Zealand*

Observer, 25/11/1893, 7). The reality of Onehunga's general public's opinion was actually more complex. Elizabeth was well known and respected in the community as a good businesswoman and keen debater, but as Gregory Mitchell stated many of her neighbours refused to take her attempt at entering the world of politics seriously. He said her opponents were loud "in their protestations against the arrogance of a woman, who so far forgot her place in a man's world as to dare to poach on his anciently acquired provinces". They called her a "disgrace to her sex", and regarded her as "one of those hateful new women" who were "most unwelcome in any council capacity and quite unsuited to occupy the mayoral chair" (Mitchell 4).

Elizabeth's decision to take part in 1893 election coincided with numerous important developments in the gender equality movement. As Judith Devaliant comments: "It was an exciting time for New Zealand women. They were preparing to vote in their first parliamentary election after a long campaign, in which the suffragists were called the shrieking sisters and accused of being faddists and fanatics" (37). Emily's candidature for the mayoral seat was not motivated by ideological involvement in the suffrage cause. In fact, she took no part in the enfranchisement campaign and chose not to sign the final petition which contained the names of over 31,000 women. Her scepticism as to the activities of the Women's Christian Temperance Union can be partly explained by her lack of sympathy and understanding for some of the most prominent aims of women's organizations. For instance, she regarded prohibition as an infringement on individual liberty as she stated in an interview for *New Zealand Graphic* that it would be "a burning shame to rob the working man of his beer". Even though she was aware of and acknowledged the harmful effects of overindulgence but considered prohibition as senseless as banning football because "some people occasionally got killed at it" (*New Zealand Graphic*, 16/12/1893, 507).

Clearly, Elizabeth was another intelligent and independent New Zealand woman who preferred to follow her own path towards equality as: "she must have noticed the articles on women's progress which appeared in the newspapers, yet she followed her own interests and joined a local literary society, attracting attention when she became their delegate to the Auckland Union Parliament. This was a debating group organised on parliamentary lines which met once a fortnight to discuss issues of national importance" (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 38). In fact, Elizabeth was determined to emphasize the lack of connection between her becoming the mayor of Onehunga and the campaign for female suffrage. As she told a British newspaper in 1895: "Some people think that my election had something to do with the extension of the franchise to women but this is a mistake. A woman could have been elected mayor at any time.

Nor had we the least idea of making a stir. We had no idea that such undue notice would be taken of our action” (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 45).

Still, the victory of Elizabeth Yates in the year of the enfranchisement of New Zealand women caused quite a stir among the political elites. Congratulations and acknowledgments started to arrive to Onehunga from practically all over the world. Queen Victoria sent Elizabeth a personal letter in which she expressed her pleasure in the progress made by New Zealand women since getting the vote, “as was shown by the commendable spirit Mrs Yates had shown in offering her services to the public” (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 47). However, some of the leaders of the suffrage movement, like Kate Sheppard, who knew what it was like to be on the forefront of the women’s advancement, warned Yates that her capabilities would be severely tested and her career watched with great curiosity (*Prohibitionist*, 16/12/1893, 3). Sheppard’s apprehension turned out to be prophetic as the new mayor had to deal not only with obstinate and disruptive behaviour of the councilmen but also with vitriolic attacks in, predominantly, New Zealand and Australian newspapers and journals.

In many of the publications Elizabeth was described as arrogant, tactless and shrill and her behaviour criticised heavily from the moment of her installation ceremony. On this particular occasion *New Zealand Herald* commented on the performance of the new mayor who refused to take advice of the male councilmen in the following way: “The eyes of New Zealand were fixed upon her, not to mention the eyes of Asia, Africa, Europe and America. It was a unique and grand historical event. To some extent she held in her hand the destinies of her sex, but she failed to rise to the occasion” (*New Zealand Herald*, 23/12/1893, 1). Magazine *Fair Play* was even harsher and more personal when they described Elizabeth as “a stern faced woman, the sort of woman to judge by her looks, to give hubby particular Hades if he came home late from the lodge, my dear” (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 56).

These scathing remarks were quickly followed by a whole series of satirical cartoons in which Elizabeth was portrayed as a tyrannical and unattractive monster who does not hesitate to use physical force against cowering men. This level of malice is striking especially directed against a woman who, as the wife of a well-known and respected former official of the town and a businesswoman in her own right, had been considered to be one of the pillars of the Onehunga community up until the fateful elections of 1893. It is even possible to find commentators who made a direct connection between the candidature of Elizabeth Yates and the disturbance it could potentially cause to the established social patterns. For instance, a Napier editor published a text in which he accused Elizabeth Yates of unnatural and unfeminine

behaviour and used the opportunity to express his outrage at the disturbance and challenge to the “natural way of things” that her victory represented:

Will it never dawn on our human right advocates that as it has not pleased heaven to give women authority over men she can never acquire it. She was born to subjection and subject she will remain while the earth goes round. No amount of evolution will ever equalise the sexes. Equality, at least the equality to which the ‘screaming sisterhood aspire, would mean the extinction of the race. (De La Mare 5)

It is possible that the harshness of the tone of many of the inauguration ceremony reports was brought about by uncompromising approach that Elizabeth displayed throughout the proceedings which many interpreted as unfeminine behaviour. Even though the installation of a mayor in a small borough like Onehunga normally would not attract much attention in national press, Elizabeth’s elevation to the mayoral position was seen as an event of great political and social significance so the event was attended by quite a few journalists. The ceremony was described in the report printed in *The New Zealand Herald* as “the most interesting” of all the previous and current mayoral installations in the colony, “being surrounded with a peculiar attractiveness, owing to the fact that the central figure was a lady.” The journalist remarked that Elizabeth’s election was not only “absolutely unique in the history of colonial municipalities” but also resulted in “very onerous responsibility placed upon her shoulder”. It was especially important as there was inevitable future scrutiny to consider as “her official career would be regarded in the light of an object lesson and her success or failure will in all probability, in a large measure decide whether this precedent which has been so boldly inaugurated at Onehunga will be adopted or avoided by other centres throughout the Australasian colonies” (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5). However, *The New Zealand Herald* reporter finished his introductory remarks on a positive note as he appealed to the community of Onehunga to throw their support behind their new mayor in this unprecedented situation:

Such being the case, the general opinion is that it is only fair that Mrs Yates should be given every facility and assistance to enable her to carry out the functions of her office with credit to herself and with honour to the borough she represents. Hitherto the residents of Onehunga have been looked upon as being a little inclined to lag behind in the adoption of new methods and institutions, but now, as it were, by a bound they have become municipal experimentalists of the very first water. (*The New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5)

The ceremony itself was very well attended as all the public seating provided for the audience was filled with local dignitaries, including lawyers, businessmen and bank managers. Elizabeth arrived at the council’s chambers at noon dressed in a “plain, yet becoming costume, wearing a blue and white print dress with a white front, puffed sleeves, and zouave jacket” (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5). Due to the fact that she was a woman, she did not have to

remove her hat when she entered as would be required from a man. The councillors all stood up and she bowed to each side of the table in acknowledgment. She was welcomed by the retiring mayor, Dr Erson who showed her to a seat on the right side of the Mayoral chair. Subsequently, Dr Emerson officially opened the installation of the new mayor. Apart from the customary statements welcoming the new official for the ensuing year, Dr Erson's speech included the assurance that Elizabeth could count on the support of the council regardless of her gender. As *The New Zealand Herald's* reporter noted, "he felt he could with confidence bespeak from each member of the Council and from each official every assistance for the new Mayor, to enable her to carry out the duties connected with office to which she had been elected by the burgesses" (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5).

When her turn came to repeat the words of the mayoral oath, Elizabeth did it in a "clear and unhesitating tone of voice." However, after she had been officially installed, she did not hesitate to go off script when the retiring mayor warned her that the only way in which she could expect to be successful in her endeavours as the first female mayor would be to follow the motto, "be just and fear not", that he had carved in gold on the back the chair she would occupy while in office. Elizabeth's reaction was swift and assertive:

The Lady Mayor replied without any hesitation or sign of nervousness. She commenced by stating plainly that she regretted that the motto referred to was the last words of the retiring Mayor. She did not require to be reminded of the motto 'Be just and fear not,' as she had been that all her life. She considered that in the service of ratepayers who had placed her at the head of the poll, she would find a sufficient incentive to place before herself. She was afraid that she did not look at the affairs of the Borough in the same flattering light as Dr. Erson did; 'but' she significantly added, 'more of that anon.' She thought she would at any rate carry out the duties of her office to the best of her ability, and if she did not at the end of her term they would simply have to say that she had not kept her word. (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5)

Her unflinching attitude met with the approval of the audience who reacted to her words with enthusiastic applause. The ceremony continued with an address of Mr J.D Jackson who was the first to hold the office of the Mayor of Onehunga in which he compared Elizabeth's situation as a pioneer with his experiences and, aside from issuing congratulations, warned her for "though there was some little honour attached to it, there was no little difficulty" (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5). In making this last remark, Mr Jackson was referring to the fact that four of the councillors had handed their resignations immediately after the announcement of Elizabeth's victory. Even though he did not want to state explicitly that the councillors' decision had a direct connection to the election, it was "mighty like it." The former mayor was openly critical of the former councillors as "some of them had only months ago

been elected by large majorities for three years, and going out of office after three months they had treated with contempt the burgesses who had elected them, their brother councillors and the present mayor” (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5). On his own part, Mr Jackson made sure to finish his speech with the expression of “his intention of giving the mayor all the support he could in the conduct of the business of the Council, and the work of the town” (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5). The support extended by the first mayor of Onehunga was a clear sign that despite the fact that Elizabeth’s election remained a controversial and even potentially contentious issue, some of the prominent and respected members of Onehunga community openly expressed their approval of the first female mayor, which allowed for a certain dose of optimism when it came to Elizabeth’s successful term of office.

Moreover, despite the fact that Elizabeth emphasized her determination to be independent in her decisions while in office, she was clearly aware of the importance of the potential support of seasoned politicians and town officials. That is why, when it was her turn to thank Mr Jackson, she made sure to bring attention to the sense of continuity represented by the fact that she was to sit at one end of the table with the first mayor of the town at the other. She perceived it as a symbol of her plan of following the constructive line of policies in the best interest of the town. In her opinion, the resignations among the town councillors were not caused by her election as there had been nine similar incidents during the term of the previous mayor. Even though, however, she was clearly trying to convince her listeners that, in her eyes, gender had nothing to do with the mayoral elections Elizabeth still did not refrain from pointing out that her decision to run in the elections was not motivated by her desire to seek honour but “because they could not get any gentlemen in the Borough to carry out the duties as faithfully as she herself intended to do”. On top of that statement, she added that this “might appear very egotistical’ but many men had been approached and did not want to take office and she ‘thought she would come forward” (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5).

In the summary of her speech, Elizabeth placed her victory within the wider scope of the position of women in society in general and in the most important organisation in particular. As she commented:

She happened to be the first Lady Mayor in the British Empire, but she hoped it was only to be a beginning. Whether in Church or State, the women were most important. Would any man in the room say that his house would be better without a wife in it? And why should not the same be applied to women. They had tried men in the Council for seventeen years – without the co-operation of women – with unsatisfactory results, and they would find that the affairs of the borough would be looked after more efficiently with a woman at their head. (*New Zealand Herald*, 21/12/1893, 5)

The phrasing of this statement placed Elizabeth Yates firmly in the middle of the gender conflict regardless of her professed indifference towards the stereotypes and unwillingness to be perceived as a symbol for the political emancipation of New Zealand women. It is also a clear indication of the pervasive and inescapable character of the narrative revolving around the issues connected with the supposed weaknesses and inadequacy of women that was created and propagated by, predominantly, journalists commenting on the political life of New Zealand.

Regrettably, the way in which Elizabeth comported herself during the installation ceremony and her comments on the shortcomings of some of her male predecessors only served to fuel the criticism expressed towards her election as well as the presence of women in the public sphere. For instance, the journalist writing under the penname of “Mercurio” directly suggested that Elizabeth behaved in an unfeminine way as, instead of boldly speaking her mind, she should have uttered “a few noble thoughts, which would have rung through the world as showing with what profound and becoming modesty, with what lofty motives” she intended to fulfil her mayoral duties. Instead she had chosen to reject outright Dr Erson’s advice, which the reporter interpreted as the sign of unbecoming arrogance. What is more, he attacked her claim that no man was prepared to “carry out the mayoral duties as faithfully” as she intended to. He perceived that statement as an accusation and attack on all of Onehunga’s male residents. ‘There! What do you think of that, ye gentlemen of Onehunga?’ Were they to believe that every possible candidate “intended to be dishonest and unfaithful?” (*New Zealand Herald*, 23/12/1893, 1)

Even the journalists, like the editor of *The Southland Times* who “did not want to find fault with the female franchise” and could not help but notice that the criticism of Elizabeth’s behaviour during her time in office was, to a large extent, unjust as she performed ‘important social functions with so much womanly courtesy and grace’ used the opportunity to express his doubts as to the inclusion of women in the public life:

The scene gravely described by the press ... [was] as broad a burlesque as Gilbert and Sullivan ever in their happiest moments achieved. It requires no comment, needing simply to be read in order to bring before us a principle run to death, a ‘reductio ad absurdum’ of women’s rights. Mrs Yates referred to the fact that she was the first Lady Mayor in the British Empire. We add the fervent hope that she may turn out to be the last. (De La Mare 5)

In the following paragraphs, the editor went on to state that even though he wholeheartedly supported granting women the right to vote he was reluctant to extend his support to the eligibility of women to public office in the Municipality or State. According to him: “It is one thing to take a share in electing men to positions which in the very nature of

things only men are fitted to fill, and quite another to thrust women into these positions or even to permit them to assuming them” (De La Mare 5). What is more, in his opinion, it was not social norms but inherent gender traits that dictated the roles that men and women could play in the community:

Whatever doubt might exist as to women being in their place as voters, there can be none we think as to their unfitness to take reins, as municipal councillors, magistrates or members of parliament. To decide the issue there is no need to go beyond the simple determination of commonsense. The conditions of active public life are all averse to the admission of women to its arena, to say nothing of incompatibility of such a career with the due discharge of these duties that naturally and exclusively belong to them. The exhibition at Onehunga with all its features of grotesque incongruousness has its uses but only in the way of warning us from the repetition of the folly which the ratepayers of that borough have allowed themselves to perpetuate. (De La Mare 5)

On the other hand, some of the newspaper accounts strove at objectivity and made an attempt at depicting Elizabeth Yates in a slightly more favourable light, but even in these cases the focus of the texts was not the skills and ability of the new official to perform her duties but the fact that, in person, she did not fit the stereotypes associated with women in public life promoted by a majority of the commentators and satires. The journalist who interview Elizabeth for an interview published in *New Zealand Graphic* in December 1893 expressed surprise that she was not “the masculine-looking personage most people would picture ... her face is not of the hard, business type we have been accustomed to associate with leaders of the woman movement ... Neither can you catch any glimpse of masculinity about her attire. It is useful and in the present mode”. Her “pretty drawing room” was depicted as “an eminently feminine retreat, containing no indication that [it was] the home of a lady devoted to political and municipal matters” (*New Zealand Graphic*, 16/12/1893, 507).

Another interview, a few months later, went even further in the admission to the fact that Elizabeth might be perceived as a potential threat to the established patriarchal order as they tried to prove to their readers that their fears were groundless. Elizabeth was described as “a brainy woman, but a well balanced one” and “not a woman of whom a sensible man might be afraid” which, according to the author of the interview was a clear sign that she did belong to the ‘shrieking sisterhood’. He finished his musing with the remark: “No woman could be unwomanly when the first thing that is noticeable on entering her drawing room is a number of children’s photographs” (*Auckland Weekly News*, 21/04/1894, 5). The comment was clearly meant as a compliment but, at the same time, placed Elizabeth firmly within the scope of familiar and acceptable femininity and, therefore, the comfort zone of the community.

All these contrasting accounts of Elizabeth Yates's appearance, bearing and conduct seem to suggest that the primary aim of their authors was not a depiction of an actual woman but addressing the problem of a certain type of femininity that Elizabeth Yates came to embody. Even though, she was not a stalwart supporter of the suffrage movement her victory in the mayoral election was unavoidably linked to the enfranchisement of women and turned her into a symbol of women trying to aggressively challenge or even abolish the gender-binary patriarchal system of the society. Undeniably, even though, she was not a stalwart supporter of the suffrage movement her victory in the mayoral election was inexorably linked to the enfranchisement of women and turned her into a symbol of women trying to aggressively challenge or even abolish the gender-binary patriarchal system of the society. Elizabeth Yates was, unfortunately, not treated as an individual by the media and the fellow town officials but as an example of a New Woman who stepped out of her bounds and needed to be curbed by putting her capabilities, femininity and even her sanity in question. The journalists saw language in particular as the means of re-establishing the power equilibrium and used it to reinforce their own standpoint which could not encompass a woman in a position which gave her the ability to dictate a course of action to a group of men used to being in charge.

It is, therefore, symptomatic that one of the very first issues raised by the newspapers after Elizabeth's victory was connected with the use of language. Namely, questions were raised as to what was the proper term to address Mrs Yates in her new office. The day after the elections *New Zealand Herald* offered tentative congratulations to the new mayor and asked: 'Is a lady duly elected to this statutory office a mayor or a mayoress?' The choice of the latter term, which suggested feminine subservience seemed to be unthinkable as the journalist noted: "We give our vote unhesitatingly for mayor. The person discharging the duties of this office is always so designated in all Acts of Parliament from William the Conqueror downwards. The term 'mayoress' is unknown to the law, and is simply a conventional designation for a wife of a mayor". According to the author of the article Yates could not allow herself to act in a typically feminine way if she wanted to "keep order amongst the members of the Council, who have sometimes been inclined to a little rowdyism and to get out of hand". This created a certain tension in the power relations which, at this point, the author was willing to address only on the level of the language when he remarked: "If we persist in conferring upon women posts which have always hitherto been held by men, we shall no doubt get into many difficulties, and have to revise our system of nomenclature" (*New Zealand Herald*, 30/11/1893, 4).

The Press of Christchurch weighed in on the issue but approached it from a different angle. The article focused its attention on Elizabeth's husband Michael when it enquired: "What

puzzles us is the problem as to Captain Yates's present position. When he was Mayor his wife was Mayoress by virtue of her relation to him. In what way are the burgesses of Onehunga, who wish to do the correct thing, to address Captain Yates now? Indeed, how are the Councillors to address Mrs Yates when she is presiding over the Council's meetings? We suppose 'Mrs Mayor' will be probably about the mark". The author of this article also sees Elizabeth Yates as a case which needs to be considered in a wider context of the gender dynamics as he follows his questions with what sounds almost like a warning. "Both these points, however, ought to be settled, because now that the ice has been broken and the feminine interest in politics has been thoroughly aroused, we shall expect to see Onehunga precedent extensively copied" (*Press*, 1/12/1893, 11).

All these opinions expressed in prominent newspapers and periodicals can serve as an indication of the fact that, despite the wider opportunities and flexibility of New Zealand society offered to women, breaking out of the well-established gender-binary patterns which saw women as fundamentally different and inferior to men proved to be challenging for many of Elizabeth's male contemporaries. That is why, it was much easier for commentators and journalists to address the confusion accompanying the election of the first female mayor on the linguistic plane instead of discussing the skills and qualifications of the new town official, without taking into account her gender.

Still, the new nomenclature that had to be employed after the elections turned out to be barely the first stage in the systematic rejection of an idea of a woman having the power of decision in the public sphere. The comments pertaining to the proper way of addressing Elizabeth Yates and her husband swiftly gave way to unsubtle allusions as to the gender roles within the Yates's marriage. Once again, Michael Yates became the first target for propaganda, this time, undermining his masculinity. Yates, a burly former sea captain who was Elizabeth's greatest admirer, proudly showing reporters the large pile of congratulatory messages from all over the world and claiming that her success was achieved "all on her own. There is no other woman in Onehunga or Auckland could have done it" (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 57) was depicted in some of the cartoons as a Mayoress sporting long skirts, frilly little hats and carrying typically feminine accessories.

The adversity and biased criticism that accompanied Elizabeth Yates' election continued unabated when the Mayoress assumed her role as the Head of the Town Council and the Justice of Peace. What is more, once regular meetings of the Council started, every word and decision issued by Yates were under constant scrutiny and commented upon not only by the journalists but members of public in New Zealand and other countries of the world. The

situation the Mayoress found herself in was far from simple as she was faced not only with the new duties and mayoral responsibilities but also with logistical problems caused by the resignation of the town clerk and two of the councilmen. On top of that she had to contend with the open hostility some of the remaining members of the council displayed towards her at every opportunity. At the same time, the public interest incited by her election showed no signs of abating which resulted in large crowds attending the meetings of the town officials.

The promise of the continuous chaos and the pressure exerted on the new Mayor became apparent from the very first gathering of the Onehunga town council in early 1894. . As the proceedings had to start without the presence of the town clerk, it turned out that both the books and the keys of office were missing and it fell to the new Mayoress to hunt them down before they could begin. The confusion must have put her in a defensive mood as she immediately got involved in a conflict with her most intractable opponent, councillor John Jackson who, standing for the town clerk asked her to sign the minutes of the last meeting presided over by the previous mayor, Dr Erson. Elizabeth categorically refused to put her name to the document as she had not been present during the proceedings. In addition, she also questioned the correctness of the minutes of a special council meeting that took place two days before Christmas the previous year due to the attendance of former councillors, Hill and Rowe. That is why, when the councillor Jackson ignored her request to ‘run his pencil through their names’ and advised her to sign ‘under protest’, she replied sternly: “Oh, no, I shan’t do anything of the kind, as it will then stand as a record against my previous ruling” (*New Zealand Herald*, 9/1/1894, 6).

This confrontational atmosphere that characterized the meeting from the beginning continued when it came to the choice of a new town clerk. After all the applications had been read out Elizabeth moved the appointment of Captain Richardson, who was offering to do the job for £20 less than advertised. The proposal met with the opposition on the part of councillor Jackson who called it “virtually a tender”, but Elizabeth stated that the captain had a pension from the army and could afford to work at a reduced rate. As she stated: “It wasn’t everyday £20 could be saved for the borough” (*New Zealand Herald*, 9/1/1894, 6). Elizabeth had enough support to push through Captain Richardson’s nomination but she was severely criticized by the press for her perceived meanness. Even though Captain Richardson turned out to be a good choice, who followed the procedure and become known for his efficient courtesy, Elizabeth was still described in *Fair Play* as “the Yates ‘female woman’ who now bosses the municipal affairs of poor Onehunga [and] believes in cheapness, cheapness, always cheapness” (*Fair Play*, 17/02/1894).

The independent spirit with which Elizabeth set out to perform her duties as a mayor, which became evident during the first council meeting she presided over, rapidly became a feature that regularly attracted the attention of journalists. Still, despite numerous critical opinions, she was convinced of the validity of her way course of action and determined to continue regardless of popular opinion. As Judith Devaliant comments: “Elizabeth’s unusual decisions caused concern. She was accused of not understanding her duties and mistaking her powers, and advised to listen to her most experienced councillor, John Jackson. She ignored the criticism and got on with the job, confident she knew what was expected of her and ready to quote the Municipal Corporations Act when challenged” (59). This interest quickly turned into a pursuit of sensationalism which meant that, despite her efficiency, Elizabeth’s term in office was turned into a form of a source of cheap entertainment or even a tourist attraction:

Her majority enabled her to accomplish a lot of useful work but street improvements and a diminishing debt make boring reading, and Auckland newspapers preferred to publish verbatim accounts of arguments with her opponents which were often spread across three columns with sensational headings. The reports attracted spectators eager to see for themselves what was going on between the lady mayor and her councillors. Some were ratepayers with a genuine interest in borough affairs, but many came from Auckland motivated by a desire for amusement which led them to take sides and encourage Jackson and his friends to go to greater lengths. The reports of the subsequent disturbances were circulated by the Press Association, creating a false impression of Elizabeth, which was exaggerated by cartoons in the weekly papers depicting her as a mallet-wielding tyrant. (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 60)

Even though the predominant tone of a majority of articles was critical or verging on hostile, Elizabeth rapidly gained a status of a celebrity not only in New Zealand but internationally as well. She started to receive numerous letters and pleas for an autograph from various countries and was visited by other officials impressed with her unprecedented election. For instance, the mayor of an English visiting the Auckland area insisted that his itinerary should include a meeting with Elizabeth as a lady mayor would cause “a great sensation in England, and [he] must not on any account return without meeting her”. He remained adamant even when he was warned that a trip to Onehunga would leave him with no time for viewing Auckland from the summit of Mt Eden which constituted “one of the most famous views which the world had to offer”. On top of that he would not be able to go to the Waitakeres and see a kauri tree or visit the Art Gallery and Free Library which were the pride of the Auckland City. His response was that he would be forgiven if he returned home without seeing any of those things, but “would be utterly disgraced if he confessed that he had been within a few miles of the borough that had elected a Lady Mayor and not had taken the opportunity of interviewing her” (*New Zealand Herald*, 28/02/1894, 4).

Elizabeth herself did not seem to resent the international notoriety that was sparked by her election to the mayoral position. To the contrary, the endorsement that she received from other officials bolstered her confidence especially as she was capable and skilled enough to impress her visitors on regular basis. On one of such occasions, Frances Trask, Mayor of Nelson, while visiting Auckland asked the Mayor of the city to take him to Onehunga. According to his account, he spent a pleasant hour with Elizabeth talking about municipal affairs and left Onehunga “deeply impressed” with her “business capacity and grasp of municipal matters” (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 66). The approval expressed by her peers gave Elizabeth confidence to claim in an interview for the New Zealand Herald that “some of my townfolk say I am the best mayor Onehunga has had.” When asked whether she considered the mayoral duties to be in any way incompatible with the fact that she was a woman, she could not find any inherent conflicts between holding a public position and gender but used this opportunity to mention artificial obstacles put in her way by male officials. “But this is what I find I could not do” she said, “I could not, for instance, go down to the Council offices day after day, when the auditors were here, like my husband did”. Still, even if she was not fully proficient in certain areas of her position, that did not stop her from performing her duties efficiently. “I do not understand the financial position of the town like Captain Yates, but as far as conducting the business of the Council is concerned I feel myself competent” (*New Zealand Herald*, 18/04/1894, p 3).

According to Elizabeth, her successes in the office were due to her thorough knowledge of the requirements of the position as well as strict following of the rules and procedures governing the activities of the council. Moreover, she put all the existing opposition and the criticism directed against her down to “a petty, personal persecution indulged in, towards her, by a certain small section” of the community who raised matters “of offensive nature”, which were insulting to her as a woman, purely out of spite or ignorance. Still, she felt that the example she was setting in presiding efficiently over the council’s matters would result in more women aspiring to the official position of mayors and Justices of Peace. In her opinion, there should be more women in public life in general:

There should be ladies on the Board of Education, which have to deal with lady teachers and girls. Woman, I think, should take her place alongside of man even in Parliament. I think our Parliament would be very much better if we had some women in it. People run away with the idea that if they give women the full benefit of the franchise that there will be a rush of women to be members of Parliament, while as a matter of fact not one woman in ten thousand thinks herself fit for the position. But I am in hopes that what I am doing will show the way, and from what I have heard I think there will be several lady mayors next year. (*New Zealand Herald*, 18/04/1894, 3)

Still, Elizabeth's notoriety brought about by all the articles and interviews had also negative aspects as it increased the scrutiny of each of her actions. Many of the commentators took every opportunity to lecture her on all her perceived mistakes and potential shortcomings. For example, a journalist writing under the pseudonym of "Random Shots" cautioned her that in "an over excess of zeal" she was likely to usurp all the functions of the council and "reduce its male members to perfect automatons, compelled to do her bidding". He also expressed his concern as to the quality of her future relationship with other councillors if she insisted on bossing them around. Elizabeth was reminded that winning the mayoral elections offered her a unique opportunity "to prove that a woman can discharge the duties of so important an office as well as a man, or better" but only if she did not antagonize the councillors she had to work with. According to him: "No Mayor in male attire would have ventured to rule as Mrs Yates did and no public body would have put up with such remarkable rulings without a good healthy row" (*Auckland Star*, 13/01/1894, Suppl. 2).

What "Random Shots" failed to take into account was that, first of all, the level of antagonism directed against Elizabeth by some of the councillors was much higher than in the case of any of her male predecessors. For a majority of her opponents finding fault with all the decisions of their new mayor was a matter of principle regardless of their actual merit. Moreover, Elizabeth was getting much more attention than any other mayor of a relatively small and unremarkable town which put her under additional stress and provoked her to react more emotionally to various unavoidable conflicts during the council meetings. The fact that her performance was also treated as a point of reference for any future female officials must have exacerbated the pressure Elizabeth was under. Judith Devaliant comments on the criticism expressed by "Random Shots" in the following way:

He overlooked the fact that Elizabeth was working in a glare of publicity that no male mayor was exposed to. She should have been judged as the mayor of a small town which was all she aspired to be, but meetings of the Onehunga Borough Council were reported at greater length than ever before and attention was focused on her performance as a woman. Part of the problem was that she was ahead of her time. People were prepared to accept the enfranchisement of women because voting once every three years did not interfere with their role as wives and mothers. Participation in politics was another matter, and the editor of *The New Zealand Herald* expressed a common feeling when he said: 'For our part, while we think women have a right to the suffrage, we do not think they would be successful as Mayors of boroughs, or in taking any action in local or general politics'. (61)

Elizabeth's example was also used by British journalists to comment on the issue of the gender equality in public life. For instance, *The Brighton Daily News* criticised the way both Elizabeth and the councillors behaved during the meetings: "the Council must, if they are to

preserve any of the prestige which should belong to them in their traditional capacity as ‘lords’ of creation, devise new methods of dialectus to cope with Mrs Mayoress” (quoted in Devliant 95). Otherwise, as the journalist half-jokingly said New Zealand men would be paving the way for the future invasion of women and their eventual dominance not only in their own country but in other parts of the British Empire as well:

Beginning with the colonies, she is closing in upon us and before long we shall hear that the march of feminine sovereignty has rounded the Channel Islands, and that woman is supreme in the Isle of Man. Then England will be attacked county by county. Mrs Mayoress and the Chairwoman of county council will carry the flag inscribed with the legend of Onehunga, ‘Don’t answer me back’, to the doors of the House of Commons. A lady will sit in the Speaker’s chair, and will wear a wig according to her own taste. And just possibly the debate will then be interrupted by the Speaker with the stern reminder that she will not allow anyone to insinuate that she has kept back official documents. (quoted in Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 95)

The articles like that were clearly aimed at undercutting the importance of the women’s movement by ridiculing and undercutting the most prominent and visible women who had enough courage to enter the public life as pioneers. As a result, however, even though New Zealand gained the reputation of a progressive country with a liberal approach towards its female citizens, Elizabeth’s reputation suffered which could also serve as a potential deterrent for the future female candidates for official posts.

The scrutiny and criticism, that Elizabeth was subject to, continued throughout her term in office. Despite the fact that, within the space of a year, she managed to reduce the Onehunga public debt from over £700 to £45, paid off around £200 pounds off the waterworks loan and made a considerable progress on the Onehunga Cemetery Bill, her interactions with the councillors remained fractious and she did not seem to be able to garner much support for her re-election for the second term. Even before the candidatures were announced some of the newspapers assumed that Elizabeth would not be standing again, and were, therefore, wondering which one of the male councillors could become her successor. Moreover, some of the writers were audacious enough to imagine future careers for Elizabeth. For instance, a journalist writing for *The New Zealand Observer* under the pseudonym “Fretful Porcupine” commented on the upcoming election in the following way:

Who will be the next mayor of Onehunga? It is improbable that Ma Yates will stand for re-election, but still more improbable that she will ' get in ' if she does. Messrs Gatland and J. G. Jackson are both spoken of, locally, as 'eligible,' but it seems questionable whether Mr Jackson, at all events, has any ambition to occupy the Mayoral chair. By the way, ' Her Worship ' was talking sometime ago of touring the Universe as 'New Zealand's first lady Mayor.' We don't know how the idea would pan out financially. But, possibly,

with the aid of a good ' advance,' and plenty of printer's ink the show might gee. Lohr made even Antoinette Sterling ' crush ' well. (*New Zealand Observer*, 20/10/1894, 7)

Despite the scepticism surrounding the possibility of her re-election, Elizabeth decided to take part in the 1894 mayoral elections. She was running against Donald Sutherland, one of the councillors who had resigned in protest against her appointment a year earlier. Elizabeth's opponent placed an advertisement in *The New Zealand Observer* which explained his decision and qualifications in the following way: "Ladies and Gentlemen, In compliance with a numerously signed and influential requisition of ratepayers, I have accepted nomination for the position of Mayor of our town, during the ensuing year. I have already acted for some time in the capacity of a councillor and am thoroughly acquainted with the conduct of public business" (*New Zealand Observer*, 20/10/1894, 9). Still his promises to work towards the re-opening of the town cemetery, increasing of the welfare of Onehunga and maintenance of low a low rate of taxes were practically identical with the program put forward by Elizabeth. Therefore, the result of the voting which saw Sutherland's victory by 147 votes to 56 in favour of Elizabeth, allows to surmise that it was his gender and not the policies that was the most decisive factor for a majority of ratepayers who took part in the elections.

Elizabeth's defeat provoked a renewed wave of interest on the part of all the major New Zealand newspapers. The predominant tone of the comments was unsympathetic or even openly hostile towards the retiring mayor. For instance, *New Zealand Herald's* commentator expressed his lack of surprise when it came to the results as he criticized Elizabeth's decision to put forward her candidature for re-election:

After an experience of twelve months, the ratepayers of Onehunga have seen fit to dispense with the services of their lady Mayor. Mrs. Yates, who was ill-advised enough to seek a second term of office, was defeated by an overwhelming majority. We sympathise with her in her disappointment, but we are not surprised at the result. It has been apparent for some time that the experiment which the little borough, in a moment of caprice, ventured upon in appointing a woman as its chief magistrate, was not altogether satisfactory. (*New Zealand Herald*, 29/11/1894, 4)

Moreover, the author of article did not deem it necessary to scrutinize the detailed reasons for Elizabeth's failure as "they will readily suggest themselves to those who have watched the manner in which the experiment has worked". Interestingly enough he seemed to place the entirety of responsibility for the frictions and conflicts during the council meetings at Elizabeth's door, going as far as to suggest that her inability to deal with the mayoral duties would serve as stumbling block for future female candidates who would be more capable of holding an official position: "It is perhaps to be regretted that the new departure should have proved so unsuccessful, for it will discourage attempts elsewhere to imitate it and render more difficult the task of the

“new woman” to realize her aspirations for that fuller and freer public life which one can satisfy the longings of her emancipated condition” (*New Zealand Herald*, 29/11/1894, 4). Altogether, *The New Zealand Herald* presented Elizabeth’s term in office as a relatively diverting but aberrant period in the short history of Onehunga which was bound to finish with the new elections:

But the ratepayers of Onehunga are the best judges of what they want, and we are by no means disposed to find fault with their decision. The proceedings of their Council meetings may now lose some of the piquancy which has characterized them of late, but we do not know that this is a matter to be deplored. The outsiders will miss the fun of the pantomime, but after all local bodies do not exist for the amusement of newspaper readers. (*New Zealand Herald*, 29/11/1894, 4)

The New Zealand Graphic was even harsher in its evaluation of the time that Elizabeth spent as the mayor of Onehunga. Once again they blamed her fully for the hostility that habitually ensued during the council meetings as they described her as a “hopeless failure” that was destined to be “crushingly defeated”. Her lack of leadership skills was quoted as the reason for the fact that during her term council meetings had “degenerated into unseemly quarrels between a tactless and heated lady, and a man who did all in his power to render the borough yet more ridiculous by promoting a quarrel on the most absurd and inconsequential trifles” (*New Zealand Graphic*, 8/12/1894, 530). Still, the author of the article was quick to absolve councilor Jackson of a majority of the guilt for the conflict as he considered it Elizabeth’s duty “to show a little tact and the ability to enforce her will which would have enabled her to put down the unseemly opposition”. Instead, she had proved herself to be entirely incapable of being a leader as she had “apparently preferred to squabble rather than to succeed” (*New Zealand Graphic*, 8/12/1894, 530).

The Auckland Star was the only periodical that made a concerted effort to present a balanced opinion on the Onehunga elections. First of all, they refrained from weighing in decisively on either side of the argument even if they agreed with other commentators when they said that “most probably under Mr Sutherland the affairs of the little borough will be conducted more smoothly than during the last year, and perhaps he may be able to do more to promote the prosperity of the place than Mrs Yates could do” (*Auckland Star*, 29/11/1894, 4). However, they were also aware of the fact that it was entirely due to Elizabeth’s courage showed by her when she took part in the unprecedented election that the town of Onehunga became known outside its own province and could suddenly boast a claim of a tourist destination. According to the article, once the female mayor was voted out of the office it was

inevitable that the small town would sink back into obscurity as Elizabeth was undeniably its most prominent citizen who elevated the tone of the local politics:

But there is another way of looking at the matter besides this narrow and parochial one. Mrs Yates practically made Onehunga in the eyes of the world. Before she was elected its mayor, hardly half-a-dozen people outside of New Zealand knew of the existence of the quiet little town by the Manukau. With her advent the place leapt into sudden fame, and throughout the world it became known as the first community to have a lady presiding over its municipal councils. Now it must again subside into the obscurity from which she rescued it and become once more one of ten thousand of the unknown mediocre boroughs that stud the surface of the planet. No more will the world's eye trouble to turn towards it with interest. It will be forgotten. And even we Aucklanders, who cannot forget it, will regard it with quite other feelings than before, for it will have become flat and commonplace in our eyes, and that pride which we felt on hearing its name trumpeted on every wind will be changed to calm indifference. The glory has indeed departed from Onehunga. (*Auckland Star*, 29/11/1894, 4)

When it came to the appropriation of blame for the conflicts that arose during the council meetings the author also strove at balancing his opinion as he stated that Elizabeth admittedly should have “exercised a little more tact and discretion, and shown a more conciliatory spirit towards those around her”. At the same time, however, he made sure to emphasize that her abrasive behaviour was partly justified by the hostile reception and lack of will to cooperate displayed by a majority of Onehunga council. As he stated: “If Mrs Yates did not succeed so well as she might have done, the fault was not entirely hers. From the beginning of her term of office she was met with by a most ungracious opposition. Obstacles were thrown in her way on every occasion, and nothing that could bring her into ridicule was neglected by her enemies” (*Auckland Star*, 29/11/1894, 4).

Overall, *The Auckland Star* chose to commend Mrs Yates for her efforts as the Mayor of Onehunga and predicted that like Ulysses, she will be able to say ‘I have become a name’. Moreover, they were certain that even if the contemporary inhabitants failed to appreciate the significance of Elizabeth's presence in politics, it was certain that she would be properly commemorated in the future, which, unlike would constitute a more fulfilling source of satisfaction than small victories over stubborn and chauvinistic councillors:

She may even go further and revel in anticipations of the day when Onehunga has become a fair city, and a population more appreciative of the talents of woman in municipal affairs will point with pride to the manly signature of ‘Elizabeth Yates, Mayor,’ inscribed in the musty but jealously guarded records of the city's early history. After all, it is doubtful whether there may not be more genuine pleasure in remembering past glories and dreaming of future fame than in being engaged in unseemly altercations with obstructive councillors. (*Auckland Star*, 29/11/1894, 4)

The Auckland Star was correct in its prediction as to the immediate loss of interest in Elizabeth and her endeavors as she dropped out of the sight of media for almost a year. None of the local newspapers considered it worthwhile to follow up on the former mayor's plans or to seek her opinion on current events or reflections on the time she spent in the office. It was a British newspaper *The Pall Mall Gazette* that sought an interview with Elizabeth in late 1895. The journalist described her as a middle-age woman with "a round and pleasant face, very dark of complexion, with black hair just going grey". Her behaviour was "collected and business-like", showing no strain or long-term resentment over the events of the previous year. In fact, Elizabeth made her duties as a mayor sound easy, implying that the perception of persistent conflicts during the council meetings was created by New Zealand newspapers' insistence on printing sensationalistic reports of unusually rowdy proceedings. "If previous years had been reported as fully," she said "it would have been seen that there was no real difference" (quoted in Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 118). Moreover, when asked whether she considered her mayoralty a success, she replied without hesitation:

The facts can speak for themselves, when I took office besides our debt of £5000 the town had a current debt of between £700 and £800. I not only paid off the whole of the current debt but paid £200 into the sinking fund in reduction of the main debt. I consider the result was due to practical economy and management. The roads during my year were better kept than they ever had been before. Since I left they have run themselves into debt again to the extent of £300. (quoted in Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 118)

The responses that Elizabeth gave to her interviewer clearly demonstrate that she did not lose her interest in local politics after she had lost her mayoral seat to Donald Sutherland. To the contrary, she remained a keen observer and merciless critic of the council's undertakings who did not hesitate to point out any shortcomings or what she perceived to be outright mistakes. She even made a brief attempt at the return into the public arena when the council put forward a proposal to purchase a cemetery site at Hillsborough for £1500. The initiative, which would require the town to incur more debt went completely against the projects that Elizabeth and Michael had worked for. During a meeting called to get the approval of ratepayers for the increase in public debt, Elizabeth spoke firmly against the proposal presented by Councillor Jackson. As *The New Zealand Herald* reported: "Mrs Yates said she was prepared to move an amendment. She did not think anyone who had the interest of Onehunga at heart would support Mr Jackson's motion. She was opposed to the proposal, as in her opinion 'the prospective site was not to be compared with the cemetery at Waikaraka', and she was surprised at the Mayor allowing the proposal to go so far as a public meeting" (*New Zealand Herald*, 6/07/1896, 6). In addition, Elizabeth implied strongly that Jackson was not the most competent person to deal

with the matter as he had been “dabbling in cemeteries for the last 10 years’ and therefore urged the ratepayers to support the project of re-opening of the Waikaraka cemetery” (*New Zealand Herald*, 6/07/1896, 6).

Elizabeth’s speech met with a great deal of derision as evidenced by so many interruptions that Mayor Sutherland had to call for order so she could be heard. However, her arguments were also so convincing that her amendment rejecting the loan was passed by 26 votes to 4. The result constituted a humiliating defeat for Councillor Jackson who had been convinced that he would be able to “sway the meeting”. What is more, the stirring address made by Elizabeth during the meeting encouraged a group of her friends to persuade her to stand for the mayoral elections at the end of 1896. Despite hard work of her supporters, once again, Elizabeth lost against Donald Sutherland with the final vote of 198 to 65. The defeat did not discourage her in the least, however, as she continued her active involvement in the politics of the town. In 1898, she agreed to become one of the seven candidates for the council and was elected with the third result of 336 votes.

Elizabeth’s career as a councilwoman was just as controversial and turbulent as her term as the Mayor of Onehunga had been. Initially, her return to public life incited little enthusiasm in the press. For instance, *The New Zealand Mail* conceded that Elizabeth’s election for the council could be interpreted as a sign that “her sex and the public of Onehunga generally have confidence in her powers”, but were more inclined to ascribe to the view that a good many votes were given to her ‘in a mischievous spirit’” (*New Zealand Mail*, 28/09/1899, 45). Majority of the journalists, however, saw Elizabeth’s success in the election as an opportunity to capitalize on the friction that was bound to occur between her and the other councillors. As *The New Zealand Observer* noted after the first meeting of the newly appointed council in their opinion: “The fair Elizabeth has once more tucked up her skirts and rolled up her sleeves preparatory to doing battle in the Onehunga municipal arena” (*The New Zealand Observer*, 23/09/1896, 6). Despite her experience and efficiency that she displayed while in the office, Elizabeth herself was not treated seriously as she was described as a personality who was elected as form of a harmless joke by the inhabitants looking to enliven the local politics:

The people of that borough are very evidently not appreciated at their full value as humorists of no mean order, but even their detractors must give them their due credit after the demonstration consequent upon the last election. Mrs Yates, entirely unsatisfied with her previous experience, determined to have another go at the Council, and, in consequence, the ‘Captain,’ who apparently only plays second fiddle in the domestic orchestra, thereupon plunged into an enthusiastic ‘barrack’ for his energetic spouse, which eventually resulted in her return.

Just what arguments were used in her favour it is difficult to enumerate, but the general impression is that as Onehunga had not been visited by a variety show for some time, the burgesses felt the need of some relaxation in the way of innocent amusement, and feeling certain of the point that if Elizabeth were elected she would do her best to entertain them in a lively manner, they plumped for her. (*New Zealand Observer*, 23/09/1896, 6)

Regardless of the enthusiasm of her supporters who carried her on their shoulders in a procession through the streets of Onehunga after the announcement of the results, Elizabeth's term as a councillor was quite turbulent and difficult. It is arguable that some of Elizabeth's personal traits stood in the way of her cooperating smoothly with other councillors as they were not in keeping with the generally accepted perception of femininity. Elizabeth was, undeniably, very decisive and opinionated which sometimes resulted in her inability to remain silent when in situations when it would be wiser to remain silent. She was always self-assured and not afraid to defend her point of view. For instance, during a revision of the municipal roll in 1899, she protested that it was illegal to tamper with the roll so close to the election that, according to her, was actually being held on a wrong date. In order to prove her point she produced copies of relevant acts but was rebuffed by Dr Erson who told her that she was misinterpreting them. Still, Elizabeth insisted on pushing her point which inspired Councillor Vause to appeal to the mayor to control to which she responded sharply: "Will you mind your own business? I can control myself and the Mayor too" (*New Zealand Herald*, 31/10/1899, 5). Subsequently, she proceeded to aggravate Dr Erson, who was the mayor at the time, when she insisted that it would be a waste of money to consult a lawyer about the inclusion of a representative of the Masonic Lodge. Dr Erson responded irritably: "So long, Mrs Yates, as I am Mayor of this borough, and think it necessary to obtain legal advice to assist me in the discharge of the duties pertaining to my office, I shall obtain it" (*New Zealand Herald*, 31/10/1899, 5). Clearly frustrated by the opposition Elizabeth retorted undiplomatically: "A child twelve years old could understand the question, and the man that assumes to be Mayor should read and study the Municipal Corporations Act, and not to have to run to the lawyer every time" (*New Zealand Herald*, 31/10/1899, 5). Even though Elizabeth was trying to press forward a valid point once she started using emotionally charged and insulting language any chance of a compromise or even a debate became unattainable.

That is why, it is difficult to consider Elizabeth's career as a councilwoman a success as, without the vantage of the mayoral position she struggled even more to establish a rapport with the rest of the council. In consequence, a majority of her initiatives got lost in the perpetual conflicts that plagued the proceedings of the council meetings. That made Elizabeth ineffectual

and disruptive element among other town officials and lowered the overall efficiency of the whole council. Arguably she was ridiculed and disregarded more than any other male councillor and apportioned the entirety of guilt for the disruption of the meetings. *The New Zealand Observer* expressed the prevalent sentiment when they commented that if she “was accorded a position in the heavenly choir she would smash the whole organisation up unless she could advise and control the conductor”. On top of that, they accused her of turning the proceedings of the Council into something “more like an energetic debate on the boodle at the meeting of the society of socialistic agitators than the proceedings of a body of presumably sane municipal representatives” (*New Zealand Observer*, 4/11/1899, 3,6). Consequently, it was this reputation of a uncooperativeness and disruptiveness that prevented Elizabeth from being re-elected for a second term on the council. She was also firmly defeated in her third and last attempt to defeat Donald Sutherland in mayoral elections in the same year which effectively terminated her political career.

On the other hand, it is arguable that it was her strong and unyielding personality that allowed Elizabeth to make any kind of headway in the world of politics. This field, even when it came to the local municipality, was particularly difficult for women to get into as the decisiveness and leadership skills required of governmental officials and politicians were very difficult to reconcile with the perception of femininity even for the generally progressive majority of the New Zealand society. Even though Elizabeth managed to set a precedent as the first female mayor in the British Empire it did not immediately facilitate other women’s inclusion in the world of politics. Odds stacked up against potential candidates were quite discouraging as Judith Devaliant comments in her reflections on Elizabeth’s political career:

Elizabeth’s mayoralty was viewed from the start as an experiments. Her courage and ability were recognized by many, but did not eradicate their deeply rooted belief that a woman’s place was in the home, and politics was best left to men. The addition of a residential qualification for the municipal franchise in 1910, increased the number of women eligible to stand for election, but did not change society’s expectations about the separate and distinct roles of men and women. Married women who thought about entering local politics were held back by their domestic responsibilities, and the disapproval of their husbands and older family members. Money was a problem for both married and single women. Mayoral stipends were not generous and few women were financially independent. Elizabeth was probably paid £25 during her year as mayor, while her councillors received nothing. (116)

Moreover, majority of the women who were potentially inclined to get involved in politics did not have sources of inspirations or established patterns of behaviour to follow. This lack was particularly disheartening when it came to following a career in the field requiring a high level of public exposure and, therefore, notoriety. “Fear of public ridicule and exposure

was another disincentive. Women were brought up to act decorously and not draw attention to themselves in public. They had few role models to follow, unless like Elizabeth they could learn from their husbands” (Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 116). Another psychological barrier that prevented women from standing in elections was the fact that “there was a common perception that there were few women of sufficient calibre to stand [...] since standing for election amounted to a proclamation of worth” (Coney 48). The problem was addressed by Labour Party pioneer Emily Gibson in an article on “Women on Councils and School Committees”, published in 1907: “When one talks of women on local bodies”, she said “the first comment is inevitably ‘Where are you going to find capable women?’ This is intended to be a complete poser. They must be exceptional. But why? We do not have exceptionally gifted men as councillors. If we get fairly honest, practical business men we are quite satisfied. Women councillors would to a certain extent be on their trial, but they could hardly be more than the new men that we vote for year after year” (quoted in Coney 49).

All the prejudice directed against women in politics meant that Elizabeth was not the only woman in politics that was subject to discrimination and unfair treatment. For some of the infrequently elected female councillors the experience of working with the exclusively male council was even more harrowing than in the case of the Mayoress of Onehunga. For instance, when Louisa Raby was elected to the Petone Borough Council in 1897, she got embroiled in a bitter conflict with her fellow councillors during only the second official meeting of the town of during her term. Apparently, she was accused of using highly offensive language as she called other councillors ‘dirty pigs’ when they refused to refrain from smoking. The argument escalated quite rapidly when Mrs Raby tried to open council chamber door to let some fresh air in and, unexpectedly, was “forcibly held back, and the doors closed” (*Evening Post*, 12/10/1897, 5). The incident resulted in Louisa Raby being sidelined as she was banned from all committees. Moreover, even though she got elected for the second term in 1898, she remained an outcast in the council, often being the sole dissident from decisions.

Overall, forging a career in politics constituted a difficult choice for any New Zealand woman in the second half of the nineteenth century. Running for any public office required strength of character and perseverance as well as the ability to deal with undeserved hostility and gender prejudice which made it much more difficult for them to succeed. As Sarah Coney comments:

It is difficult to tell from minutes or newspaper accounts if women such as Louisa Raby or the ‘Lady Mayor’ of Onehunga, Elizabeth Yates, were a little eccentric or were simply forceful women who were unwelcome in their council chambers and unsympathetically reported. But their treatment, including

verbal abuse, media ridicule and, in Mrs Raby's case, physical violence, must have served as a warning to prospective candidates. In the terminology of the day, political women were 'unsexed', and as such could expect none of the elaborate courtesies normally extended to women (49).

Still, despite all the adversities and conflicts, when Elizabeth got pushed out of the council she missed the stimulation associated with her involvement in the local political activities. She realized that she was not likely to be elected again but as she was never inclined to join any women's groups which left her with no option but to focus on her family life. When her husband died in 1902, however, Elizabeth, who inherited all of Michael's property doubling her holdings in Onehunga, felt motivated to try to get back into the world of local politics once again. The immediate incentive was provided by Mayor Angus Gordon in 1905, when he announced his intention of raising the tax rates. Maintenance of the ninepenny rate had been one of the causes that Michael and Elizabeth had fought passionately throughout their involvement in the local council so any attempt at changing the status quo were bound to be treated personally by the former mayor. Eventually, she decided to stand in the by-election that was taking place in June this year to fight the proposed increase. Her opponent, Warren Blyth was not included on the municipal roll when the council elections were held in March, but his name was hastily added to the roll in response to Elizabeth's candidature. Clearly, the members of the council preferred to support any potential candidate in the race against Elizabeth, regardless of his skills or qualifications as long as it guaranteed them that they would not have to work with a female again.

That is why, when Blythe won Elizabeth filed an official protest, and when the council refused to take it into account she took a petition to court trying to unseat Blyth on the grounds that he "was not capable of being elected to the council or holding the office to which he had been declared elected" (*New Zealand Herald*, 13/11/1905, 7). However, even though the court criticized the council for slotting Blythe in at the last moment, Elizabeth's petition was thrown out as the judge decided that not only did she not have enough evidence for her claims but should have petitioned for a new election instead. In addition, it was pointed out that the reservations against Blythe's candidature were not raised at the time of the elections which meant that the people who voted for him did so in good faith. The situation inspired another bout of critical articles noting that 'Onehunga lady who found fame by being elected the first woman mayor on this earth' had failed once again in her bid for further fame because she had not set out the reason for her opponent's disqualification "clearly enough" (*New Zealand Observer*, 18/11/1905, 4).

This last bid at making a difference in local politics left Elizabeth frustrated and dispirited. By that point, she must have realized that her political career was equivocally finished and as she did not have children of her own had to rely on extended family and friends who were busy with their own lives. On top of that, Elizabeth obviously missed Michael as well as the excitement of running for and holding a public office which left her feeling lonely and marginalized. Eventually, she began to relieve the stress of her loneliness by drinking excessively. Consequently, her mental health deteriorated rapidly which eventually led to her being committed to the Auckland Mental Hospital in 1907 where she spent the last years of her life. According to her casenotes dating back to January of 1911 she could be described as “dull, stupid and demented” as her memory was “quite absent” and she was known to be talking to imaginary people, her husband Michael in particular. Again, in November she was described as “restive and at times violent. Fault finding and bad tempered” (quoted in Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 137). In addition, even though she was clean and tidy she also refused to engage in any type of work prescribed for the patients. As her condition showed no signs of improvement in the next six months, she was transferred to the Chronic Ward dedicated to patients who were not expected to recover. Eventually, Elizabeth died on the 6th of September 1918 after being bedridden for several weeks. She was assumed to be 78 years old and the cause of death was described as “diarrhoea and chronic brain disease” (quoted in Devaliant *Elizabeth Yates* 137).

The relatively rapid decline of Elizabeth’s health and faculties that ensued after she was deprived of the stimuli provided by her political endeavours can be seen as a clear indication of the fact that it was fallacy to assume that it was only the domestic sphere that all women could thrive on in the nineteenth century. Even though she was happily married, she did not see herself hampered to any extent by her domestic duties. To the contrary, she was at her most successful and fulfilled when combining family life with running a local business and getting involved in local politics. What is more, despite her lack of patience as well as diplomatic skills, it is undeniable, that Elizabeth managed to become an effective politician, even if for a short period of time and, as such, remains a symbol of female ability to be an integral part of any government. Thanks to her election to the position of a first female mayor in the British Commonwealth she also played a role in the long struggle for women’s political emancipation even if she was not an active member of any suffrage organizations and did not agree with all the tenants of the gender equality movement. Despite all the criticism and adversity that she had to face and the inauspicious end of her political career, Elizabeth remains an important figure in the pantheon of not only New Zealand but world female politicians. As Judith Devaliant comments:

Elizabeth never doubted her right to equality. She believed women could do most things if they prepared themselves. Her election as Mayor of Onehunga began the movement for the recognition of women's rights to participate in local government in New Zealand. It created a stir and caused ripples of interest throughout the British Empire, forcing journalists to examine their attitude towards women in public life. Some mocked and fantasised about a future with women in control. Others pontificated and made statements which showed that no matter how well Elizabeth did, they believed women were not suited to public life and should remain where nature had placed them, within the bosom of their families. Elizabeth became a symbol of women's advancement, an object of intense curiosity, and a target for derision, when all she had wanted was to be a good mayor (140-141).

The lives of women such as Kate Edger, Ethel Benjamin and Elizabeth Yates can serve as an example of the way female influence started to infiltrate what, traditionally, was a male sphere of public life. Their experiences reflect the complexity of reactions and attitudes of not only New Zealand men but other female colonists. On the one hand, they had, practically unprecedented opportunity to prove themselves in public life and professions, but at the same time, had to contend with prejudice stemming from conservative gender stereotypes. Overall, Edger, Benjamin and Yates became role models who encouraged the future generations of young girls to follow in their footsteps and try to forge their way into the public domain.

4.5 Male attitudes towards the issue of the female franchise and the gender equality movement

The reactions of journalists and commentators to the Elizabeth Yates' attempts at a political career reflect the overall ambivalence that many of the New Zealand men felt towards the issue of the emancipation of women. On the one hand, the admittance of girls to comprehensive education on all levels was seen as the sign of remarkable progressiveness of the New Zealand society as evidenced in the favourable articles published upon the graduation of women such as Kate Edgers and Helen Connon. However, it is important to remember that for most New Zealand men the Victorian patriarchal values remained a significant point of reference when it came to the perception of acceptable bounds of both femininity and masculinity. Therefore, it was one thing for them to approve of women getting degrees in order to enter female-dominated professions like teaching and another to welcome their inclusion in professions such as law or politics which required the display of decisiveness or even aggression which, in the eyes of the male half of community were entirely incompatible with even the most progressive model of femininity.

The main motivation behind the critical or even scathing reactions to pioneers such as Ethel Benjamin and Elizabeth was the fear of gender equality eventually turning into the possibility of women not only encroaching on the traditionally male domains but also losing the traits such as sensitivity and gentleness which, according to common perception, distinguished them from men. That is why, the ideas of writers such as the English novelist Mrs E Lynn Linton who was openly hostile towards the suffrage and equality movements in Britain found resonance among many New Zealanders. The image of the arrogant and masculine New Woman in particular was presented as the reason behind what certain men considered to be unwelcome changes. According to Sandra Coney: “To those who opposed women’s rights, she was a trousered, aggressive harridan – the ‘man-woman’ of the cartoons – who emasculated men by demanding equality” (15).

Frequently, it was specific actions undertaken by women’s organizations perceived as threatening that inspired articles drawing parallels between the Linton’s theory on the emergence of the New Woman and the contemporary New Zealand suffrage organizations. For instance, Christchurch *Press* devoted an editorial in January of 1895 to a scathingly harsh criticism of the newest initiative undertaken by the town’s feminist. Namely, it became known that small groups of activists went out on regular nightly patrols compiling lists of men frequenting the local brothels. The exact purpose of this list was a matter of speculation but its very existence rapidly became a source of anxiety among the patrons of these establishment. Even though it was clearly a project aimed, predominantly, against the corrupting influence of prostitution, it did not meet with warm reception on the part of the public as evidenced in the comments by *Press*’ editor.

The editorial began with the disclaimer according to which the author recognizes prostitution as one of the persistent ills plaguing the city which challenges even the most virtuous members of the community when it comes to finding a permanent solution. However, according to him, “it is not nearly so difficult to determine when the means adopted are absolutely wrong and likely to bring about further evil instead of good” (*Press*, 3/1/1895, 4). What is more, he does not hesitate to state that the newest project “pursued by certain women social reformers in Christchurch” was an absolutely the worst way to try and eradicate prostitution as “it has not the remotest chance of doing any good, but that on the contrary it is bound to result in the degradation of those who lend themselves to such dubious methods, and in intensifying the evil which they avowedly desire to remove” (*Press*, 3/1/1895, 4)

Still, despite the initial declaration of the lack of viable solution to the problems connected with the existence of Christchurch brothels the article goes on to contrast the

initiative of the New Women with the efforts of the charitable ladies of the parish in order to point to a commendable course of action:

When self-denying, pure-minded women set themselves to raising up their fallen sisters, we honour and reverence their Christian charity, and we cannot but admire the self-sacrificing spirit which leads them to undertake work at once so painful and so hard. There are women in Christchurch engaged in such noble labours, and there is probably not a single soul in the community who does not honour them for their efforts and cordially wish them success. (*Press*, 3/1/1895, 4)

The author of the article perceives the traditional form of charity, heavily influenced by religious ideas of “uplifting of sinners” as the only acceptable way of approaching the problem of prostitution. What is more, as the only way in which respectable women can get involved in the matter without compromising their femininity. According to the author: “Such a mission undoubtedly comes within woman’s sphere and such an exercise of religion and charity blesses both the recipient and the giver. This is the old-fashioned method, which has shed a lustre on the name of woman in the past, and given her one of the strongest claims on our love and reverence” (*Press*, 3/1/1895, 4).

On the other hand, the greatest fault that the author finds with the behaviour of the women’s organizations which he equates with the image of the New Woman is connected with what is considered to be aggression with which they proposed to tackle prostitution. *Press* editorial questioned their motivation as collecting names of brothels’ clients is seen as an attempt not to help the unfortunate women but to hurt the men who use their services. Moreover, the text depicts activities of the female patrols in the way that emphasises the menacing and more than slightly irrational character of their intervention:

The aim of the New Woman is not so much to raise her own sex as to terrorise man. Accordingly two or three doubtless well-meaning and respectable, but terribly misguided, women of this type have set themselves the debasing task of prowling about playing the spy in our Streets at midnight. They take up their stations in the neighbourhood of houses supposed to be of questionable repute, in order that they may ferret out for themselves the immorality which walks obscene in the darkness, and above all, that they act the spy upon the frequenters of such places. Notebook in hand, they crouch in street corners, compiling their unsavoury list. What they intend to do with the names we are not in a position to state with absolute certainty, but there are rumours that in at least one case they have made use of their information to injure a Christchurch young man with his employers. It is also said that they band, the names over to the police, although what the latter are expected to do in the matter we are at a loss to imagine. (*Press*, 3/1/1895, 4)

Even though the article declares its condemnation of ‘the class of men against whom these efforts profess to be directed’ it is the potential harmful effects of feminists’ actions on all men that is clearly one of the main sources of anxiety for its author. First of all he bulks at

the supposed audacity of women who dare to pass judgment on men's morality asking: "Is the reputation of the whole male community to be at the mercy of a band of hysterical, morbid-minded females, with their imagination constantly set on one subject, and therefore likely to be widely astray in their facts as well as in their inferences?" Moreover, it is not only the fact of female organizations potentially shaming men but also the possibility of them directing their actions against innocent parties that troubled *Press*. "Is it not at least probable that they will make mistakes either in the character of the houses around which they hover or at any rate in the identity of the men on whom they play the spy?" In addition, the author of the article is clearly more concerned about the well-being of potential male victims of slander than the unfortunate women frequently forced by circumstance to work in local brothels as he muses: "Suppose some respectable man falls a victim to the mistaken eyesight and prurient tittle-tattle of these prying persons, what is his remedy? Clearly he has none that is likely to serve him in good stead" (*Press*, 3/1/1895, 4).

All these negative elements of the behaviour of women that the author of the editorial considers to be the representatives of the New Woman leads him to unfavourable conclusion as to their characters and motivation. He deems them not only unreasonable and dangerous but also unchristian and professes the inability to understand the details of their agenda and reasons for their supposed viciousness. Furthermore, he predicts far-reaching and detrimental effects of the name-gathering activity not only for the women involved but for the cause of eradication of social ills such as prostitution:

It is difficult to understand the attitude of mind of these self-constituted spies. How do they reconcile their own arrogant, and, we will add, unwomanly conduct with the high standards of the Christian religion? What reason have they for imagining that the cause of morality is likely to be served by adopting the occupations of the informer and the sneak? They will certainly find no countenance for their conduct in the example of the Master they profess to follow, whose gentle admonition, 'Go and sin no more,' is in strange contrast to the methods of the New Woman. But we protest against such practises on other grounds. We say such debasing espionage is sure to bring discredit on the body with which it is associated. Not only will the general sympathy be alienated from the cause of social reform, but such tactics will cause the very name to stink in the nostrils of the community. Apart from this such ignoble practises are degrading to womanhood as a whole and cannot fail to have a terribly debasing effect upon those who engage in them. For the sake of their own decency and respectability, to use no higher term, we hope that the misguided persons to whom we have referred will in future seek some loftier method of social reform. (*Press*, 3/1/1895, 4)

The issue of motivation behind the feminist organizations' initiative continued to puzzle the commentators who, in many cases, were inclined to resort to concocting their own, frequently outrageous theories on the topic as they continued to perceive feminists as one of the

threats to the established and comfortable patriarchal status quo. In February 1895 *Press* continued their campaign of discreditation aimed at the New Zealand feminist organizations or “the new womanhood.” In a section entitled “Jottings for Women” the newspaper gives an account of an interview with a novelist Mr Hall Caine who is quoted as a firm supporter of the traditional, patriarchal social order whose theories undermine the very foundations of the existence of female supporters of gender equality. According to his arguments all the activities of ‘new women’ have no legitimate *raison d’être* as everything they stand for goes against the most basic laws of not only culture but nature:

Mr Hall then proceeds to point out that the essential inequality of the sexes is a thing ‘the New Woman’ says nothing about. ‘There is an absolute inequality,’ he declares, ‘an inequality that began in the Garden of Eden, and will go on till the last woman is born. It is not an inequality of intellect but of sex. How can we escape from the belief that woman is the subject creature? Once a woman marries, she becomes conscious of this, willy nilly. The male is of necessity the dominant creature. Nature tells us so in a thousand voices; we see with our own eyes that on average the offspring partakes more of the character of the male than of the female. This great truth was recognised in the Garden of Eden, it has been recognized to the end. Can we think that a group of women at the end of the nineteenth century are going to alter all this, to reverse the order of all the ages and all the climes, and change the laws of nature. (*Press*, 27/02/1895, 4)

That kind of approach inspired a range of texts which implied more or less explicitly that progressive female organizations could not be expected to have lasting impact on the social structure as their very existence was an abnormal departure from the norm. Consequently, journalists and commentators set out to attempt to explain and rationalize the origins and the reasons behind the emergence of the New Woman in order to reduce all the feminists movements in New Zealand to an easily dismissed curiosity. For instance, a follow up article in Christchurch *Press* published in March 1895 made an attempt at outlining all the elements that, according to the author, contributed to the emergence of a novel social group broadly labelled as the New Woman as well as the economic and cultural consequences of potential future gender equality. Strikingly enough, even though the text begins with the expression of satisfaction due the supposed assertion that ‘the new woman is somewhat on the wane’ still her presence in the community is considered to be of enough significance to devote a lot of attention to the analysis of the origins of the phenomenon.

The author bases all of his assumptions on one, relatively far-fetched theory which explains the existence and popularity of the new woman movements with the fact that in the economic realities of New Zealand of the second half of the nineteenth century women struggle to find a suitable candidate for a husband. “In other words, it is alleged that the world-wide

depression and the low prices are mainly responsible for the new woman in all her great variety of shapes” (*Press*, 8/03/1895, 4). The author goes on to support his claims by quoting the current reluctance of New Zealand men to enter the bonds of matrimony not out of the aversion to the institution but because of their fear of poverty. Moreover, as a direct consequence he sees women, unable to become wives and mothers, being pressured into “the struggle for subsistence which was formerly mainly the lot of men”. He does not perceive the increased presence of women in professions as a positive development either as it is becoming an element of unfair competition: “The avocations which used to be the only ones open to women having long been overcrowded, they have had to take up many of the occupations which used to be regarded as suitable only for the male sex. This, of course, is gradually making things even worse, for the competition of women is now pressing hard upon men” (*Press*, 8/03/1895, 4).

When it comes to women themselves, the increased financial independence also breeds exceeding amount of overly high expectations as women who can earn their own keep “are naturally becoming more fastidious about marriage, which of itself also helps to keep down the marriage rate” (*Press*, 8/03/1895, 4) What is even worse, however, unburdened of familial duties unmarried women tend to focus on matters that are entirely unsuitable for them, such as sexuality. In contrast, their married counterparts, who follow the natural course of things, do not have time and are not inclined to trouble themselves with such topics:

It is mainly the woman who cannot marry who troubles herself about sexual questions, but, as we have said, we are glad that there is evidence of a reaction against this form of the new woman. The woman with a house of her own and a family to look after, is, thanks to the maternal instinct which Nature has deeply implanted in the female mind, not inclined to trouble herself too much about missions and theories and the questions of the day. She has wholesome domestic duties to occupy her mind and keep her energies employed. (*Press*, 8/03/1895, 4)

In the next paragraph, however, the author backs out slightly from his radically patriarchal vision of gender roles in society when he states he is also far from “desiring to make out that it is impossible for married women consistently with their domestic duties to take not merely an intelligent interest in public matters, or even to take a leading part in their discussion. However, he deems such women to be an exception to the rule and even if it “probably only a matter of time before women are granted equal political rights in all democratically governed countries” he hopes that the “great bulk of women who come from happy or even moderately happy homes will follow the lead of the men they are associated with” (*Press*, 8/03/1895, 4). In this way, the inevitability of social and economic change is reconciled with the traditional gender roles as the expansion of liberties allowed to women who “should take sufficient interest in public matters to enable them to vote intelligently” is certain

not to upset the gender hierarchy which grants men leadership positions both in private and public spheres.

Still, this pattern does not encompass those of the New Zealand women who can be labelled as “the new woman”. The main reason why they constitute a threat and are approached with resentment by men is the aggression with which they focus not on finding their place within the bounds of new, more progressive femininity but on an attempt of eradication of all the differences between men and women. What is more, they do that by trying to imitate the appearance and comportment of the male part of population which the author clearly finds grotesque and rather offensive:

The new woman, however, being that limited section of womankind which is disposed to be aggressive in its attempts to obliterate the distinctions of sex, by following the same pursuits, wearing the same kind of clothes, indulging in the same sports as men and claiming to be regulated by the same code of morality as men, is, we say, mainly the outcome of the hard times which prevent so many women from becoming wives and mothers. (*Press*, 8/03/1895, 4)

Moreover, as the author of the article claims, the whole idea of the new woman can be described as an artificial construct and, therefore, not surprisingly after a short period of popularity stemming from the novelty of the concept, it is already possible to notice that the “extravagances which characterised what is called the emancipation movement” are on the wane as they are starting to lose the support of the public. The author blames popular culture, novels and plays in particular, for the promotion of unreasonable expectations as to gender equality but, eventually, dismisses their significance and the potential to make a lasting impact on the structure of society. As he comments: “The novels which have discussed the relations between the sexes, especially in matters of morality, have not done much good, even if it be admitted that they have not done so much harm as their detractors allege. The plays, too, in which the heroine is a woman of more than doubtful reputation, even if the object be to show how great is the punishment visited on her by society and by her conscience for her lapses in virtue – what good do they do?” (*Press*, 8/03/1895, 4)

Overall, it is the aim of *Press* article to present the gender equality demands as represented by the idea of the New Woman as temporary vagaries in the social fabric of New Zealand. These temporary disturbances are caused by the combination of technological progress with economic depression resulting in unhealthy competition between “weakly and worse paid woman” who does the work that “otherwise would be done by the stronger and better paid man.” The article ends with a solution to these social woes that can be achieved thanks to a

return to well-established and comfortable patriarchal patterns which would see both genders fulfilling their “natural” roles:

It is often said what a vast increase of human wealth would result from the disbandment of the vast armies in which are enrolled the flower of European manhood kept in idleness at the cost of grinding taxation, and their entrance into peaceful and wealth producing pursuits, but if the great army of women workers could as easily be converted into wives and mothers, and thus made the helpmeets of men instead of their industrial rivals, would it not also largely tend to the raising of the standard of living and a great increase of more evenly distributed wealth? (*Press*, 8/03/1895, 4)

Clearly the male commentators writing for the *Press* in the last few years of the nineteenth century were struggling with both their understanding and acceptance of the emancipation movement. On the one hand, they seemed to be perfectly aware of the inevitability of the social momentum that led to the acknowledgment of the right of women to participate in democratic process of elections. They recognized that the economic and demographic conditions of New Zealand naturally resulted in the increased importance of women not only in private but also public sphere but balked at accepting any demands that suggested eventual full gender equality. That is why, the continuous existence and activity of female organization after they had won their primary and prominent fight for voting rights was seen as a threat to the well-established order especially as male commentators found it relatively difficult to imagine a reality in which gender equality would not result in men being forced to relinquish a considerable portion of their privileges.

As a result, *Press* journalists found the virtually proverbial “The New Woman” to be an easy target for defensive attacks either by applying exceedingly harsh criticism and double standards or presenting feminist or “the new women” as somewhat extravagant or even preposterous in their departure from the traditional norms of femininity. It was even the supposed appearance of a “typical” new woman that evoked unfavourable or scornful comments aimed at emphasising her lack of typically feminine traits. They were not isolated in that approach either as evidenced by, for example, numerous *New Zealand Graphic*’s cartoons which always depicted the figure of the new woman in a negative light as grim-faced and peevish. As one of journalists writing for this periodical explained, they perceived all the women who could be labelled as new woman to be “by some inscrutable law of nature painfully plain, apt to have scanty hair and prominent teeth, and is almost sure to wear spectacles, through which she glares at you” (*New Zealand Graphic*, 25/10/1890, 7).

On the other hand, despite the sceptical and occasionally openly hostile attitude of some of the public commentators, New Zealand female organizations and their agenda enjoyed a consistent support of numerous prominent male public figures of the period. What was even

more fortuitous, many of them were politicians actively involved in the creation and modifications of legislature. The group that consisted of politicians like John Hall, Robert Stout, Julius Vogel, William Fox and John Ballance became especially visible and vocal during Parliament debates on granting women the right to vote. It was John Hall who made his first speech supporting female suffrage in the Legislative Chamber as early as 1878 during the debate on Robert Stout's Electoral Bill that put forward a proposal to extend the right to vote to women ratepayers. Hall did not think that women had "any abstract political right" to vote but considered it to be an essential and pressing matter to grant it to them. According to him women "have as much interest in the good government of the country, and in our having good laws, as men have". In addition, as he continued, "they have almost more interest, because they are the weaker vessels, and are less able to protect themselves. Therefore it is of more importance to them than to men that they should have the protection of good and efficient laws" (Quoted in Garner 242).

It is important to point out that John Hall was fully in favour of equal rights due to his conclusions based on observations of the complexity and uniqueness of social and economic situation of women in colonial conditions of New Zealand. The fact that he could see countless examples of wives and mothers supporting their families out of choice or forced by circumstance led him to believe that it was "absurd that men could vote whether or not they were drunk, had deserted their wives or had been in prison whereas the women who maintained their families through such adverse circumstances had no voice" (Quoted in Garner, 242). John Hall's unwavering acceptance of New Zealand's women claim to participation in democratic elections meant that when Kate Sheppard wrote to him in 1888 asking if he would be an advocate of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in parliament, he agreed without hesitation. It was also him who advised Sheppard that women had to demonstrate that they were determined to gain the vote by constantly bringing the female franchise to politicians' attention so they would eventually include it in their list of priorities. He based that conviction on his own experience as a politician as he had witnessed the issue of female rights ignored or defeated time after time not for any reasons that had anything to do with the merits of the issue but due to the lack of momentum behind the support of the bills. Still, despite the fact that Kate Sheppard followed his instructions and Hall himself introduced a Women's Franchise Bill and an amendment to an Electoral Bill in favour of women's franchise in 1890 but both of them fell through, mainly due to the lack of sufficient support on the part of ministers and members of parliament.

That does not mean, however that the bill and amendment went unnoticed among the New Zealand politicians. What is more, the subsequent petitions of 1891 and 1892 drafted and lobbied for by WCTU under the leadership of Kate Sheppard, even though unsuccessful, managed to inspire heated debates and garner even more attention which resulted in more and more of the MPs starting to acknowledge the merits of the arguments for the introduction of female franchise presented by the suffragettes and their proponents. For example, Richard Meredith, a Liberal MP from Ashley who had previously opposed the measure said in 1892: “I look upon the disabilities under which women have been suffering as the remnant of a barbarous age, and I am delighted to think that I am a member of a Parliament which has had the courage, the intelligence, and the liberality to deal to deal with this important question in the manner that it deserves” (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.80, 599).

Another of Liberal members of parliament, Alexander Hogg from Masterton addressed the question of the impact that the right to vote might have on both, women themselves and their role in the society: “If, by conferring the franchise on women, we can make the portion of the race less dependent on man than it has been in the past, then I say we shall be making woman more womanly, and we shall also be conferring a great benefit on the race in the future [...] We shall have purer legislation, and we shall have in my opinion, a much better state of society” (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.80, 599). William Hutchinson, a Liberal from Dunedin agreed with these sentiments but, at the same time, pointed out that the proponents of female franchise should make allowances for those who, for various reasons, opposed the measure and be prepared to assume a conciliatory attitude in case of conflict. According to Hutchinson only that kind of approach would help to convince those who feared the destabilizing effect of allowing women to participate in the democratic process of elections that granting women the right to vote would be, in fact, a positive change. “It proposes a great change,” he said in one of his parliamentary addresses “in fact a revolution. We are seeking to introduce a factor of immense moment and power into our electoral system; and I sometimes think that those of us who advocate this reform do not make sufficient allowances for the doubts and fears of honourable members who are opposed to it” (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.80, 609).

Hutchinson’s appeal was significant as there existed numerous doubts and fears connected with the increased presence of women in public life not only among the members of public but also among politicians. For instance, for some of them the acceptance of female franchise meant that it would logically lead to women being allowed to stand for parliament. For considerable majority of male members of parliament such development was considered to be too much of a violation of the gender balance to be allowed to become a feasible option for

New Zealand democracy. That was one of the main reasons why the measure had been derailed in Parliament more than once as even the MPs who supported giving women the vote in principle, expressed their doubts about potential far-reaching consequences the franchise could bring. One of them, James McGowan, a Liberal from Thames said that he was in favour of women having the right to vote and thought that

they should have had it long ago; but I am not prepared to say that the logical conclusion would be that they ought to have seats in the House, because every sensible man must consider that there should always be a line drawn, and that the men and women should remain each to carry out their proper functions, and that the work of carrying out the laws of the country is a duty that devolves upon the males of the race. (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.80, 602)

James Macintosh, another Liberal, reminded the House that women had voted in municipal elections for a number of years, “and it is a pleasant sight to see them step forward and coolly record their votes in the election of the Mayor and Councillors. In a few years after the franchise is extended ladies will go to the poll and record their votes without anyone thinking it at all out of the way” (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.80, 604). Still, despite his apparent enthusiasm for women’s participation in elections, Mackintosh emphasized that his support of female franchise did not extend to the possibility of women becoming Members of Parliament.

Another aspect of the potential enfranchisement of women that stirred up controversy among the parliamentary factions was the issue of whether or not there was support in the country and in the Cabinet for the introduction of franchise in New Zealand. Some of the Liberals, William Hall-Jones from Timaru among them, were skeptical as to the sincerity of the government’s intentions as he stated that most people thought ‘the Premier [Seddon] is not in earnest on this question.’ When it came to the doubts as to whether majority of women actually wanted to gain the right to vote, Hutchinson responded:

what of the numbers who have signed petitions to this House, who have held meetings in favour of the franchise? These women want the vote, and surely they ought not to be deprived of what is their right because others of the same sex are careless about its exercise. [...] It is our universal experience that a large number of electors fail to record their votes at every election, but no one thinks that electors should be disfranchised because a certain number of them are so weak as not to exercise the votes possessed by them. (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.80, 610)

Finally, the opponents and supporters of female franchise in New Zealand Parliament locked horns on the elemental question of women’s suitability to become active participants in the world of politics. For some of the representatives of the conservative group of MPs⁷ the

⁷ At the time of female franchise debates of 1891, 1892 and 1893 the conservative opposition in Parliament consisted only of independent politicians and was described disorganized and demoralized. As it could not agree

social and cultural changes that made the petitions for granting women the right to vote possible were advancing too rapidly and were perceived as harbingers of the decline of the well-established order. Sir George Whitmore from Hawke's Bay expressed these sentiments in his address during the debate over the bill's first reading: "It is always a first step in the decadence of a nation," he said "when men hand over government to women, and I think the country must be said to be tottering to its fall when the women have too much power in their hands, because it means that the men have shirked their proper duty in any such country" (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.81, 142). These implications of women's inability to take part in public duties were refuted by Richard Oliver from Otago who passionately argued for women's abilities that allowed them to take part in public duties and make informed and independent decisions when faced with the electoral duty:

In our School Boards, in educational matters, in hospital management, and in household management they have shown their ability to thoroughly perform every kind of duty that has devolved upon them. To talk of the unfitness of women to perform public duties – the idea that this argument should be used in the reign of Queen Victoria – is absurd. [...] We have lived to see electoral rights of the very widest and most all-embracing kind given to men. Those who voted for this extension did not do so in the expectation that the new electors would vote on every occasion in the right way – that they would not commit mistakes. They knew them to be imperfectly educated in political matters. You cannot learn to swim without going into water. (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.81, 237, 239)

All in all, the radical faction of MPs in New Zealand parliament led efficiently by Dr James Wallis, a Presbyterian minister, Greek scholar, and medical practitioner of Auckland and Sir William Fox, demanded the immediate and total emancipation of the female sex based on their conviction as to the inherent equality of genders when it came to skills and abilities. They based their arguments on social, economic and cultural evidence drawn from the short history and experience of New Zealand community. What is more, they perceived the opposition to their viewpoint as rooted solely in lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown. As John MacGregor from Otago said countering the argument according to which the woman's sphere was naturally in the home:

Because in the past we have been used to see woman occupy one particular sphere – namely, the domestic sphere – therefore this has become, and is necessarily, her only sphere. It has been said on this, somewhat humorously, that English children who have never seen a parrot in its natural state would naturally come to the conclusion that the proper and only sphere for the parrot is a cage; and that its proper function is to say 'Pretty Polly!' (*Parliamentary Debates*, vol.81, 266)

on a single leader and had no comprehensive plan to counter the dominant Liberal Party it was not considered to constitute a viable alternative to the Liberals' rule.

Admittedly it was the reasonable approach of the Liberal Members of Parliament that saw the Electoral Bill of 1893 through its final hurdle despite the efforts of Prime Minister Seddon who did his best to convince the members of the Legislative Council to throw the bill out before the third reading and, eventually, led to its passing on the 11th of September. However, it is important to remember that the viewpoint of many of the Liberals was shaped with the help of the well thought-out and comprehensive campaign of WCTU and other, affiliated organizations and female activists who managed to present their case for female franchise in a coherent and non-confrontational way. Their texts were instrumental in convincing the most prominent politicians of the land that allowing more gender equality in politics would not constitute a threatening disturbance to the status quo but would, in fact, reflect the unique realities of the former colony.

4.6 Summary and conclusions

It is conceivable that, despite the extensive campaign and careful rhetoric of the texts penned by New Zealand female organizations' activists, the effect of all their efforts on both, general public and the authorities would be limited without women such as Kate Edger, Ethel Benjamin and Elizabeth Yates. None of them considered themselves declared feminists fighting for the unconditional gender equality. To the contrary, Ethel Benjamin and Elizabeth Yates frequently expressed their doubts as to the suitability of all women to enter the public sphere of life and were not prepared to side with their own gender on principle of female solidarity. What is more, even though they were pioneers in the fields previously dominated by men they did not consider themselves exceptional or demand special treatment on account of their sex.

It seems that New Zealand conditions in which they all grew up, shaped them in a way that allowed them to notice and acknowledge their capabilities outside the limits of patriarchy. As Patricia Grimshaw notices: "By the early 1890's, then, women were receiving equal educational opportunities with men, had entered many hitherto masculine occupations, and had invaded the male world of unionism" (7). Therefore, for many young girls and women it became natural to see themselves just as capable as their male peers without ascribing any ideological justification to that perception of gender dynamics. "If many women had not heard of 'women's rights', if others opposed them, unconsciously they and their daughters were slowly but perceptibly being influenced by these new concepts. It was on such changes that their full acceptance into equal power in the political world would be based" (Grimshaw 11).

In addition, the accomplishments of women such as Kate Edger, Ethel Benjamin and Elizabeth Yates were also perceived as evidence of progressiveness of New Zealand society and therefore a source of pride for many of the contemporary male commentators. Even though, the presence of women in politics and professions such as law or medicine was still controversial for the conservative members of the community and female pioneers in these areas had to contend with fair amount of resentment on the part of their peers and scrutiny and criticism of observers and general public alike their achievements were a clear indication of the fact that allowing women to actively participate in the public sphere did not automatically signify the downfall of the most fundamental structures of society. In fact, women's contribution proved to be invaluable and enriching as *Otago Daily Times* noted in 1891: "So far as examinations by universities and active participation in the affairs of life constitute a fair test of proficiency and power, woman has completely turned the tables on her critics. She can write Greek or Latin, tackle the higher mathematics, give metaphysics, that fearsome science, a back fall, make a betting book, run a hotel, edit a newspaper, or manage a brewery" (*Otago Daily Times*, 8/9/1891, 2).

The contrast between the approaches to the question of female emancipation and gender equality is also visible in the texts and public addresses of male journalists and politicians in New Zealand. A majority of the alarmist publications predicting the disintegration of the gender relations and very fabric of family life in the former colony were based on theoretical tenets found, for example in the ideas connected with the apocryphal figure of the New Woman while the texts which could be classed as sympathizing or, occasionally, enthusiastic quoted the examples of contemporary New Zealand women who lived and worked among other members of various local communities. Therefore, it is not surprising that the positive articles and texts had a significantly larger impact on the public opinion as they resonated with readers' own experiences and viewpoints. The reluctance to follow the fear-mongering visions was obvious among the parliamentary majority of Liberals but also among the large portion of society as the introduction of the Electoral Bill of 1893 inspired no public protests or disquiet. Alongside, the well-balanced rhetoric used in the suffrage campaign by female organizations, the examples of pioneering women who ventured into the public sphere became one of decisive factors used by "a body of women to persuade politicians that they, at least, did not regard their enfranchisement as an "abstract" question, but one which was to them of considerable concrete importance" (Grimshaw 20).

Chapter 5

The rhetoric of the New Zealand suffrage movement

The passing of the Electoral Bill by the New Zealand Parliament on the 19th of September 1893 immediately became a cause for joy and celebration for thousands of women all over the country. The leader of New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union received numerous telegrams and letters informing her of spontaneous celebratory gatherings in various areas of both of the islands. For example, Mrs Marion Hatton telegraphed from Dunedin describing the joyous occasion: "Splendid meeting last night City Hall crammed mostly women enthusiasm unbounded thousand handkerchiefs waving for victory" (quoted in Grisham 95). The jubilation was not limited to the local organizations, either, but was shared by suffragists throughout the world from Australia through the United States to Britain. Many of the prominent leaders of suffragists, such as Millicent Fawcett, Susan B. Anthony and Helen Blackburn, who shared and commiserated in the disappointments of New Zealand women in previous years, now celebrated their triumph with sincere sympathy. Moreover, it was not only the desire to share in the unprecedented legislative victory that fuelled the expressions of congratulations as the success of the NZWCTU's campaign was regarded as a sign of hope for the endeavours of all activists who struggled to convince the authorities of their countries to introduce similar gender equality measures. Their feelings were summarized in perhaps the best way by Catherine Wallace from Melbourne who wrote to the leaders of the NZWCTU:

Your long, patient, faithful, untiring, earnest, zealous effort is finally rewarded which means so much, not for you and the women of New Zealand only, but for women everywhere on the face of the globe. It will give new hope and life to all women struggling for emancipation, and give promise of better times, of an approaching millennium for all the down-trodden and enslaved millions of women, not only in so-called Christian countries, but in India and the harems of the East. Right glad I am and proud of New Zealand. (quoted in Grimshaw 95)

At the end of the nineteenth century hope was actually greatly needed to uplift the spirits of female rights activists in various countries frustrated by decades of fruitless campaigns which did not result in any substantial legislative results. That is also why, at the beginning of the twentieth century societies new methods of fighting for the recognition of women's right to participate in the democratic elections appeared. The most notable example includes the British Militant Suffrage Movement, which rapidly gained worldwide notoriety for its radical claims

and actions and garnered sizeable groups of both staunch supporters and opponents. It was set up by Emmeline Pankhurst as a form of exasperated response to the futility of actions of the constitutional suffragists, united in 1897 as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and led by Millicent Fawcett. The union held meetings, lobbied, issued petitions and distributed leaflets but was continuously unsuccessful in their appeals to Parliament. After decades of frustration "patience and trust were abandoned, and indignation and bitterness took their place. The old ways led nowhere, the old friends did nothing, and it was time for fresh enterprise" (Strachey 292). The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) did away with the conciliatory methods and adopted strategies based on hackling, harassment and even violence.

The WSPU's activists, dismissively nicknamed the "suffragettes" by the *Daily Mail*, did not hesitate to engage in violent acts such as verbal and physical attacks on the prominent politicians renowned for the opposition to granting women the right to vote, breaking the display windows, destroying mail boxes, slashing paintings in museums and galleries as well as carrying out bomb attacks on both public and private property.

Consequently, suffrage activists were frequently arrested and handed harsh sentences for their participation not only in militant action but in peaceful demonstrations as well. This practise, in turn, resulted in numerous members of WSPU initiating the campaign of going on hunger in protest against what they perceived as the injustice of the Government's practises. As the authorities did not want to allow imprisoned suffragettes to become martyrs for their cause they introduced an unprecedented technique of force-feeding of striking prisoners. In order to prevent suffragettes from dying while in custody, in 1913, the British Government introduced the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act, commonly dubbed the Cat and Mouse Act by the members of the WSPU.

Still, all the efforts and determination displayed by the members of WSPU and other British female rights organizations did not result in any significant headway in the introduction of female franchise legislation until the outbreak of the First World War on the 4th of August 1914. At this point, all the suffrage societies suspended their political activities for the duration of the hostilities and adopted fervent patriotic stance. For instance WSPU changed the name of their periodical *Suffragette* to *Britannia* and devoted a majority of the columns to articles promoting the involvement in war effort.

Despite the suffragettes' contribution to the war effort, the new Representation of the People Act 1918 which extended the franchise in parliamentary elections did not include all the postulates that WSPU had been fighting for a better part of two decades. Instead, only women

over 30 years of age and only if they were registered property owners of land or premises with rateable value of £5 pounds or of a dwelling-house were granted the right to vote. The only exception to this rule was constituted by graduates voting in a university constituency. Consequently, the male electorate increased by 5,2 million to 12,9 million while female electorate was established at 8,5 million. It was not until Representation of People Act 1928 that all British women were finally granted the franchise.

On the other hand, the process that led to granting women the right to vote in New Zealand was markedly different. Not only did the legislation introduced in the former colony predated the Representation of the People Act by over twenty years it included all the adult women regardless of their age, marital status or whether they owned property. Moreover, unlike in other colonial countries, the franchise was also extended to the indigenous minority as represented by Maori women. The process itself was also entirely peaceful and comprised of the campaigns based on strong leadership and the introduction of well-balanced and reasonable argumentation (Grimshaw 118).

It is possible to state that the experience of the New Zealand suffrage movement proved that in certain conditions it was the power of rhetoric and argumentation that was the most effective when it came to the pushing forward the progressive social and political changes. While in the United Kingdom the suffragettes were pushed to the extremes of violence by the conservative values of both a majority of society as well as authorities, in New Zealand the suffrage activists managed to forge their eventual success thanks to the force of their argumentation combined with sociological, demographical and economic factors that contributed to the way nineteenth century New Zealand functioned (Grimshaw 118).

5.1 The appearance of the ideology of gender equality in New Zealand

The society of New Zealand became introduced to the ideas connected with the question of women's rights as early as the 1860s and early the 1870s barely over a decade after the British Parliament passed the New Zealand Constitution Act in 1852, which gave the former colony the legislative, judicial and executive authority over its domestic affairs. The issues of gender equality were raised by three women who combined their knowledge of the contemporary liberal thought with the comfortable familiarity of the New Zealand conditions which led them to the conclusion that it should be the matter of natural progression to allow women to vote in democratic elections. These were Mary Ann Muller, whose pamphlet *An Appeal to the Men of*

New Zealand, written under the pseudonym “Femina” was published in the *Nelson Examiner* in 1869, Mary Taylor who was born and raised in Yorkshire, who spent fourteen years in Wellington between 1845 and 1859 running her own business, and who subsequently wrote a series of articles which were printed in 1870 as *The First Duty of Women*, and Mary Coclough, who instigated a lively debate in various Auckland newspapers in the 1870s writing as a correspondent using the penname of “Polly Plum”. All these text were aimed at the introduction of the novel and relatively radical idea of women’s equality and “concerned with to point out the injustice of the inequalities between women and men before the law and within the constitution” (Macdonald 14), in order to inspire New Zealand society to accept the fact that the legislation should reflect the development of the social and economic relationship between the genders. Consequently, it was a natural conclusion that women should be allowed the same rights as their male peers.

The main premise of the texts was based on the fact that the extension of universal suffrage to men made the disfranchisement of women seem particularly unreasonable and unjust. When the law excluded a majority of men alongside women from the political process, the gender discrimination was perhaps less apparent. However, after all men regardless of their status, calling, education or wealth got enfranchised while all women remained excluded simply on account of their gender, the discrimination of female sex became more glaring conspicuous, and was perceived as biased and outdated by an increasing number of women and even some men. As the educational and professional opportunities afforded to women in New Zealand at the time resulted in their increased presence in the public sphere the communities were gradually accustomed to the idea of women capabilities to act responsibly and efficiently outside their traditional, domestic domain making the political exclusion even more strikingly inequitable. As Charlotte Macdonald comments, the plea that the three women issued was “based strongly on arguments of natural justice”, as they used the arguments applied earlier to give all men the right to vote to call for the female franchise (13).

The first person to broach this subject in a published text, Mary Ann Muller, had herself experienced the consequences of gender discrimination. Born and raised in London, she was forced to move to New Zealand with her two sons in 1849. The records are unclear as to whether the immediate incentive for the move was the death of her husband or his apparent negligence and cruelty. Either way, he must have died before 1851, as it was the year when, after working for two years as a teacher in Nelson, Mary married her second husband, Stephen Lunn Muller. Even though, however, the second marriage was a notable improvement on the experiences of her first marital relationship, Dr Muller did not share his wife’s views on women’s

emancipation, which meant that Mary was forced to write under carefully guarded cover of her pseudonym “Femina”. That was also the immediate reason behind the fact that her identity was not revealed until the 1890s. Her texts were also based on personal experience, especially when it came to the emphasis that she places on the helplessness of women who are, traditionally, entirely dependent, both economically and legally, on the good will of their husbands who have the freedom to treat them in a cruel or unjust way. This situation was aggravated in pioneer societies where women were completely disenfranchised, but frequently pushed, by necessity or inclination to find personal and economic independence in the public sphere. (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 462).

Mary Ann Muller’s most popular text *An Appeal to the Men of New Zealand* which was published with the co-operation of the sympathetic editor of the *Nelson Examiner*, Charles Elliott in 1869 and reprinted a number of times afterwards, focused on this harmful contrast between tradition and modern reality of life in New Zealand. Muller starts with a series of questions as to the functioning of the formerly colonial government insisting on the resistance to modern legislation which results in discrimination directed against half of its population:

What, therefore, can be said for a Government that deliberately inflicts injury upon a great mass of its intelligent and respectable subjects; that virtually ignores their existence in all that can contribute to their happiness as subjects; that takes a special care to strike at the root of their love of country by teaching them that they have no part in forming or maintain its glory, while it rigidly exerts from them all penalties, even unto death? What can be said, what urged, in extenuation of this crying evil, this monstrous injustice? ‘Custom; use; it has always been so?’. This may be enough to say of the past – ‘let the dead past bury its dead’; but is it to be remedied for the future? How long are women to remain a wholly unrepresented body of the people? (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, 7)

In the following paragraph, Mary points out that, despite the fact that New Zealand is situated in a remote location, women who live there are well aware of the most recent developments in the liberal school of thought developing in Britain as “though their household cares chiefly occupy them, yet many find leisure in the quiet evening hours to read not only their fashions, and colonial papers, but the English papers also” (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, 7). Therefore, there exists a unique opportunity for New Zealand and its government to not only follow the example of the British liberal thinkers but also to set precedents when it comes to forward thinking in the areas of social emancipation and legislation. Muller gives the example of America, where law and customs originating in Britain have been modified to reflect the modern character of the young nation. “Why should not New Zealand also lead? Why ever pursue the hard-beaten track of ages?” – she asks and proceeds to question the validity of imposing outdated and conservative rules on communities of people who, in majority, came to

New Zealand looking for a fresh start and a better and less restricted way of life. “Have we not enough cobwebs and mists to cloud our mental gaze, enough fetters to impede our onward progress here, that we must voluntarily shackle ourselves with old world principles in the way of Government?”, (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, 7) is her rhetorical question as to the logic behind the employment of English model of law in her new homeland.

According to Muller nowhere does the absurdity of patriarchal rules show more vividly than in the approach to the female franchise in the country that otherwise allows its female citizens to seek social, educational and economic independence. It is possible to find New Zealand women who rival men in all these areas who are simultaneously discriminated against when it comes to democratic processes solely on the bases of their gender and not their talents or abilities:

She may be a householder, have large possessions, and pay her share of taxes towards the public revenue; but sex disqualifies her. Were it a question of general knowledge and intelligence as compared with men, women might submit unobtrusively; but this is not the case. The point is, she is as capable as our bullock-drivers, labourers, and mechanics? It may surely be confidently asserted that when a woman is possessed of sufficient skill and management to retain unassisted the guidance of her family, and remain a householder, she develops more than a moderate degree of capability. (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, 7)

Mary also makes sure to point out that even in England the exclusion of women from any active participation in politics does not possess any merit, because the country is ruled by Queen Victoria, which, in itself, goes against the patriarchal Salique law. Moreover, the countries of the Commonwealth have seen numerous departures from the strictly male dominance of the public sphere as “a woman may be an heiress of a country, nominate a minister who takes charge of the souls of thousands, may vote in joint-stock companies, in vestries for guardians, may [...] even be an overseer; while in America women are doctors, lawyers, managers of factories, schools, &c, are Government clerks, and in one place Judges” Therefore, the arbitrary denial of the right to vote is even more striking especially in the context of a country that has recently gained the right to establish its own, independent legislature. Mary Ann Muller supports these arguments with references to recent cases of British women demanding the acknowledgment of their participation in public life by the way of granting them franchise, presenting not only the extent of her knowledge of current international events but also the keen sense of the importance of the social and political connections still present in the relations between the countries within the scope of the British Empire (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, p 7).

Still, even though the author quotes examples showcasing British suffrage attempts, she also continues to emphasise the local, New Zealand context in her appeal for changes in the

voting law. She argues that the application of the property ownership rule would result in a relatively small number of women being given the right to vote which would not be threatening to the male majority in any discernable way, but could only contribute to the increase in the quality of political life in New Zealand:

Hence this appeal to the common sense of New Zealand men – of New Zealand law-givers. I cannot appeal to a higher quality in a statesman than common sense, for is it not the sense of the common interest. Let them dispassionately ask themselves whether that interest will not be advanced by the admission of a few female voices. There are but few, comparatively speaking, who could claim to vote on the strength of possessing the minimum amount of property and those few would probably bring pretty keen intelligence on the duty. The infusion of a fresher, purer spirit, and higher tone, would result from the concession of this right to women. (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, 7)

At the same time, Muller addresses the fears that the introduction of female franchise would eventually result in women invading the structures of Parliament which would irrevocably undermine the status quo of the structures of Government. According to Muller these predictions are completely unfounded as, in her experience, the overwhelming majority of New Zealand women does not express any desire or inclination to get involved in the world of professional politics so “it is a bugbear, an absolutely exaggerated view of a notion taken by men whose intellect must be as weak as it intolerant” (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, 7) What is more, it is men who are in possession of all the instruments which allow them to regulate the further access of women to political institutions responsible for the introduction of New Zealand legislation. That is why, as Mary Ann Muller claims, women need to be uplifted from their state of submission, as their advancement does not constitute a threat but a beneficial opportunity for the whole society: “Our women are brave and strong, with an amount of self-reliance and freedom from conventionalities eminently calculated to form a great nation. Give them scope. At present their grasp and power of mind is ‘cribbed, cabined, and confined’ to one narrow groove. It is weakened and famished by disuse, and only a close observer can detect the latent force, the unspent energy lying dormant in many seemingly ordinary characters” (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, 7).

The sum of all the arguments which Muller uses to support her postulates supporting the idea of the introduction of female franchise in New Zealand amounts to a passionate appeal to the authorities of the new country to discard the burden of the outdated, patriarchal tradition in favour of the acknowledgment of the growing contribution that modern, well-educated women add to the development of their local communities and, by extension, to the society as a whole. According to Muller, as both the upbringing as well as educational opportunities of contemporary New Zealand women render them an entirely different group in comparison to

their female ancestors, it is ill-founded to expect them not to take interest or want to participate in the important events of public life of their country. Moreover, as rapid progress in all areas of life cannot be stopped or even slowed down, it is only reasonable and advisable to make the most of it, also in the issues of social emancipation as the effort of all citizens is crucial to the betterment of the conditions of both public as well as private lives:

We ask you, our rulers, to disembarass yourselves of those tenets of Government, built up during ages upon a system of senseless and credulous trust in those principles which guided our ancestors. Shake them aside, or subject them to a rigid scrutiny, and see how they fit the requirements of the present day. Women are now educated, thinking beings, very different from the females of the darker ages. [...] improving as all should be, to feel that our claims have become higher, nobler, and our sympathies wider. Let the laws be fitted to the people and times. Do you still persecute for religious opinions? Do you still burn for witchcraft? Why, when the broad road of progress is cleared for so many human beings, is the Juggernaut car or prejudice still to be driven on, crushing the crowds of helpless women beneath its wheels?

Permit them to take, as their right, an interest, and some small part in the Government of their adopted land. That interest will grow apace, enlarging the scope of their ideas, and in time changing entirely the habit of their thoughts. (*New Zealand Mail*, 1/6/1878, 7).

It is remarkable that Mary Ann Muller's appeal published less than two decades after New Zealand became an independent state was not simply an early attempt at outlining potential scenarios for the directions in which New Zealand society should progress but a fully formed analysis of how the most current liberal thought could be employed to transform both social structures and legislation of the former colony and turn New Zealand into a pioneer and an example to follow for other countries of the British Commonwealth. Mary Ann Muller was clearly familiar with the works of British thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon as well as with the efforts of suffrage organizations in the vein of the Ladies' Discussion Society to get British Parliament to contemplate the possibility of granting female citizens the right to vote. In addition, she managed to employ that knowledge to come up with a reasonable proposal that took into consideration all the factors unique for New Zealand conditions which influenced women's position in society as well as the relaxed perception of the patriarchal stereotypes in order to introduce the progressive idea of female franchise as a topic for public discussion.

Still, despite the well-thought out and comprehensive argumentation presented by Mary Ann Muller, her *Appeal* failed to make an immediate impression on the public opinion upon publication. The ideas included in the texts did not bring any outward changes neither to the development of the women's rights movement in New Zealand nor to the life of Mary Ann Muller. She continued to live in Nelson, her views unknown to all but a few of her close friends

and did not get actively involved in the projects of the NZWCTU or any other suffrage organizations. The role of the observer that she assumed in the further development of the women rights movement brought her satisfaction as she recounted to Kate Sheppard years later that she enjoyed to “watch the efforts of those younger and abler women striving bravely to succeed in obtaining rights, so long unjustly withheld” (MacLeod 464). Regardless, certain observations as to emancipation and the ways in which gender equality legislation would improve New Zealand society that Muller was the first to introduce in the public domain inspired other female thinkers to expand on the ideas which aimed at finding balance in the relations between genders.

One of these women was Mary Taylor, who came over to New Zealand from Britain in 1845 in search of financial and social independence, for she struggled to fit into the constraining frames of the Victorian patriarchal stereotypes. After over a decade of running a successful drapery and garment shop in Wellington, Mary decided to go back to her native Yorkshire around 1860. She used her experiences of liberally minded New Zealand property law which allowed her to own a business without a male intermediary to write a series of articles on the topic of the role that women can play in society. The texts were originally published in London-based feminist periodical, *Victoria Magazine* between 1865 and 1870 and later compiled into a book entitled *The First Duty of Women*. All the articles included in the volume were devoted to the promotion of the idea according to which women should be responsible for earning their own living and should not be forced to demean themselves by entering the bonds of matrimony solely in order to find financial stability. (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 659).

At the same time, however, Taylor refused to perceive women as helpless victims and apportioned them a part of responsibility for their own intellectual and professional development. Therefore, the vision presented in her articles was balanced as it promoted a social structure in which there was neither discrimination nor privilege based on gender. The author herself admitted openly that the main inspiration behind her conclusions as to women’s status in Victorian society could be traced back to the time she spent in New Zealand. She was especially appreciative of the attitudes of the settlers and the equal opportunities available for all those involved in the effort of establishing new township regardless of their gender and age. Mary held a strong conviction that a strong opposition to snobbery and efforts to impose class distinctions on the new communities was an inherent part of settler ideology and was persistent in her efforts to convince British public opinion to adopt a similar approach especially when it came to the economic independence of women.

The aim of demonstrating the illogical and inconsistent character of the enforced dependency that British women were subject to in the second half of the nineteenth century is immediately outlined in the preface to Taylor's collection of articles. Mary makes sure to emphasize the absurdity of the double standards that are responsible for the discrepancy in the expectations extended towards men and women. As she notices, it is a common perception that all men have a duty to earn their living:

The object of most of the following papers is to inculcate the duty of earning money. It may be thought the recommendation was needless, seeing that most men make it their principle business, and all their life long. As a rule they seem quite aware of the miseries and temptations of poverty, and generally try to escape from them. They would feel a decided contempt for the man who made no effort to protect himself, and still more for him who would be content to look to the gifts of others for a permanent maintenance. (Taylor iii)

As Mary Taylor notices, in the case of women, the situation is drastically different and even a suggestion of applying a similar set of rules to female gender is certain to "startle and anger the reader". The reason for this reaction is beyond any reasonable explanation as "it is not that the temptation of poverty and dependence are less trying to women than to men, though it is common to think so. And if they were, it is certain that the miseries resulting from temptation, must at least admit their right to protect themselves from suffering" (Taylor iv). According to Taylor, women who rely solely on following the patriarchal system which requires them to look to their male relatives for basic financial support condemn themselves not only to a total dependence on the goodwill of fathers, brothers or husbands, but to a state of confusion, ignorance and the lack of faith in their own intellectual potential as well.

All articles included in the collection follow this line of argumentation but focus on various aspects which determine the quality of woman's life in Victorian society. Besides the fact Mary Taylor touches upon such fairly obvious areas as feminine work, earnings, knowledge and marital issues she also turns her attention to the analysis of the desirable and problematic aspects of female character including honesty, idleness and respectability. In addition, she discusses pressing contemporary problems connected with the increasing number of so-called "redundant women", the inability to find a consensus between men and women when it comes to the perception of the value of traditional distribution of social and economic duties according to gender and the issues women encounter even in the professions which are, at least theoretically, considered to be acceptable for female occupation. Altogether, Taylor manages to capture the complexity of the clash between the expectations that women have to live up to and the reality and economic pressures of a modern, increasingly industrial society which requires flexibility and initiative from all of its members.

For instance, in the first article included in *The First Duty of Women*, Taylor tackles the issue of the conditioning that middle-class Victorian girls experience during their upbringing and the period of education which renders many of them incapable of even considering the possibility of attaining financial independence when they reach adulthood. In the text entitled “What Am I To Do?” the author writes from the perspective a young woman who struggles with constant contradictions in the way she is perceived as a representative of a weaker sex who should not have ideas above her station and the need to find employment because as she explains she finds herself ‘pinched in means’ and is therefore ‘in danger of absolute poverty’. The situation is not only incongruous but entirely bewildering: “The only way I see, or have been taught, of lessening these evils, is to complain and get helped – or not helped, as the case may be, or else to accept starvation without complaint at all. It seems to me that my education should have taught me something better than this, but I am yet in the dark as to whether I ought even to wish for it” (Taylor 1).

The main problem with the education which the author received is the fact that even though she was encouraged to study diligently in the pursuit of ‘self-improvement’, discussing their knowledge and accomplishments was frowned upon as behavior inappropriate for ladies. It was with that mixed message that the conditioning of young girls started as they were taught that their social acceptance depended on their submissiveness and the willingness to appease others:

Sometimes I spoke of these to my old school-fellows, for all the well-disposed and conscientious girls, laid plans and made good resolutions of some kind, and they generally came to the same decision. They would study and learn, and practice, and ‘improve themselves.’ But I found all my friends even more averse to speak of books of any kind except novels, than older people. They all had the impression that it was wrong; not morally wrong, perhaps, but a sort of solecism in manners like putting your knife in your mouth. Not anything that would prevent your getting to Heaven, but fatal to your acceptability on earth. (Taylor 1)

The lack of approval and even dislike evoked by women who are too keen to show their interest in education stems directly from the patriarchal stereotypes according to which “Ladies have no time for such things; they are out of your sphere; what would become of the house while you were reading?” (Taylor 5). What is more, the author of the article admits that the prevailing opinion on the acceptable duties and activities that a woman should engage in is because it convinces her to turn her mind and energies to her “proper occupations” and to strive to get into her “proper place.” Still, even though she made a concerted effort to fit into the constraints of the patriarchal “Angel of the House” stereotype, at the moment of writing her text she finds herself in an impossible position of enforced idleness which allows her to be

“respectable” but prevents her from providing for herself and being a useful member of society. In order to make the reader realize how difficult it is for a young woman to function in a conservative society, she describes her situation in detail:

I am the fourth part of a housekeeper; mama and my other two sisters being the other three-fourths. It occupies me half-an-hour now and then, and unless we sent away a servant I don't know I could find more to do. We used to spend a good deal of time in visiting, and entertaining company. We don't now, and I suppose no one will say we were in any way called upon to do so if we did not wish for anything else. [...] Besides these two I have no serious employments – nothing in the world that benefits anyone in doing. I have sought opinions in all quarters, and cannot meet with anyone to recommend me anything different to what I now do. I have read all that came in my way on the subject, and have not found any employment worth beginning. There are frequent declamations against frivolous and trivial pursuit, but negative teaching is not enough (Taylor 6).

That brings the author to the original question of the available courses of action that she can undertake without risking her reputation which she fails to answer conclusively as any reasonable solution that she could propose clashes with the convictions of society, in particular, of its male members who shape the conditions in which women have to function. In particular she balks at the acceptance of the idea according to which simple fact of gender should bar women's access to particular areas of science, which should remain the solely male domain for the benefit of social stability. The author finds the very notion of such a belief incomprehensible as well as irrational due to its extremely divisive character:

Now answer – are there men, I mean any number of them, who believe that they profit in civilization by preventing the women from sharing it, and they are ready ‘at all hazards,’ to keep them for their own benefit in a less cultivated state than they might be? To wish any one to be ignorant of any knowledge they can attain to, is strange, but to strive to keep some ignorant for the benefit of others, is to proclaim that the world is so constituted that the one half of humanity can only flourish at the expense of the other. Is it so? Or are there many men who thinks so? Are the two halves of mankind at deadly enmity, or are their interests the same? (Taylor 8-9)

Taylor devotes the remaining part of her article to a detailed analysis of the exact nature of what is considered to be typically feminine qualities and how they determine the acceptability of their decision when it comes to all of their significant life choices. According to her, the most puzzling aspect connected with this issue is that despite of wide range of available definitions of feminine nature presented by predominantly male writers and commentators it is still difficult to determine with any degree of certainty which of the character features can be ascribed exclusively to women. “None of the things mentioned are feminine,” she comments “either in the sense of not belonging to men or in that of belonging to all women” (Taylor 9). It is especially visible in the way men tend to hail women as morally superior creatures who are

supposed to provide men with an example of gentleness and moral values but, simultaneously, criticize them for what they see as failure to live up to this ideal: “Whenever a man writes about women the chances are that he will praise her nature up to the skies, and then begin to blame her for not following it; or, in other words, he will tell her she has only to be feminine. [...] These writers seem to rejoice in the belief, that woman is a very superior being, while forced to admit that generally she does not act like one” (Taylor 13).

What is even more important, Taylor finds the notion of women being placed in the position of role-models as incomprehensible as it precludes any forms of meaningful activity and leads to a situation in which it is impossible to create a relationship between genders that can be based on mutual trust or respect. (Taylor 14-15).

Being cast in the role of a paragon of virtue has a severely limiting effect not only on how women are perceived in society but, even more importantly, on their options when it comes to educational or professional choices. According to the popular opinion pursuing scientific interests or employment outside the narrow scope of ‘acceptable’ occupations cannot be reconciled with the task of “holding up an ideal” which Taylor finds unacceptable, especially in the rapidly changing economic conditions. “From the attitude taken by those who object to the modern demands of women,” she comments “it seems that the things that women wish for – science for instance – are thought to be inconsistent with this ideal. In simple terms they are wrong. They are not thought wrong in the other half of humanity, and the argument to prove them wrong for women is that she is to hold up an ideal” (Taylor 15). As men are not held to similar standards and are given the freedom to pursue their interest without risking their reputation it is clear that female gender is put at a distinct disadvantage in the search of social and economic independence.

In order to emphasize this point, Taylor turns her attention to the examples of what male commentators consider to be acceptable forms of female employment outside the sphere of domesticity. According to one of the writers she quotes there are only three areas in which women can engage namely, “educational work, charitable work and artistic work. The last with the odd condition – with a means of communication between the public and the workers” (Taylor 16). None of these occupations, however, offer much of an opportunity for a woman to earn her living, and from female perspective presented by Mary Taylor, the choice of artistic field is difficult to discern as, in her opinion women have actually less inclination and skills for it than men. Still, Taylor sees the very acknowledgment of a possibility of a “respectable” woman working outside of her home as one of early signs of the changing nature of social conditions. (Taylor 17)

In order to validate her claims as to the lack of practical premises behind the limiting restrictions included in the list of professions suitable for respectable women Taylor recounts the stories of women of her acquaintance who managed to successfully defy the constraints of stereotypes in the pursuit of ways of supporting themselves economically. Moreover, in the majority of cases their choices were not motivated by feminist ideology but by an economic necessity, which belies the assumption that women are bound to stay in predestined social roles and opens up the avenues for future change. She says:

Some women [...] have had the opportunity of learning a useful trade. There are many firms and many shops where the master is incapacitated, and the business done by his wife. There might be many a merchant's or banker's business carried on in the same way, but – the woman could not own the money. Commercially speaking she could have no credit or character. Would not anyone who heard this fact for the first time suspect that the arrangement of women's position and employments had been guided by motives not altogether unselfish? Whether this were so or not, these arrangements may be mended, and they greatly need it. (Taylor 24-25)

She ends her article with an assertion of her conviction that a social upheaval in female gender roles is possible as long as men acknowledge the developments brought about by industrial revolution and allow women to get education that they need to develop skills necessary to find fulfillment outside of their domestic sphere.

Taylor continued to explore these themes in subsequent articles included in *The First Duty of Women* as she strove to impress on her readers the pressing necessity to address the issue of feminine condition in societies based on Victorian, patriarchal values. Not only did she emphasize the fact that the male half of the society have no choice but to acknowledge the connection between the changing economic conditions and the increasing presence of women in the public sphere but also what she considered to woman's duty to find a way to earn her own living in order to “protect herself from the danger of being forced to marry” (Taylor 34). It is essential for every woman to find this type of independence as the first, crucial step of breaking out of the constraints of stereotypes. As Mary Taylor's ideas did not receive wide circulation within New Zealand outside occasional copies of the book brought over from Europe and the subscriptions of *Victoria Magazine*, where the chapters of *The First Duty of Women* were originally published, they did not instigate a widespread reaction or discussion on the topics connected with female emancipation among the general public. Still, as Taylor based many of her texts on her experiences during the period she spent running her own business in New Zealand, it is undeniable that many elements that contribute to her vision of gender roles in society reflect the conditions in which women functioned in the former colony.

It is exigent to notice that none of the articles included in *The First Duty of Women* focus on the question of the female franchise but depict the options that open up for women when they are allowed to pursue employment outside their homes without risking their reputation. Inspired by the way New Zealand society functioned as early as the mid-nineteenth-century, Taylor seemed to have identified one of the most elemental factors in the process that would eventually lead to the introduction of equal rights in a majority of countries remaining within the scope of influence of the British Empire. Namely, she noticed that it is not always the legislation that is the most crucial factor in the process that leads to a betterment of female condition but a shift in mentality of both men and women which makes it possible for the female citizens to become independent. She became convinced of the validity of this statement in New Zealand where social and economic circumstances gradually pushed an increasing number of women into the public sphere and enforced a general, if sometimes reluctant acceptance of this fact on the part of the male part of the society. Even though Mary Taylor criticized the lack of intellectual stimulation that she suffered from in the former colony, she acknowledged and appreciated the progressiveness of its gender roles which she attempted to propagate, albeit without much success, after her return to Britain.

In contrast to Taylor's inauspicious and, eventually, ineffectual efforts to promote the New Zealand social model, the third female activist of the period, Mary Colclough was markedly more prominent and controversial as her texts, published under pseudonym 'Polly Plum' caused quite a stir on publication and inspired lively exchanges between her and some of her readers. Mary was born in England in 1836 but as a young woman decided to look for opportunities in New Zealand where she emigrated in the mid-1850s. In 1861, she married Thomas Colclough, a "gentleman settler" with the view of settling down as a wife and mother. Unfortunately, as her husband was almost twice her age, six years later she found herself a widow with two young children. Having received a comprehensive education Mary managed to secure a well-paid teaching job which allowed her to support her family. In the 1870s she became involved in campaigns for social reforms such as lecturing on the evils of drink, working for the rehabilitation of women ex-prisoners and prisoners. It was her interest and active participation in the female franchise and equal treatment movements, however, that made her a renowned public figure especially in Auckland and its neighbouring towns. Writing as "Polly Plum", she carried on extensive and frequently confrontational correspondence with her readers in the local press fiercely defending all the tenets of gender equality. In addition, she spoke on public platforms in Auckland township and environs, and as far afield as Ngaruawahia, Hamilton, and Thames, which was an unheard of activity for a woman at the

time. In 1874, she left for Melbourne where she spent the next eighteen months and became renowned for her radical views on social institutions of marriage and traditional, patriarchal family (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 143-144).

The reactions of Aucklanders as well as Melburnians to Polly Plum's public appearances and the contents of her speeches ranged from applauding to outraged among both men and women. While her supporters cheered her on and welcomed her theories with enthusiasm some of her male opponents went as far as hurling abuse or even throwing copies of the Bible at her in protest against her claims as well as her audacity to speak in public. Newspapers questioned not only the validity of her convictions and logic behind her argumentation but also the reasons that motivated her public appearances. For instance, it was frequently suggested that her lectures were driven by the bitterness and jealousy she was bound to feel towards women blessed with conventional and happy family lives. As the editor of *The Evening Post* commented in July of 1871:

Finding that her lucubrations in the Press did not seem to be productive of much effect', "Polly" has at length abandoned the pen, and taken boldly to the "stump" - in short, she has come forward as the platform' denunciator of the wrongs of her sisterhood. To judge by the brief summary of the lecture given in the Auckland papers, it does not appear that the lady who delivered it adduced anything further than a rechauffe of those old stock arguments on this subject, the utter fallacy of which - has been shown again and again. The main object of the lecture was to prove that woman should not be subject to man at all; that she is quite equal to man in every respect; and quite as competent to cope with all the stern business of life, its cares, burdens, trials, and difficulties, and "that she should, therefore, hold an absolutely independent position. Now, this sort of nonsense is, fortunately, never heard from the lips of those true women whom men admire and love, to whom they render instinctive homage, and to cherish and protect whom they look upon as a privilege and duty. No! it is not amongst women of that kind that we find the champions of women's orators and philosophers in petticoats spring is a special and peculiar one. Disappointed and ill-tempered old maids, who, never having had the chance of entering upon the connubial state, vow deadly vengeance upon the whole race of mankind, or married women who can't hit matters off with their yoke fellows in the bonds of marriage, sometimes find a sort of vent for their spleen in stirring up discontent in the bosoms of the fairer and more amiable portion of the sex, whom men adore as sweethearts, cherish as wives and revere as mothers. (*Evening Post*, 13/07/1871, 2)

The author of the article continues with a personal attack directed against Mary Colclough as he, erroneously describes her as an embittered spinster who should refrain from expressing opinions on the subjects which are not within her sphere of expertise or even experience. "It is trite saying that old maids make the best mothers," he comments, "and we suppose, on this principle, "Polly Plum" is of all others the most competent person to say how young girls should be brought up, and tell women all about their rights and wrongs. This may

be sound doctrine, but it is one of which we entertain very grave doubts” (*Evening Post*, 13/07/1871, 2). The second half of the paragraph is even more insulting as it puts into question not only Colclough’s femininity but also her intelligence and other fundamental features of character. “At all events,” states the commentator sardonically, “we never found a woman possessing amiability, sweetness of temper, average intelligence, and a fair share of personal charms, who bothered her pretty head about anything of the kind. Women of that sort get all their rights freely conceded by men without needing either to rush into print or spout in a public hall” (*Evening Post*, 13/07/1871, 2). Judging by the amount of vitriolic malice contained in this article alone, it is possible to state that both the arguments presented by Mary Colclough as well as the forms in which she chose to express them must have touched upon a sensitive area for the conservative part of the community determined to protect what they considered to be foundations of social relations.

Outwardly indifferent to the critical reception of her activities, Mary Colclough focused her writings and lectures on similar areas to that discussed by Mary Taylor in her *Victoria Magazine* articles. She expressed her opinion on the women’s right to education as an inherent element in the process of forging the social and economic independence for women of all classes. Moreover, she did not promote the idea of gender-related privileges as she considered well-educated women to be personally responsible for their own well-being and potential careers. Finally, even though she was an ardent believer in the claim according to which women had every right and capability to be able to vote in democratic elections she considered the issue of franchise to be of secondary importance which should be nothing more than a natural consequence of young women being able to discover and develop their potential thanks to comprehensive education and ability to engage in employment outside of the domestic duties. As Charlotte Macdonald comments in the biographical note on Mary Colclough in *The Book of New Zealand Women* “Polly Plum’s” ideas and her perspectives on the development of the female movement could be summarized in the following way:

What of education, careers, the vote? She did not question, at this time the importance of women as wives and mothers, but it was absurd to educate girls purely for a domestic life. As single women, widows or wives of improvident husbands, many would have to support themselves. Self-reliance and self-help were the goals. There should be no legal barrier to women rising as high in the world as their talents would take them. Let them have fair field and no favour! Education was the answer. Finally, women should have the vote. It was a question of justice. They should not be subject to laws they had no part in making. (144)

Mary Colclough expressed her views on the way girls’ education should be structured in a straightforward and unabashed fashion, clearly considering herself to be an equal opponent to her male readers and adversaries as she pointed out flaws in their reasoning and countered

arguments with her feminist outlooks. For instance, in August 1871 she felt compelled to respond to the editorial on female education printed in *The New Zealand Herald*. She starts her text with the appreciation of “many sensible views on the subject” expressed by the editor tempered with the acknowledgment of what she considers to be “a great mistake” in his reasoning. Namely, she disapproves of the fact that he is “urging that women should be improved and raised without any corresponding rise being permitted in their legal position” (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 143). According to “Polly Plum” that kind of argumentation is burdened with inherent fallacy as: “Though female education is far from so good or so general as it ought to be, women, even with the limited knowledge that they have acquired through the more general diffusion of learning, have become discontented with the existing institutions, and there can be no doubt, the more they are educated, the more will be their objection to legal subjection” (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 143).

Still, in the following paragraphs of her retort, Colclough goes to great lengths to assuage the fears of the conservative members of society who may perceive any demands to introduce more extensive rights for women as a harbinger of a revolution which could threaten the stability of social structures. She points out that many of the women who hold “the doctrine that legal subjection is a frightful wrong, that whilst it continues it forms the most effectual bar to progress” are still firm believers in Christian values according to which “the rational subordination of a wife is the right and orderly position for her to occupy” (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 143). She puts forward that one of the main reason for women’s insistence on pursuing financial independence lies not in the desire to completely overthrow the established patterns of gender relationships but in the reasonable urge to protect themselves against these men who would abuse the power granted to them by the legislation steeped in patriarchal stereotypes: “for what is the use of knowing how to act rightly, and guide a family properly, when it may so happen that you may be joined to a man who may choose to nullify all you would gladly accomplish? – and who, in the present state of society, *can* do so, simply because he wills it so, without being obliged to assign any reason for his acts” (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 143). When viewed from this perspective, the appeal for the acceptance of greater gender equality becomes a form of perfectly understandable self-defense against discrimination which can be accepted even by strict conservatives.

“Polly Plum” does not even allow for a possibility that any reasonable and mature man could refuse women the right to express their opinions and seek ways to improve their social and economic standing. Even though she does not profess any certainty as to the way men think and therefore cannot pretend to speak in their name, she finishes her text with an expression of

a belief in the noble features of character that men tend to possess which preclude them from being hostile or even indifferent towards women and their needs:

It seems hard to believe that men are so essentially mean and unchivalrous that unless they hold women almost entirely at their mercy, they cannot consent to be civil and respectful to them. It may be so; I cannot tell. I am not a man, and can no more enter into their feelings than they into woman's, though they so frequently pretend to do so, then often try to terrify us with the threats that there is this ugly, ungenerous trait in their character. Still, I am fain to hope that that they are unjust to themselves, and that an alteration in the law would in way affect those whom love has joined together.[...]Only the bound-down, the ill matched and the unjustly treated will find the freedom of woman affect them in any way. Of this I feel sure. (*The Book of New Zealand Women* 143)

Polly Plum's rhetoric relied heavily on the references to the Christian ethos and symbolism in her texts she consistently emphasized the lack of revolutionary determinants behind the New Zealand female rights movement. The distinction was crucial due to the associations between the appeals for reforms leading to more extensive gender equality and the revolutionary and detrimental upheavals of the established social order that the conservative members of the newly formed New Zealand society were bound to form. Mary Colclough was determined to dispel that assumption, presenting the tenets of the female organizations in a rational and unemotional way which highlighted the pragmatic aspects of the gradual relaxation of patriarchal rules that confined the scope of female activity to the domestic sphere. That is also why, the parallels with the mission of Christianization that many of the former colonists found easy to identify with, became an important part of the argumentation that she used to support her claims on both general and personal levels. For example, in an article entitled "What Women Want" Polly Plum starts with the explanation of both her motivation and the importance of what she considers to be her mission:

I am well known and everywhere known as a firm and earnest woman's advocate, and I am content and grateful to be so considered. No amount of contumely, insult, contempt, or ridicule, would make me swerve for one instant from a cause that I consider a high and holy cause. You will believe that I am true when I declare on my honor as a Christian woman that dearly as I love my life, and many and close as are the ties that bind me to it, I would this day gladly and gratefully lay it down, if by so doing I would swerve the great work, which, next to my God, claims my highest service. No Missionary ever yet went amongst the heathen, who was ever more firmly convinced that he was doing God service, and working to His honor and glory, than I am convinced that I am doing God's best work, in the path I have chosen to follow. I fully believe, and am convinced, that neither I or my little ones will suffer in this enlightened nineteenth century, by my carrying out my earnest convictions of right; but even were it otherwise, and I should be counted 'worthy to suffer', I hope and believe the strength will be given to say 'Even so Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight, not my will but Thine be done.' From this preface you will see that I consider the cause of women's rights a *holy cause*; I do, apart from all social considerations. I count it a

holy cause, and I believe any advocate who does not so consider it, has undertaken the work in a wrong spirit and can hardly hope for a blessing. (Macdonald 27)

The text continues in a similar vein with strong references to Christian values as the author implores her male readers to make use of the doctrine according to which “we should do unto others as we would they should do unto us”. In her opinion, the only reason why potential emancipation of women could evoke anxiousness among men is the fear that if given any semblance of power in public life, women would embark on a campaign which, in turn, would result in discrimination of men. In Colclough’s opinion that kind of reaction is a clear indication of the fact that men are aware of the existence of injustice in social relationship that women experience on daily basis as they equalize the possession of independence and influence in public sphere with the inevitability of imbalance and subordination in gender relations. “Now men dread to give us power,” she comments, “avowedly from the fear lest we should oppress them, as they have hitherto oppressed us, and place them where they have not hesitated to place us. They very dread lest by our emancipation they should be brought to endure some of the ills which hitherto we alone have borne, is the clearest proof that they know they have not acted to us in the spirit of the Golden Rule” (Macdonald 27-28).

This acknowledgment of what amounts to conscious discrimination leads Polly Plum to an appeal to the imagination of her potential young, male readers. In the following paragraphs of her article she asks them to put themselves in the position of their female peers so they can visualize and appreciate the extent of the depravation that they are subject to and realize that they would not be willing to share the same fate:

I will ask any young man just entering on life, if he would like to contemplate this fate. That all he has, or can have, or can earn, shall be absolutely at the disposal of his wife, that it shall be in her power to take away from him those dear children – whom I can tell him, good parents love as their very lives, and whom it is hard *hard* to part with, even to the God who gave them – that she shall be able to do all this, to force him to obedience, keep him poor if she please, while she has plenty, and leave him penniless if she dies first and it pleased to do it. Further, that on this creature he had no further hold than her moral sense of right, supposing her to have any moral sense of right, and even of that there is no guarantee required, he must trust to his insight into character to settle that question, and if he is deceived! – there is no hope: the cruel grave or the scarcely less cruel and more shameful Police Court can alone end the misery of such a life. I will ask the young man entering on life – Would it not take all the aim and energy out of his bright dreams for the future if he had only to contemplate such an uncertain, such an unsettled fate as this? If all his future life’s happiness or misery depended on his getting a good tyrant, what would his life be worth to him? No! men could not endure this fate. They would soon become vitiated in principle if it were theirs. (Macdonald 28)

On the other hand, the only reason why women are even remotely ready to accept the existing status quo is the fact that, as a group, they are not familiar with any other possibilities and they can no longer fully recognize the severity of the restrictions that they have to take into account when undertaking any form of public activity. What is more, it is natural that men do not want women to realize how confined they are as they are reluctant to give up or share certain privileges. Still, the universal character of female experience does not signify that the discriminative social reality becomes justified or does not require modification in order to improve the quality of women's lives. "Woman has borne it so long that she does not often see it in all its dread uncertainty. Men who have not to bear it are content to leave her to it. She is supposed to be used to it, as 'the eels are to skinning'. Aye and each fresh eel has to bear its own particular skinning, and where bad men bring the burden of the law to bend down women, it comes no easier because other sisters have borne the load" (Macdonald 28).

In addition, in the following paragraphs Polly Plum rejects the interpretation which deems the patriarchal social order as the only acceptable model because "God meant to be so". According to her, such an interpretation of the Scripture cannot be perceived as nothing less than a perversion of the true meaning of the Christian spirit. Even though she acknowledges the outward validity of St Paul's pronouncements according to which "every Christian wife should practice all the Christian duties towards her husband" and expresses her support for the belief that God, in fact, granted "man mental and physical superiority over woman" she does not subscribe to the conviction that this natural order should lead to an abusive relationship between genders. To the contrary, she sees men as tasked with additional responsibility towards women which obliges them to extend additional support and protection over their female counterparts. Sadly, as she notices, this principle seems to apply solely to private sphere but becomes suspended or even reversed in the case of women who dare to venture into the realm of public activity (Macdonald 28).

Mary Colclough draws parallels between Biblical justice and the current law system in the former colony. It is her claim that, even if the authorities are determined to perceive the legislation as the reflection of the wholesome Christian values, the resulting discrimination and injustice cannot be explained or validated. As a result, even the men who are infallibly chivalrous and protective in their private relations with women cannot escape partial responsibility for the suffering of the weaker sex and, therefore should be also vitally invested in the introduction of more equality into the New Zealand social dynamics:

The cries of wronged women and helpless children rise to God bearing witness to the deep blot on our country's fair scroll, and believe me, Christian men, so long as you defend the law; so long as you even

tacitly oppose reform, no matter how excellent and admirable you may be in your own family relations; no matter how pure and good and holy your moral and religious views may be, as long as defend the existing marriage laws; so long as you are opposed to the doctrine of perfect legal equality between man and woman, so long do you share the blame of all the sin and shame born of these evils; so long are you in part answerable not only to man, but to your God, for every robbery and every brutality committed under their shelter. It *is* your affair, if you countenance the system that legalizes the sins, and if you do no worse you help to perpetuate abuses and check progress – to my mind two of the greatest political sins a man can commit. (Macdonald 28)

Mary Colclough finishes her letter with another declaration of her steadfast belief in the eventual success of the campaign for women's rights as "there must be a day of discovery for everything, nor is the long period during which woman has been subject an argument" (*New Zealand Herald*, 31/07/1871, 3). The conviction is supported by the way other social ills such as the subjugation of the working-class men and slavery that have been resolved and "disappeared before the light of the glorious gospel of Christ" (*New Zealand Herald*, 31/07/1871, 3). All these factors only serve to strengthen Polly Plum's faith in the cause and the resolve to continue her efforts aimed at propagating the awareness of the universal discrimination of women's right to equal treatment and propel forward the inevitable transformation of the way gender roles are perceived in society. She assures the reader that under no circumstance will she get deterred by neither ridicule and criticism nor by a potential lengthiness of the process of recognition the right of women to equal treatment as she is convinced of the righteousness of the cause that lies at the foundations of all her efforts:

Flippant satire is powerless even to offend women working in such a spirit as this, but are we to be deterred by the argument that the truth we urge is new, or more properly is newly discovered truth. [...] I think I have written enough to show that my advocacy of the cause of woman is firm and unflinching; that my devotion to it is entire and on the highest grounds, and this I want to make clearly understood. (*New Zealand Herald*, 31/07/1871, 3)

Mary Colclough presents another, comprehensive vision of femininity and the role that women should play in modern society which, alongside the proposals put forward by Mary Ann Muller and Mary Taylor constituted valid alternatives for patriarchal patterns which were an important factor holding back the social progress in mid-nineteenth-century. Despite certain minor differences all these authors perceived women as thoroughly capable of extending the scope of their activity into the public sphere and finding ways to attain financial independence. What is more, women do not require any type of preferential treatment or privilege based on gender in order to achieve it for it is enough if New Zealand men learn to be at least tolerant of their of their presence in public life. If granted the unconditional right to comprehensive education and equal access to various forms of employment women will surely take

responsibility for their own well-being and be able to support themselves and their children without overstepping on male authority.

The “three Marys”, as they were dubbed by commentators and historians also shared many elements when it comes to their background and life experience. They all came from lower middle class families who valued education and provided opportunities to gain it to all their children regardless of gender. On the other hand, they were not brought up in affluent conditions and were familiar with financial hardships from an early age which not only taught them the value of money, but impressed on them the importance of the ability to support oneself without the necessity to rely on male members of their families. Both Muller and Taylor wrote their texts as manifestos which reflected their convictions and beliefs and were designed to challenge the readers, persuade them to change their outlook on social realities and provoke them to become active supporters of the campaign for the introduction of gender equality. On her part, Mary Colclough was more impulsive and dialogic. She seemed to have thrived on direct contact with her audience as she engaged with her readers in order to present the abstract principles of justice in an immediate and practical way.

All in all, however, all three of them were perfectly aware of the conditions prevalent in the freshly forged country of New Zealand and were, therefore inclined to appeal to the pragmatic side of men and women working to find a way to create a better way of life for people disenchanted with the rigidity and strictures of Victorian society. Marys realized that the former colonists and their offspring were bound to be more receptive of the more progressive outlook on the gender roles in society and based their texts around this belief of a very real possibility of a change in social dynamic in New Zealand. They perceived their articles and public addresses as a way of instigating a public debate which would eventually result in the emancipation of women. They were not wrong in their predictions. Their important statements were read and taken up by their contemporaries who did not reject their ideas outright but considered them and, in some cases, used them for further initiatives in the women’s rights movements. What is more, their writings were also placed within a wider scope of the burgeoning female movement in other countries, Britain in particular, which added additional validity and gravitas to their ideas especially in the eyes of well-educated females part of the community.

All three Marys seemed to be heavily influenced by inspiration drawn from the contacts with visitors from abroad as well as the correspondence with friends and relatives back in Britain. One of such important visitors was Maria Susan Rye, a political activist who had been part of the group working for reform of married women’s property law in England in the mid-

1850s. She stayed with Mary Ann Muller in January 1864 during her travel around New Zealand and, as Muller admitted herself was instrumental in the process of shaping the ideas behind her *Appeal to the Men of New Zealand*. Mary Taylor, who was in regular correspondence with friends and family in England throughout the time she spent in New Zealand was also influenced by the views of such prominent figures as Charlotte Bronte and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. Therefore, the intellectual legacy of Mary Ann Muller, Mary Taylor and Mary Colclough is an important contribution to the early feminist thought in New Zealand as their texts initiated the interest in female rights in the former colony. According to Charlotte Macdonald the “three Marys”: “may have been isolated voices in New Zealand but they had echoes in other parts of the world. Their writings did not prompt widespread agitation, sudden changes in the law or even a sustained debate on the position of women. But their ideas were read and discussed. They had raised the question of women’s rights” (17).

5.2 New Zealand women journalists and the cause of emancipation

While the ideas presented by Mary Ann Muller, Mary Taylor and Mary Colclough in the 1860s and 1870s were considered to be reflections and musings of private individuals who made attempts at influencing public opinion, it was around the same period that some of the New Zealand well-educated women embarked on the careers of professional journalists contributing regularly to various magazines and newspapers published in the country and abroad. Newspapers started to appear in New Zealand from the onset of organized European colonization in 1840s with the first regular titles being published in Wellington and Auckland. Initially, the establishment of a new newspaper or a periodical was almost invariably connected with the support of a particular political goal, such as the formation of a new province, like in the case of Hawke’s Bay, or providing a platform for the advancement of the political career of their owners. Over the next couple decades, however, the character of these publications started to shift in order to cater for the needs and interests of readers who treated press as not only as a source of information on the current events but also as something of a guidebook on the most common problems they were likely to encounter as pioneers in a new land (McCallum *Women and their Words* 15-18).

That is why, in the 1860s newspapers and magazines started to feature not only pages devoted to agriculture and husbandry addressed to male farmers but also items on food and fashion dedicated to female readers. At first, these were male journalists who prepared the

materials for these publications but, gradually, the move to include local social news led to the employment of women as writers and editors of these pages. One of the first women known to have written for New Zealand newspapers was Londoner Caroline Howard who arrived in New Zealand in 1862 as matron on board of a ship bringing a group of young women to Otago. Back in Britain Caroline was an active promoter of middle class female emigration to New Zealand in search of the betterment of working conditions for domestic servants. Therefore, when Caroline decided to remain in New Zealand it was a natural step for her to set up a servants' registry office which dealt mainly with female workers. On top of that, for seven years she wrote regular reports on the actual conditions dominant on the labour market for the *Otago Daily Times*. Her texts were based on her extensive travels around the Otago province which she undertook in order to assess labour demands, wage rates and living conditions and were aimed at providing practical information for employers and give women looking for work reliable information on what they can expect when it came to wages and employment opportunities (McCallum *Women and their Words* 28).

Another female contributor to New Zealand newspapers in the 1860s was one Elizabeth Peryman. She grew up surrounded with journalists as many members of her family were professionals in this field. One of her brothers was both a journalist and a Member of Parliament in England; another one, Alfred Saunders, was a New Zealand politician associated with the *Nelson Examiner* while his son Samuel became the editor of the editor of the *Lyttelton Times* in the 1890s. Elizabeth was no exception to her family's journalistic tradition as, using penname 'Martha', she wrote series of articles on the dairying industry and social issues for the *Canterbury Times*. As one of her letters to her family back in England demonstrates she was also involved in the creation of a magazine for women as she asked her mother to "just keep me supplied with a good piece each month for a new Magazine we have started, and Ann [her sister] to send me a good story now and then for public reading" (Trask 46). In later life, Elizabeth suffered continuously from ill health which prevented her from writing much but she remained a steadfast supporter of her daughter-in-law, Nellie Peryman who became the longest-serving editor of *White Ribbon*, the journal edited and published by the New Zealand women's suffrage movement (McCallum *Women and their Words* 32).

The presence of women in New Zealand journalism eventually led to the emergence of a small group of well-educated women in the 1880s and 1890s who perceived the profession of a journalist as a perfect platform for the promotion of feminist ideas. However, unlike their predecessors, Mary Ann Muller, Mary Taylor and Mary Colclough, who used the press as an occasional outlet for their ideas and proposals, women such as Edith Searle Grossman and Mary

Colborne Veel considered themselves to be professional writers equal to their male colleagues. For instance, Grossman was not only a novelist and journalist employed by various newspapers but also worked as a special reporter when in 1902 she was sent to write a feature on King Edward VII's Pacific Island coronation ceremonies and celebrations. The list of the New Zealand and British magazines and journals she contributed to include titles such as the *Otago Witness*, *The Contemporary*, *The Nineteenth Century* and *After*. Moreover, as she was not a member of any of leading New Zealand women's organization she considered the emancipation not as a political issue but a question of natural social evolution. Therefore, her topics were not limited to those connected with feminist ideas but included a wide range of areas, including Maori education, the development of public parks, historical sketches and literary criticism. She was described by a contemporary as a "leading writer on literary or historical matters and social movements" (Thomson 310).

Still, the feminist issues remained within the scope of her keen interests and, despite the fact that she did not take an active part in any female organizations' campaigns for franchise or acknowledgment of the right to equality, Grossman felt invested in the progress of the emancipation of women. In many of her texts, she strives at impartiality and does not shy away from criticism of certain aspects of suffrage and other activities of New Zealand feminist, but she steadfastly acknowledges the significance of the social changes that can be observed in New Zealand. For instance, in 1896, she wrote a piece for *The Press* entitled "The Drifts in the Woman Movement" in which she comments:

Take any great movement, and you will always find the same leading features – an ideal, a religious faith to start with, germs of good and evil developing side by side and finally a change in social conditions, both for better and for worse. Looking backward upon our Century – pre-eminently the era of women – we shall find many mistakes made along with the great good done. Now that the burden and heat of the day is done, earnest and conscientious workers find the lightest and most frivolous minds mingling with the 'forward movement' On the whole, the gain far outweighs the loss. We would none of us return to the era of worsted work and antimacassars, of devout wives who 'love their lords,' of literary ladies who hide their MSS under needlework if a knock is heard. We have travelled a long way since the days of the unfortunate and misguided Mary Wollstonecraft. Many of the rights which she, the first champion of women, demanded, have become a matter of course with most of us'. (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5)

Grossman continues her article with examples of the increasing acceptance of female presence in public life. Predominantly, she focuses on the fact that the access to higher education that young women were granted in New Zealand resulted in a new social situation as "one profession and trade after another is opening to women". Moreover, it is not solely the professions commonly if reluctantly accepted as suitable for female occupation such as teaching

and literature but a variety of areas that are now unbarred for women because “girls are commonly employed in post and telegraph offices, or as clerks, typists or secretaries ; others are claiming to have a voice in the administration of justice and in the government of the country; nor has any logical cause as yet been shown for debarring them ; while it is a mere anomaly that in spite of the demands of modesty and humanity women doctors should be regarded with suspicion” (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5). This kind of change is perceived as a positive and empowering shift in social dynamics and a direct and positive result of the campaigns and activities undertaken by female rights organizations.

Still, that does not mean that the activists of women’s rights associations can feel complacent and consider their task of securing equal position for women complete. To the contrary, there are plenty of issues left to resolve in the future before women’s social status is secure and comparable to that enjoyed by men. Grossman brings up the most pressing of these problems in her text: “The question of equal conditions in marriage yet remains to be solved. Are women, after marriage, to retain the right they possessed beforehand to an independent income? Why, if a few professions are open to them, should not others be? Has the mother or the father a greater claim to the child? If women vote, why may they not also govern?” (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5) All these matters of contention between the supporters and opponents of the gender equality model are complex and difficult when it comes to finding a solution which would, at least partially, meet the expectations of all groups. Regardless of this, however, in order to achieve true equality, all these questions need to be answered otherwise New Zealand society will remain in an undefined state stuck in between patriarchy and fully-fledged equality.

In the following paragraphs, however, the author acknowledges the validity of certain apprehensions that the rapidity of the changes to the status of women in society could evoke in even in those who, in principle, support the idea of gender equality. Grossman states that, basing on the evidence of women in public sphere “current is towards increased independence” and it is impossible to state where the lines will be drawn in the future. “Will women dress like men, talk like them follow all their trades and professions, and ultimately lose all differentia?” (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5) Grossman herself, with her own endeavours, gave testament to validity of the claim according to which women were perfectly capable of undertaking pressures of a professional career acknowledged the fact that there exist limits to the levelling of differences between genders that patriarchal strictures reinforced in society.

Mainly, it is the experience of motherhood that becomes the focus of female attention which stands in the way of both genders attaining any form of flawless balance in their contribution to public life and professions. According to Grossman, women, in general, are not

overly consumed with the idea of passionate love but cannot deny the pull of their maternal instincts which should be taken into account by the activists attempting to promote social reforms:

Love as an active passion plays a subordinate part in the life of a normal woman; her part is still that of a receptivity, let the ultra-advanced say what they will. It is in maternity alone that she finds fulfilment of her being. Maternity is with her a craving, an instinct not only spiritual but even physical. Many of the earlier reformers were inclined to ignore this fact, but their mistake having now become plain, the tendency is to exalt this condition to the highest possible level. Here we approach the very depths of the problem, for perfect maternity means self-abnegation, indeed, for a time, something approaching self-annihilation. Here man and woman diverge, and the woman passes alone beneath the shadow of the Cross. (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5)

The discrepancy between the ways in which both genders experience parenthood is predominantly due to the enormity of responsibility that each and every mother is faced with when she has to take care of an infant. As Grossman comments: “The strongest and the weakest alike must choose – Myself or my child?” It is especially vital at an early stages of any child’s life, when its vulnerability requires not only constant attention of a mother but also a great deal of vigilance and personal sacrifice on her part (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5).

The observations that Grossman makes when it comes to the all-absorbing nature of motherhood lead her to conclusions as to its impact on social dynamics as well as education of women. While she acknowledges the importance of the role that mothers play in society and states that raising of children is gradually becoming a respected occupation which “requires great and varied knowledge, trained judgment and self-control, the power to think and act and rule, in short a rich and strong personality” she strongly disagrees with the idea of limiting the scope of girls’ education to the topics which they may find useful during the physical process of bringing up children. To the contrary, Grossman states that any restrictions to the intellectual development of young girls would result in harmful consequences experienced not only by themselves but their offspring as well. Not only is a woman educated only in pragmatic areas of life incapable of directing her children’s mental and spiritual education but cannot be an intellectual partner for them in their adult lives:

Education, then, is really more important for women than for men. But the question now comes in—what sort of education ? [...]A woman whose mind has been from her youth directed only to material things, can be the mother of her children's bodies alone, not of their spirits. Nothing estranges a parent from a grown-up child so much as her own narrow sympathies and aims. Besides, when the mother is no longer necessary to her children, it is intolerable that she should be unfit to take any further part in life. (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5)

Overall, Grossman concludes that, in its early stages, motherhood precludes any form of intensive activity in public sphere even if it should provide women with enough experience to consider a career as women judges, councillors or members of Parliament when their children grow up. In the case of exceptionally intelligent and gifted women, however, it is a matter of choice between making use of their potential and taking care of young offspring as the strain of trying to combine the two roles can be overwhelming even for the most remarkable individual. Still, even though this statement could be seen as the validation of a conservative point of view which places woman firmly within the domestic sphere, Grossman actually advocates that for a woman who has talents that could benefit the society it is more advisable to forgo raising a family as it could be detrimental both to her community as well as her private life and even sanity (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5).

Grossman's argumentation is an example of individual ways in which some of the independent, well-educated New Zealand women were interpreting the tenets of feminist philosophy that lay at the foundations of the female rights movements. The way in which she strives at objectivity while discussing various aspects of gender equality and appreciates both sides of the argument is a great illustration of a non-doctrinal character of New Zealand public debate on this sensitive issue. For instance, even though Grossman spent much of her life as a successful, professional woman and clearly rejected strictly patriarchal social patterns so prevalent in nineteenth-century, in no way did she support extreme forms of doing away with these stereotypes. She emphasizes the fact that the most radical activists blindly follow the lure of revolutionary advancement and do not take into consideration that "many of the institutions that they want to overthrow have their root in the inspirations of those great minds which appear (not so much in the old age a nation) but rather at long intervals in the history of the world" (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5). Moreover, she expresses her disapproval of the attitudes and modes of behaviour adopted by the most militant activists in other countries as she concludes her article with a statement according to which the only feasible way forward for the domestic female rights movement leads through gradual and non-confrontational progression and incorporation of ideas into the structure of New Zealand society:

The revolted by no means include all 'new women' for the new type appears in all but a small conservative section, but they are the noisiest class. It is not difficult to predict their advance until they are distinguished from men chiefly by greater frivolity. The very worst of them – the society new woman who smokes, shoots, hunts, and swears – we are thankful to say has not yet reached New Zealand. May her day be long distant! Perhaps before then the counter revolution will have set in. For yet another fact history has taught. Extravagances are inevitably crushed by opposing extremes, and the only change that endures is the slow

and moderate growth that is in perfect agreement with the prevailing conditions of human nature. (*Press*, 26/10/1896, 5)

Therefore, even though, Edith Searle Grossman was not an active member of any of New Zealand female organizations, her words encapsulate the flexible nature of the rhetoric employed by even the staunchest supporters of suffrage and gender equality in the country. Not only did the members of the New Zealand Christian Temperance Union and other associations encourage well-educated women to depict their opinions on the position of genders in society based on experiences of sojourns into the public sphere but were not dismissive of critical voices. What is more, they were willing to take into account the most pressing doubts and apprehensions of the opponents of the introduction of gender equality in New Zealand and were capable of adjusting their argumentation and focus in order to assuage them.

This tendency is visible from the very moment when New Zealand women started to organize themselves in order to gain influence on the legislature of the former colony. Despite the fact that, initially, their initiatives were not rooted in political ambitions but pragmatic necessities and their very first aims were directed at the introduction of restriction in the distribution and sale of alcohol, organizations such as the New Zealand Christian Temperance Union quite quickly moved into the campaigns aimed at the promotion of equal franchise for women. This shift in focus was an expression of their determination to find the best way in which to achieve their aims of improving everyday economic and social situation of especially of those of New Zealand women who had to support themselves and their families in the challenging conditions of the former colony. The flexible approach adopted by the leaders and main writers of the New Zealand female movement can be pointed to as the most immediate cause behind the peaceful campaign and the eventual introduction of equal franchise into legislation. As most of the contemporary texts demonstrate, the activists were exceedingly cautious not to aggravate and alienate those members of society for whom the introduction of equality meant a potential upheaval and an unacceptable social revolution.

5.3 Women in the New Zealand temperance movement

In order to understand the origins and character of the feminist movement in New Zealand it is essential to take into consideration social and economic conditions which were the greatest incentives for women of all classes and walks of life to get involved in political activities. One of the most profound factors that had a detrimental effect on the situations that many of female citizens had to contend with was the overindulgence in alcohol that was a common problem

among New Zealand men. While it was not an unknown issue in other nineteenth century societies, the scale of alcohol consumption and its impact on the society deprived of organized forms of charity that women and children could fall back on meant that the creation of associations promoting temperance became a matter of necessity. New Zealand was similar to many other colonial societies when it came to excessive drinking which became a matter of concern and criticism for authorities as well as journalists commenting on the life of the communities (Grimshaw 22).

The problem was noticed and acknowledged by social reformers and activists from the beginning of the existence of the British settlement in New Zealand. As early as the 1830s, predominantly nonconformist Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian congregations began to set up temperance societies and by the mid-eighties numerous organizations such as Rechabites, Good Templars, Bands of Hope and Sons and Daughters of Temperance were active in New Zealand raising awareness of the issue. The scope of their campaigns ranged from the postulates of mild restrictions in the sale and consumption of spirits to a strict and complete prohibition of alcohol but, the common factor for all them was the belief that the problem of overindulgence was firmly rooted in the context of religious beliefs and duties. In consequence, it was mainly male representatives of clergy who were responsible for the rhetoric and focus of the activities undertaken by the respective associations.

The significant shift in the focus groups and the ways in which the temperance movement operated was initiated by the visit of an American temperance crusader and a founding member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Mary Clement Leavitt. Invited by members of Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist Churches, Clement travelled around New Zealand extensively speaking at public meetings, women's circles and gatherings organized by individual parishes. Her message concerning temperance was revolutionary as, even though it was still profoundly Christian in nature, it emphasized the importance of the role that women should play in the social reforms leading to sobriety. Clement's argumentation was based on the traditional perception of 'special mission' and separate nature of women which they are obliged to employ in the service of Christian forces determined to introduce the necessary reforms. As Charlotte Macdonald comments:

Leavitt argued that women's special mission carried with it an obligation to take social and political action. In this she was going much further than other mid-nineteenth-century thinkers: on one hand, the advocates of separate spheres for men and women, and on the other, traditional Christians who exhorted women to express their faith through charitable or philanthropic work. The evangelical roots of temperance stressed the link between the spiritual transformation of the individual and the moral transformation of society. (32)

As the message relayed by Mary Leavitt during the meetings combined elements of traditional approach to both, Christian faith and the roles that genders should play in society with the novel proposal of female self-sufficiency and the belief in causative influence that women can exert on social processes it found resonance with extremely receptive audiences which, in many cases, consisted predominantly of women. As a result, in a matter of months, branches of the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union were formed all over New Zealand which allowed the first national convention of the representatives to be held in 1886. From that moment onwards the NZWCTU became the focus of women's reforming and organizing energies. Even though the main agenda undertaken by the Union in the first years of its existence was strongly influenced by the American parent society which regularly sent encouragement and campaign strategies it was the local interests and the personalities of its female leaders that determined the direction that the organization eventually took.

The involvement of the NZWCTU in contemporary feminist issues was mainly due to the fact that the movement attracted many of the most prominent New Zealand female social activists of the period. For instance, Learmonth Dalrymple, the promoter of the comprehensive education for girls and women and personal friend of the most prominent Liberal politicians of the day joined the Wellington branch and eventually progressed to the position of a president of a new branch in Fielding. Harriet Morison, organizer and leader of the Tailoresses' Union and a lay preacher for the Bible Christian denomination, joined in Dunedin. Kate Edger, who at the time was the headmistress of the girls' secondary school in Nelson and her husband, Congregational minister, Reverend W. Evans became leading figures in the structures of the local union. In Gisborne, the position of the branch president was given to Margaret Home Sievwright, wife of a barrister and a former nurse who had trained under Florence Nightingale and taught at a school for neglected children in Edinburgh before coming to New Zealand (Mackay 429-30). Auckland members included Amey Daldy, wife of the politician, William Crush Daldy; two Methodist ministers' wives, Mrs Annie Schnackenberg, the wife of the Reverend Joseph Berry and the wives of doctors, Alan Kerr-Taylor and A.O Knight (Grimshaw 30).

Despite the diversities of natures and personalities and the various backgrounds from which they came, all these women shared the interest in social issues that went beyond the problem of overindulgence and were likely to undertake campaigns promoting, for instance, female suffrage. It is possible to say, that temperance societies became a convenient platform which allowed women to enter and engage in public life. Thanks to their experiences gathered while campaigning for temperance, women became convinced of their right to attempt to

influence the way society functioned. Moreover, temperance movement, was sufficiently catholic to draw in women with religious outlook, which gave it even more egalitarian character (Patricia Grimshaw 31).

The direction that the newly created Union took was unquestionably determined by the dedication and the wide scope of social interests of these remarkable female leaders who took the opportunity created by the popularity of the temperance message propagated by Mary Leavitt to address a variety of the most pressing social issues. Even when it came to the area connected with the problem of temperance, the Union expanded on the methods employed by other bodies dealing with the concerns related to the overindulgence in alcohol. Apart from the well-established practices of organizing meetings to encourage personal abstinence, canvassing for temperance candidates at local and general elections and sending petitions and letters to members of Parliament, the activists of the Union paid particular attention to the aspects that were of the greatest importance to them. For example, they worked tirelessly to prevent the sale of alcohol to minors and children, stop the exploitation of female barmaids and secure the vote for adult women at licensing elections (Grimshaw 41).

Moreover, their activities were not limited to preaching and theoretical speeches aimed at convincing people to change their ways as they turned to more pragmatic approach of setting up temperance booths which offered refreshments alternative to beer and spirits at local fairs, and running coffee shops or clubs that were alcohol-free places of entertainment. That type of projects had a direct appeal to the public and, consequently, helped to popularize the temperance message. Even other, predominantly male temperance organizations noticed and appreciated the efforts of WCTU as an article in the temperance publications commended the Union for its successful forays into the outlying country centres to hold public meetings: “When they first essayed to hold these public meetings it was with considerable trepidation; but they have gone beyond that stage now, and deem the masculine element a draw-back rather than helpful. At all events, they can face the footlights without any misgivings; and they do it well” (*Leader*, 14/12/1888, 555).

Regardless of the appreciation that their temperance campaigns garnered, a considerable part of Union activities was devoted to other social and humanitarian issues. The wide variety of its interest and involvement was partially caused by the fact that, at the time, New Zealand was still in the grip of serious economic depression which led many of Union’s branches to concentrate on alleviating the burden that the financial strain was putting on the poor in the society. For example, in Christchurch, Union’s leader, Mrs Lodge launched a collection of funds to provide the homeless with a night’s shelter and a soup kitchen which distributed free

meals among the city's poor. Similar initiatives were undertaken in Dunedin and Nelson (Grimshaw 32).

Other issues within the scope of WCTU's campaigns were connected the so-called "fallen women" and freshly released female prisoners trying to rejoin the society after serving their sentence. Both of these groups had dedicated meetings organized for them, which aimed at teaching them new skills and making them aware of alternative opportunities for the future. In addition, the most unfortunate of these women were also placed with sympathetic families and helped to find employment. In addition, Union campaigned tirelessly over the course of two decades for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, which allowed women suspected of working as prostitutes to be forcibly examined and treated against their will. According to WCTU, the government should have addressed the problem of venereal diseases by setting up clinics which would act in the best interests of their female patients.

Women's Christian Temperance Union was also at the forefront of modern education employing the newest developments in fields such as nutrition and fashion to organize classes on the most appropriate diets for children and invalids and the benefits of using wool as the most suitable and healthiest material for everyday clothing. The Union was very inclusive as well as it tried to further the education not only of young girls but boys and Maori communities as well. For example, Mrs Aldcock, tried to organize domestic science classes for boys in her district, though she was forced to admit that she found them "so wild and tricky" that she could handle only groups of no more than six at one time (Christchurch W.C.T.U. Minutes, 7/7/1886). On their part, Maori women responded favourably to the message and initiatives of WCTU as they were concerned about the particularly destructive toll that the consumption of alcohol was taking on their communities. Some of them joined the existing branches in the 1890s, while others dedicated themselves to the creation of new structures created to tackle specific problems plaguing Maori tribes in the society dominated by white settlers. These developments eventually resulted in exclusively Maori WCTU conferences, the first of which was held in 1911 and was attended by representatives of seven separate branches.

It was the question of female franchise, however, that united the efforts of WCTU activists, especially after the initial efforts to introduce temperance into New Zealand legislation met with the resistance on the part of authorities as well as the significant proportion of the male members of the society. Once the leaders of the female temperance realized that their campaigns and petitions were perceived as the intolerable encroachment on male territory and an attempt to curb men's freedom, it was a logical step for them to seek to redress this imbalance with an alternative route of influencing the way law was being shaped in late nineteenth century

New Zealand. Attempts at gaining the right to vote quickly became the most natural manifestation of WCTU's desire to reform the colonial society and improve the situation that not only women but their whole families found themselves in, which divorced the issue from its association with the struggle to establish the dominance of either of genders. For instance, even the figure of the New Woman was stripped of its threatening and militant qualities as one of the WCTU's founding members presented her mission from a new, morally charged perspective:

The New Woman wants to make this world a garden of fair women. Women who are able to lead the way in intellectual, social, and moral progress by showing our brothers that we can be as loving, true and tender as the women in the past ever were, but seeing more clearly the danger and the wrong that we would inflict upon our children by acquiescing in the laxity of morals amongst men. Our children must have pure and temperate fathers, and our sons must be brought up to consider it equally necessary for them, as for our daughters, to have a pure mind in a pure body. [...] When women have made men understand that it is necessary to be 'self-reverent each and reverencing each,' then, and not till then, will the question of the New Woman and New Man be solved, and the fever of unrest that frets modern man as well as the New Woman be stilled. [...] The New Woman has set herself the task of improving the conditions of life for women, hoping thereby to improve the conditions for men as well, thus making it possible for both to raise the standard of the life of fatherhood and motherhood to a higher, purer plane that has never been dreamt of in the past. (*Women and the Vote* 20)

It is equally characteristic for the burgeoning suffrage movement in New Zealand that, as Charlotte Macdonald puts it: "throughout the writings from this period ran two distinct, and two some extent conflicting, lines of argument, which were sometimes evident within a single piece" (35). The first of them was based on the firm belief in the indisputability of the fact that women were created equal to men and as such should be granted comparable rights and duties. This way of looking at the problem of gender inequality echoes the sentiments promoted by John Stuart Mill. In New Zealand, it was one of the most prominent WCTU's leaders, Kate Sheppard who echoed Mill's ideas in her seminal publication "Sixteen Reasons for Supporting Women's Suffrage". Some of the points she makes in her list underline the inherent equitability of men and women and the consequences that this fact should have on the structures of New Zealand society. Still, on the other hand, other reasons that Sheppard includes in her line of argumentation reflect the perspective that was more in keeping with the rhetoric employed by the activists leading the franchise campaign in New Zealand which promoted political and constitutional rights for women on the strength of the natural differences between men and women.

This kind of duality characteristic of the writings by New Zealand proponents of the female suffrage was aimed at drawing in as wide an alliance of pro-suffrage supporters as

possible as well as at avoiding alienating or even aggravating those members of the society whose attachment to conservative values caused them to be naturally suspicious or even hostile towards the ideas that went against the familiarity of patriarchal stereotypes. Consequently, a new quality of argumentation was created which combined various, occasionally conflicting elements and was, therefore, more likely to incite controversy among general public. According to Charlotte Macdonald:

Behind these arguments lay two contradictory concepts of sexual difference. The complementarity of the sexes – the idea that men and women, masculinity and femininity were different but of equal value – had now become imbued with a moral dimension. As Mary Leavitt put it: ‘Men needed women for the completion of their intellectual and moral natures as much as for other matters.’ Women were seen as having higher, truer and superior moral natures. Men were deemed either devoid of or distinctly less endowed with moral judgment and sensibility. Women were therefore encouraged to exercise a purifying and improving influence on the world of politics and public life. (36)

The rhetoric that supported this line of argumentation resulted not only in the immediate action on the issue of female franchise but, over the decade at the turn of the centuries became the source of further demands as to the greater representation of women in public life. One of example includes the creation and activity of the National Council of Women that continued the campaigns initiated by New Zealand Women’s Christian Temperance Union. NCW which was established in 1896 and, just like WCTU was united under the leadership of Kate Sheppard, passed numerous resolutions urging that women be appointed to position within the criminal justice system and be given an opportunity to work as police officers, jurors, justices of the peace, judges and prison wardens. Other organizations made similar appeals for women to become charitable aid officers, prison visitors and other non-professional, charitable functionaries working to improve the conditions for vulnerable members of society such as prisoners, the poor and the infirm. All the entreaties and initiatives were rooted in the beliefs in the nobler and purer virtues exercised by women in their homes and families. Even though these postulates were not realized before the active membership numbers dwindled to levels which prevented NCW from holding annual meetings they remained within the sphere of public debate and were taken up again within few years (Grimshaw 34).

It is worthwhile to analyze some of the prominent examples of the texts penned by the WCTU activists during the campaign for the female franchise in order to illustrate how New Zealand women excelled at merging diverse and, at times contradictory elements in their narratives which not only took into consideration the realities of life in the former colony but also demonstrated the acute awareness of the complexity of values and the limits to the tolerance they could expect from a majority of members of the newly formed society. Apart from the

most seminal works of WCTU's leader and the most ardent suffrage campaigner Kate Wilson Sheppard who first became national Franchise Superintendent in February 1887, as well as Helen Lyster Nicol, the head of the Dunedin branch, and the president of Gisborne branch, Margaret Sievwright, we will examine an example of the rhetoric of Maori activists, Meri Managakahia, who became the first Maori woman to speak in front of Te Kotahitanga Parliament¹ in support of voting rights for Maori women. It is important to acknowledge their contribution to the ultimate shape of the 1893 Electoral Act which granted franchise to all New Zealand adult women regardless of their age, marital and proprietary status as well as their ethnicity. At that point in time it was an unprecedented and, therefore, revolutionary piece of legislation which came into being predominantly thanks to the rhetoric of the texts of suffrage activists aimed at the propagation of the popularity of petitions, which directly influenced the decisions of the Members of New Zealand Parliament voting on the matter.

5.4 Reasons for supporting women's suffrage: Kate Sheppard as a writer and a social leader

Kate Sheppard was born in Scotland in 1848 and emigrated to New Zealand with her parents and siblings. Subsequently, she spent most of her life living and working in Christchurch in the South Island, where she eventually became a prominent figure in the charitable circles of the city. As a devout Christian, she associated the bulk of her activity with religious and philanthropic initiatives as she enjoyed leading the ladies' group at Church, taught classes at Sunday school and helped to establish the Christchurch branch of YWCA. It was the visit of Mary Clement Leavitt in New Zealand and the resulting establishment of the branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Christchurch, however, that changed the course of her life and sharpened the focus of her efforts to improve the social and economic conditions in the country for women of all backgrounds and classes (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 8-9).

Kate Sheppard joined the Union at the first opportunity as early as 1885 and was immediately charged with the responsibility of the position of Superintendent for Relative Statistics, which reflected her interest in economics, but within two years shifted her focus entirely to the issues connected. During the second national convention of WCTU she was appointed National Superintendent for Franchise and Legislation and from moment onwards

¹ Te Kotahitanga was an independent assembly of the representatives of Maori tribes which convened annually in New Zealand annually from 1892 to 1902.

she was the key figure in the franchise campaign not only at the local but also national level. Thanks to the fact that a year later she was elected a new President of the Christchurch Union Sheppard was also able to crystalize the priorities of the branch's agenda and redirect its main resources into the suffrage campaign. As Sheppard's biographer, Judith Devaliant notices about this period in WCTU's leader's life: "This meant a heavy commitment to the WCTU. She was still settling in to the work and finding new ways of promoting the franchise, but she was showing increasing confidence as a leader" (30). The increased exposure to public meetings and discussions also resulted in her developing new skills and ways to express the charismatic side to her personality as she 'was developing a confident style of speaking. Her arguments were well presented, and she was able to keep the attention of her audiences (Devalian 31).

Still, Sheppard quickly realized that although be it vital and influential to speak in front of audiences it was equally important to produce printed material for distribution (Devaliant 31). Initially, WCTU was using templates of leaflets sent from the British and American suffrage associations but it was not long before Kate Sheppard came to a conclusion that New Zealand social and economic conditions required a slightly different approach in the line of argumentation and started to produce her own material. Her first effort resulted in a one-page leaflet entitled *Ten Reasons Why the Women of New Zealand Should Vote* which was originally written and distributed in 1888. The argumentation was based on the principle of inherent justice, which also lay at the foundation of the entirety of New Zealand legislation as the first and the main reason included on the list emphasizes: "Because a democratic country like that of New Zealand, already admits the principle that every adult person, not convicted of crime, or suspected of lunacy, has an inherent right to a voice in the laws which all must obey" (the NZWCTU Minutes, 1889, 45). Consequently, the ideas included in the leaflet proved so popular and inspiring that the text got edited and expanded on until list got published again in 1891 in WCTU's periodical *Prohibitionist* as *Sixteen Reasons for Supporting Women's Suffrage*. Even though Sheppard penned numerous other texts and articles it was these two lists that encapsulate the essence of not only Sheppard's personal views but also the official stance of WCTU on the issue of female franchise (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 35).

According to the final version of the list comprising of the extended set of arguments the justification of granting voting rights for women could be found in both external, social and legal factors as well as in the inherent traits of female nature. The first four points focus on the fact that in a full and genuine democracy "Parliament should be the reflection of the wishes of the people' and it is not possible in the situation 'when the wishes of women are without any direct representation" (Macdonald 41). In the subsequent arguments Sheppard point out that it

is practically impossible to accept a claim that a Government could represent and serve the entire nation when it is chosen with the votes of only half of the citizens especially in the light of the fact that its legislations have a direct impact on men as well as women. Moreover, there exists a whole range of regulations which apply predominantly to women and one of their main spheres of activity “relating to the guardianship of children”. In consequence, even the newly created New Zealand system does not provide sufficient protection for half of the members of society and is, therefore practically ineffective and in need of reform which should begin with the introduction of female franchise (Macdonald 44).

Still, even though Sheppard does rely heavily on the line of argumentation which promotes the idea according to which men and women are born equal and, consequently, any gender differences are rendered ineffectual and should not be taken into consideration in the legislative processes, on both of the versions of her list it is possible to find assertions which emphasize the distinctive character of women’s nature and their typical modes of behavior. As a result, Sheppard postulates that it is equally valid and important to point out the uniqueness of potential contribution which women can fulfill within the frames of public activity. According to her, the gentleness and the moral steadfastness of female nature makes them infinitely less corruptible and likely to be swayed by party agenda. For instance in *Ten Reasons Why the Women of New Zealand Should Vote*, Sheppard introduces this concept in the following way: “Because women are less accessible than men to most of the debasing influences now brought to bear upon elections, and by doubling the number of electors to be dealt with, women would make bribery and corruption less effective, as well as more difficult” (Macdonald 42).

What is more, by their mere presence women during elections would bring a “refining and purifying effect” on not only the actual process of casting votes but also on final results and the overall wellbeing of their communities. Kate Sheppard assumes that it is a part of women’s nature to be more patient and generous as they are responsible for raising new generations, therefore, she draws a direct parallel between women’s influence and the personality of their adult offspring. As she notices: “public-spirited mothers make public-spirited sons”. Mothers’ focus on the future of their children also means that they are “endowed with a more constant solicitude for the welfare of the rising generations, thus giving them a more far-reaching concern for something beyond the present moment” (Lovell-Smith *The Woman Question* 66). On the other hand, women’s interest in public matters would, in all probability, temper the way in which New Zealand politics is conducted because “the admitted physical weakness of women disposes them to exercise more habitual caution, and to feel a deeper interest in the constant

preservation of peace, law, and order, and especially in the supremacy of right over might” (Lovell-Smith *The Woman Question* 66).

Overall, Sheppard, in her narrative, manages to merge seemingly mutually exclusive arguments, aimed at demonstrating and proving the necessity of the introduction of female franchise, especially in the unique social and economic conditions of New Zealand. Even though, she does not refer directly to the realities of the former colony as her appeal strives at universality of conclusions as to the nature and position of women in society it is still clear that she draws inspiration from the increased importance of women and their contribution to New Zealand public life as she states that “women naturally view each question from a somewhat different standpoint to men, so that whilst their interests, aims, and objects would be very generally the same, they would often see what men had overlooked, and thus add a new security against any partial or one-sided legislation” (Lovell-Smith *The Woman Question* 66). Consequently, the official recognition of the right of women to participate in political activities becomes not only the most reasonable, but practically an inevitable solution in order to make New Zealand system truly democratic and just.

Both of the versions of the list of the main reasons behind the demand for the female franchise compiled by Kate Sheppard are also a reflection of her background and wide spectrum of inspirations both of which she shared with many of her fellow companions in WCTU. The fact that she grew up in Britain, spent her adult life in New Zealand and kept in close contact with temperance and suffrage associations in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, shaped her views and refined the methods that she employed in order to persuade a majority of New Zealand society to accept the shifts in the traditional perception of gender roles in society. It was the combination of all these factors that rendered Sheppard more sensitive to the wide variety of attitudes as well as anxieties of New Zealand society and made it possible for her to employ rhetoric devices designed not to antagonize but to appease and convince the potential opponents. Moreover, she was determined to promote cooperation of both genders as the most efficient solution to problems connected with social inequalities. Judith Devaliant describes Sheppard’s attitude in the following way:

She made it clear that she had no desire to set one sex against the other. She believed they would work best when working together, ‘each contributing his or her own individuality to the common good’. She thought public opinion was being developed in England and New Zealand in favour of women being allowed to work out their own destiny subject only to the constraints of society that all shared. She believed that women were as capable of taking power as men and pointed to Queen Victoria and Millicent Fawcett as examples of two women in the public sphere. She thought it would take time for women to become accustomed to taking part in politics, but she could see nothing unbecoming in their doing so. Women’s

enfranchisement would not have an immediate effect but it would gradually develop women's powers of thought and would lead to a more practical consideration of matters affecting the daily lives of citizens. (47)

Another vital element that characterizes Sheppard's views and writings is the fact that, as a first-wave feminist, she avoided any vestiges of radical approach to the question of gender equality in public life. Her texts focused on the promotion of the idea of the greater freedom and the acceptance of the presence of women outside the domestic sphere, but she was realistic as to the chances of a rapid social reform and realized that, especially in the demanding conditions of a young country any postulates as to the female franchise required strong support of not only politicians, but also of ordinary men with whom they shared their everyday lives. In addition, she refuted the claims according to which campaigns for the female rights were just a domain of a relatively small group of anarchists, as a majority of New Zealand women displayed indifference or even antipathy towards the activities of suffragettes. Sheppard claimed that these kinds of reactions should not be used as an argument against the franchise and "the duty of actively exercising it for those who saw and felt the need for it" (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 48).

All these factors were behind Sheppard's decision to try and enrol the backing of one of the most respected Members of Parliament elected in the province of Canterbury, Sir John Hall. Hall, who became the acknowledged leader of the female suffrage supporters in Parliament for the period of at least six years, had a long political experience dating back to the days of Provincial Governments. Over the course of almost two decades he served in various capacities ranging from the position of Premier to Legislative Councillor until he decided to run for the Parliament in the belief that he could do more useful work as a member of the House of Representatives. Kate was aware of his activities and political career but it was not until June 1888 that she met him in person while trying to gather support for the amendment to the current Electoral Bill which would allow women to gain the right to vote (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 32-33). In her very polite and respectful first letter to the renowned politician Sheppard made it clear that the ideas promoted by WCTU and the expectations of its members were measured and full of pragmatic restraint:

As the new Electoral Bill will shortly be discussed in the House, the members of our Union throughout New Zealand are of the opinion that we should make an appeal to Parliament urging that the women of New Zealand be allowed to have a voice in the choice of legislators who construct the laws which we in common with the other sex, are expected to obey.

As we understand that you are in favour of extending the franchise to women, we shall feel grateful if you will kindly present our petition before the House, and, as it is certain if passed at all, to be considerably

altered or amended, we have a faint hope that the little sentence among the interpretation clauses which reads thus: 'Persons does not include female' may be expunged, if some influential member like yourself would propose it. (quoted in Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 33)

It is clear that Kate Sheppard was determined to detach the issue of female rights in New Zealand from the alarmist and slightly hysterical depictions of the potential social anarchy caused by the emergence of "the New Woman" that were promoted by the conservative circles of both the authorities and journalists alike. According to her, the introduction of female franchise was just one of the signs of a natural progression of contemporary social transformations and the only reasonable conclusion as there were no logical and sound arguments which could be used against the claim that every adult who was not a lunatic or a criminal had an inherent right to vote in a democratic country. Therefore, she pointed out the absurdity of claims according to which female franchise would render women "unwomanly" and become an immediate cause of disintegration of families. As Sheppard pointed out on numerous occasions there was no reason why a woman would lose her femininity due to interest in the politics governing community in which she lived or neglect her home and family just because she cast a vote once in three years. She also dealt with the notion that motherhood was too time-consuming of a task to allow women time to vote by pointing out that it was mothers who had the keenest interest in seeing good laws passed for the sake of their children and were determined to protect them from the consequences of the introduction of bad laws. Finally, Sheppard did not consider the possibility of husbands and wives voting in the same way to be detrimental or even alarming in any respect, as she predicted that it was actually women who would be more likely to sway their partners towards a more reasonable and future-oriented way of voting due to their focus on the welfare of immediate communities and lack of political affiliations (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 38).

Sheppard continued to promote these views and supporting arguments as the official line of the Women's Christian Temperance Union on the issue of female suffrage during her official speeches and in the texts that were distributed among wider circles of potential supporters. Her activity, which from the start of her involvement in the WSPU structures was aimed at the promotion of the petition to Parliament, intensified significantly in the last two years of the 1880s as the House of Representatives was locked in a prolonged debate on the particulars of the new Electoral Bill. This situation was perceived as a perfect opportunity for the introduction of equal franchise into New Zealand legislation and therefore required increased efforts in the scope of the campaign. On the other hand, Sheppard was aware of the potential for the public to get overexposed and tired of the suffrage message promoted by the

activists and shaped her speeches accordingly. For instance, during her visit in Wellington in early 1889 she gave an address during a tea meeting organized by the local WCTU that was later printed afterwards in a form of a pamphlet. In the text she acknowledges that, despite its importance her message may be seen as obvious and too frequently repeated not to be slightly exhausting. Still, once again she underlines the unreasonable character of the arguments employed by the opponents of granting of voting rights to women:

When we are told that ‘the franchise’ would make women unwomanly’, that ‘she would neglect her home duties on account of it’, that ‘it would cause dissension between husband and wife’, that ‘giving women the franchise, would only be giving dual votes to married men’, that ‘because she cannot fight she should not vote’, that ‘because motherhood she has not time to vote’, that ‘it would demoralize women to associate with men at polling booths’, that ‘women are already represented by their fathers, brothers, or son’, that ‘women do not want to vote’, - when we hear these objections, we feel somehow as if that way of thinking had gone out of date a long time ago, and that the speaker or writer could not have thought much on the matter, or they would not give expression to such opinions. (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 35)

In addition, Kate Sheppard was well aware of the importance of public dialogue which she perceived as an indispensable element of a political campaign in a democratic country. Not only was she willing to answer any questions of audiences during her addresses but regularly published letters expressing her views on various aspects of franchise and gender equality in local press and engaged in the exchange of views with the readers. She considered that activity to be an integral part of her duties as the unquestioned leader of WCTU’s suffrage campaign as she included her newspapers correspondence in her annual report that she presented to her fellow members of the temperance association. It is not always easy to identify these letters, since few of the regular contributors to the public debate signed them with their own names. It is certain that in the second half of the 1890s Kate Sheppard eventually settled on the pen-name “Penelope” but in the years preceding the introduction of the franchise, in all probability she was using a variety of pseudonyms. Sheppard’s biographer, Judith Devaliant came to a conclusion based on the analysis of various letter exchanges between readers in Canterbury province newspapers and periodicals that it is highly likely that in 1889 she was writing as “Mater” (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 45).

One of examples of such a public debate includes the exchange initiated by a letter written by “Mater” to *Lyttelton Times* in August in September 1889. The letter to the editor entitled “Women Suffrage” is, to a large extent, a commentary on a report that Lady Dilke appealed to English women to wait with their demands for franchise until all adults were enfranchised. “Mater” takes the opportunity offered by this statement to offer an observation on the New Zealand conditions that sounds remarkably like the argumentation employed by

Kate Sheppard. Even though Lady Dilke's words could be most straightforwardly read as an appeal for far-reaching restraint and putting suffrage campaigns on hold, "Mater" decides to interpret them in a completely different way. "As in this highly-favoured country the general extension of the franchise is established so far as men are concerned," she states, "we must conclude that we are ripe for the extension of the franchise to women" (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/09/1889, 3). That is why, she expresses gratitude on behalf of all New Zealand for what she referred to as Lady Dilke's "happy suggestion" but, at the same time takes time to point out what she perceived to be certain faults in Lady Dilke's reasoning. For example, while she agrees with the conclusion that women are in need of more instructions in the area of politics she puts forward that this claim could also be extended to a majority of men.

However, the main problem "Mater" sees in Lady Dilke's assertions is connected with the fact that they are based on the assumption that women are inherently less interested in politics. In her opinion, if women are in fact less invested in political life of the nation it is mainly due to the lack of any decisive power in that area. According to her, women are put in an impossible position as they are expected to respect the law and contribute taxes for the upkeep of the authorities but, on the other hand, are denied any right to influence the structures of government. It is only natural that such an unjust situation must evoke frustration and despondency in some of New Zealand women, while in others the feelings of resentment and even anger. These feelings are amplified by the fact that the discrimination against women has absolutely no reasonable justification neither in social nor biological factors, as the traditional tasks of both genders are of equal importance for the welfare of communities. As "Mater" comments:

It is like creating individuals honorary members of a society, asking them to pay their fee, according to them their full share of the work, but declining to give them any voice in the administration. Suppose for a brief space that the cases were reversed, and that women held the Government reins, and the power to extend the franchise. Suppose that while men were clamouring for their rights, and petitioning a female Parliament for justice, these women held their noses very high in the air and said: -"To women belong the rearing the children and the making of puddings, therefore men should not vote." Would not the reply be, "How unjust of these women to debar us from a voice in the Government because our work, which is also necessary to the State, is different to theirs?" Because there is a natural division of labour, it is absurd to argue that women should have no voice in electing their rulers. And who shall say which half of the work is most important to the wellbeing of a country? (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/09/1889, 3)

The claims put forward by "Mater" were challenged the very next day by, in all probability, a male reader writing under pseudonym "Didymus" who agreed with "Mater" only as far as the conclusion according to which the thoroughly diverse social and economic

conditions in England and the former colony of New Zealand made it difficult to arrive at any valid comparisons and come up with arguments that could apply to both countries. However, he employs this assertion to state that the main difference between England and New Zealand is the level of the interest of their women in the political matters. What is more, according to Didymus there is no discernible benefit to granting women the right to vote. He addresses “Mater” directly: “I should like to ask “Mater,” have the women of New Zealand ever asked for the franchise? Does one woman in twenty know anything about the matter? Is there any reason to suppose that they would use it if granted? And, finally, what good object would be attained if they had it?” (*Lyttelton Times*, 1/10/1889, 2) “Didymus” expressed the sentiments of the conservative part of New Zealand society who did not consider the question of female franchise to be a particularly important social issue but, simultaneously, unlike in Britain were not actively hostile towards neither the suffrage activists nor the concept itself.

Still, the statements penned by “Didymus” were not left without a response as ‘Mater’ sent another, even longer letter addressing his arguments which was published on the 4th of October. The text starts with “Mater” acknowledgment of the validity of the claim that a majority of New Zealand women are not “clamouring for their rights but, in her estimation, that fact does not take away from the importance of the movement propelled by ‘the most earnest and thoughtful of them—those who are most anxious for the development of all that is brave and womanly, as opposed to what is weak and frivolous in their sex—are asking for it; not for self-glorification, but in order that they may be helpers of all that tends to that righteousness which exalteth a nation’”. She continues with the assertion that, contrary to what “Didymus” might think, New Zealand women have already made numerous appeals for the right to vote. In order to support it she gives the example of the 1879 petition that was brought in front of Parliament when the new Electoral Bill was discussed and suffrage activists proposed that the word “male” should be substituted with “person” in order to include women in legislation. Even though the project fell through and the Bill never came into force, “Mater” claims that continuous efforts are being undertaken by all organizations promoting the introduction of equal franchise into New Zealand law and the female members of these associations are perfectly aware of all legal and social implication of changes that would be wrought by allowing women to participate in the political life of the nation (*Lyttelton Times*, 4/10/1889, 2).

In the next paragraph, “Mater” addresses the question of the ignorance as to the details and the significance of the activities of suffrage activists displayed by the large percentage of New Zealand women. According to her, it is crucial to educate all women about the consequences of the systematic discrimination that they are subject to in order to make sure that

the equal franchise will be employed for the greatest benefit of the whole nation. In addition, even if it is possible to find numerous examples of women who do not experience the immediate effects of discriminative legislation that does not mean that the equal rights are superfluous as they are inherently just and universally beneficial for the entire society. In order to illustrate her point and emphasize the significance of the suffrage activists' campaigns, "Mater" draws parallels between suffrage movement and the abolition of slavery in the United States of America as two landmark political processes aimed at the introduction of greater and more universal liberties. As she notices in her text:

Active measures are being devised for arousing women to a sense of their shortcomings in this respect, and there is little doubt that if the franchise were granted to them they would use it, if not wisely, yet quite as wisely as it used at present by the electors of the Colony. But even supposing that at first a large proportion did not use it, or even care for it, is that any reason for denying the franchise to those who do care for it, and who already take an intelligent interest in politics?

When emancipation came in America were there not thousands of slaves who, living under kind and indulgent masters, and accustomed to being cared for and thought for, took little pleasure in the idea of having to turn out, and think and plan for the means of living?

Would it not have been absurd to say that therefore, liberty should be denied to the race? The women of this Colony are, at least, as ripe for the franchise, as were the negroes of America for the cares and responsibilities of freedom. (*Lyttelton Times*, 4/10/1889, 2)

"Mater" finishes her letter with the assertion that granting women the right to vote would not constitute an immediate cause of social unrest or destructive political upheaval. She uses the example of the Isle of Man where women gained the right to vote eight years before and whose Governor, Sir Henry Holt used to be opposed female franchise but "eventually, seeing how well it worked, he became quite a convert to woman suffrage." In addition, "Mater" mentions the American state of Wyoming which also gave all women the right to vote and quotes a local correspondent who said: "After fifteen years of woman suffrage here, I do not know of a person in the territory who does not most heartily endorse its results; and I do not think one could be found to consent to its repeal, unless it be some one who belongs to that class who do not want to see good laws faithfully carried out" (*Lyttelton Times*, 4/10/1889, 2). The words of American journalists also become the conclusion to the argumentation of the whole letter as "Mater" takes his assertion according to which: "No great revolution follows here when women vote; it seems most natural and proper that all should have a voice in the laws under which they live, and women do not undervalue it". Sheppard suggests that, despite obvious differences between the two countries, the beneficial character of the introduction of

female franchise is universal and would not cause a source of addition strife for the newly created New Zealand political system.

Even though it is impossible to state with certainty whether the letters published under the penname of “Mater” were, in fact penned by Kate Sheppard, it is certain that she cut them out and pasted them in her scrapbook in which she kept reports on WCTU’s meetings devoted to the issue of franchise and the letters on the subject which were sent to local newspapers. The fact that she found these particular texts worth preserving demonstrates that, as Judith Devaliant puts it, “the letters certainly represent her views, and comply with her recommendations to franchise superintendents to watch the newspapers for any mention of women’s franchise and be ready to contribute something in reply” (186). Clearly, Kate Sheppard was aware of the great influence that could be exerted through the medium of newspapers and magazine and was determined to employ it in service of the campaigns aimed at the extension of female rights. Her task was made easier by the fact that, unlike in Britain, the colonial press of New Zealand was not a well-established and structured institution and was, therefore less likely to systematically discriminate against the suffrage movement’s attempts to promote its message. Even if New Zealand suffrage activists could not count on universal active support of editors and journalists, they were, at least, given a fair chance to present their arguments. According to Patricia Grimshaw, unlike in England, press in New Zealand was more prone to giving suffragists a platform to present their arguments. That is not to say that all editors supported the idea of female franchise as, for instance, *The Lyttelton Times*, the *New Zealand Times*, the *Press*, and the *Otago Daily Times* frequently opposed or were very reticent in reporting on suffragettes’ claims. Generally, however, the need of publicity of the movement complimented editors’ own sympathies and there were newspapers such as the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Evening Post*, that were consistent in supporting the movement. What is more, in the cases of two evening dailies, the *Auckland Evening Star* and the *Dunedin Evening Star*, their sympathy extended to going against the agenda of political party they were supporting in Parliament (55).

That is why, as the leader of WCTU’s suffrage campaign, Kate Sheppard made sure that the effort to introduce female franchise employed all the available avenues to reach as wide audience as possible and promote equal rights in New Zealand society. It was also this consideration that constituted a significant part of Sheppard’s motivation when, in 1891, she decided to become an editor of a page on behalf of WCTU in the fortnightly temperance paper the *Prohibitionist*, which had a wide circulation around both of New Zealand islands. Thanks to that initiative, Sheppard gained an opportunity to try and interest large numbers of women oblivious to the aims and tasks performed by the members of the Union. From the very start of

her career as a writer and editor, the *Prohibitionist's* pages became a forum for a vigorous promotion of franchise and the presentation of details of the activities of various local branches of the Union. As Judith Devaliant notices in Sheppard's biography: "Many of the articles she wrote reveal something of her personal philosophy. In an early issue she wrote about the variety of work done by the WCTU. While a woman's place was essentially in the home, she thought it ought to be possible to find time for work outside the home without neglecting domestic duties" (59).

What is more, Kate Sheppard's articles were not devoted solely to the issue of female franchise as she perceived the problem of equal gender rights to be inherently connected with a host of other social problems. Therefore, her texts also put strong emphasis on the question of dress reform, hygiene, social purity and the freedom of an individual regardless of their gender. For instance, in September 1892 she wrote extensively on the subject of promotion of hygiene among New Zealand youth and vigorously attacked outdated double-standards, which saw girls treated differently from boys:

Our girls commence life in the nursery under the same conditions as our boys, but even before the period of maidenhood begins, they are surrounded by, and hampered with, a set of artificial bonds and trammels, that have a very deleterious effect on their physique. They are taught that it is unmannerly to race, romp and climb, too often their elastic bodies are cramped into the hard and ungraceful corset, to the lasting injury of their vital organs, and heavy skirts are hung about their waists, dragging on a part of the frame where any strain has a most calamitous effect. While their brothers are racing, playing cricket, and generally laying up a reserve of energy for their life's, our girls are being taught to walk demurely, and to feel that all violent exercise is unwomanly. Can we wonder that so few women rejoice in the possession of perfect health. (*Prohibitionist*, 10/09/1892, 3)

On top of this comprehensive approach which took into account wide variety of social and economic factors, Kate Sheppard also displayed remarkable optimism and steadfastness in the face of adversity. When, in September 1891, one of the early WCTU's Female Franchise Bill was defeated by seventeen votes to fifteen in the second reading, Kate Sheppard chose to present the setback in a positive light in her commentary published by the *Prohibitionist*:

The battle for the franchise has been fought and lost. Our defeat however was almost a victory. To have carried the Women's Suffrage Bill through the Lower House, and to be beaten in the Upper House by so small a majority as two, is little short of a triumph for the large hearted men who are fighting so stoutly for our cause. That the Legislative Council is so completely out of touch with the people is notorious, and their action in connection with our bill but accentuates the fact. (*Prohibitionist*, 26/09/1891, 3)

Moreover, that kind of outlook on the unexpected and undeserved defeat was not an attempt at putting on a brave face in public, but the expression of Sheppard's strength of character and convictions as evidenced in a private letter to Sir John Hall. In this text she admits

that the failure at Parliament was very trying and difficult to accept for “you who worked most hard and carried the measure through the Lower House – to the real friends among the members who supported you, and to the women themselves who have been so hopefully looking forward to the final success of the Bill and this privilege of exercising their votes at the next general election” (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 71). Still, Kate refuses to give in to the feelings of despondency as her positive attitude comes through clearly when she states: “To sit down and mourn, however, would be worse than foolish, and it may be that our temporary defeat will have the effect of spurring on all who earnestly desire to see this reform carried, to greater zeal and energy, so that the majority favourable in the House of Representatives next session may be so large that the Legislative Council will not throw the Bill out again” (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 71).

That is not to say that Sheppard’s optimistic approach made her pliant and submissive when it came to the evaluation of the motivation and the reasoning employed by the Conservative Members of Parliament. To the contrary, her conclusions were not only straightforward and to the point but devoid of superfluous niceties. For instance, after studying reports of the debates in the Lower House she was pleased to notice that the opponents of the franchise had “mended their ways somewhat”, as no remarks were made about the mental inferiority of women. Still, Sheppard strongly resented the chief objections presented during the discussion according to which women would lose their charm and delicacy if they started to get involved in politics. She saw it as a sign of a repetition of the tired patriarchal narrative to which she retorted furiously:

Curiously enough, the very men who deny the suffrage to women for fear the delicate bloom of their modesty should be impaired are Simply Rampant when it is proposed to do away with the employment of girls as barmaids. We think that the modesty of women will be safer in their own charge, than in the hands of either Mr Fish or Mr Swan, and for these men to constitute themselves, and for these the guardians of the delicacy of women is little short of an insult. [...] It is painful to find that men whose grey hairs should command our reverence Should Besmirch Themselves by speaking so lightly of women. Other members told the old, old story. Men were brutes and women were angels, and it would never do to sully the purity of the said angels by dragging them through the dirty pool of politics. (*Prohibitionist*, 26/09/1891, 3)

Sheppard’s harsh comments actually earned her a rebuke from the National President of the Union, Catherine Fulton, who had been present throughout the debate in the Lower House of Parliament. In a private letter addressed to Kate, Fulton implied that, in her article, Sheppard was markedly too quick to pass judgment especially as she had no opportunity to witness the details of the Parliamentary discussion in person. According to Fulton, it was especially the

members of the Legislative Council who discussed women's franchise with "fairness and consideration", and treated it seriously and respectfully. Therefore, it was wrong and irresponsible of Kate Sheppard writing as a representative of WCTU to suggest that the councillors were not only hopelessly old-fashioned but had lost the ability to understand the needs of New Zealand people. Fulton concluded that Sheppard's comments may even, in effect, harm the future endeavours of the suffrage movement if she manages to alienate the councillors when nearly half of them have already voted in favour of the Female Franchise Bill (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 74-75).

On her part, Kate Sheppard did not shy away from a confrontation with Fulton who was her former mentor and valued colleague. To the contrary, she decided to publish Fulton's letter in the *Prohibitionist* and meticulously address all of the doubts expressed by the President of the Union as she was of an opinion that Fulton had not read her words carefully enough. Sheppard begins her commentary to Fulton's letter with an expression of gratitude addressed at the members of both Houses of Parliament who have actively supported the cause of female suffrage but, simultaneously, points out that there is no reason to be grateful towards the Council as a whole as it decided to deny women the privilege of the right to vote despite all the convincing argumentation presented by the suffragists. In addition, Sheppard remarks that her comments as to the tone of the Council's discussion cannot be deemed inaccurate despite her absence during the proceedings as she based them on reliable reports of Press Association which were later reprinted in every newspaper in the country. Therefore, she was secure in her claims as to the overall patriarchal and dismissive tone employed by many of the Councillors. For instance, Mr Whyte spoke of agitation coming from "shrieking sisterhood", and Mr Walker referred to "angelic nature of women". What is more, in what was even more outrageous display of disrespect towards female, Dr Grace not only stated that women had been purified by the chivalry of men but added that it was fortunate that they wore long dresses so that their clay feet could not be seen. Sheppard states that while reading the reports of such speeches she was even inclined to assume that "the honourable gentlemen were joking. Mrs Fulton says they spoke seriously. So much the worse. The coarseness remains without even a semblance of humour" (*Prohibitionist*, 10/10/1891, 3).

All these elements led Sheppard to a steadfast belief in the veracity of her statements according to which the Legislative Council as an institution was outdated and out of touch with the needs of New Zealand society. That is also why she resented Mrs Fulton's comments accusing her of hastiness and even recklessness as, in her estimation, the facts showed that she was right. In her eyes, there was no justification for the fact that, during this faithful meeting,

the Legislative Council chose to kill nearly every measure of any significance passed by the Lower House, including the Suffrage Bill, which was not a politically charged party question and managed to gain the support by both the Liberals and the Conservatives. Therefore, not only did Sheppard refuse to retract her comments but returned to the subject in a later issue of the *Prohibitionist* where she expressed her hope that public opinion was strong enough to ‘overcome all obstacles save those of unreasoning prejudice’ as represented by the conservative faction of the Council as: “Those members of the Legislative Council who opposed the Bill giving liberty to women are the embodiment of this kind of unreason. Called to office by Governments that have since been swept away by the will of the people, they are a stumbling block in the march of human progress” (*Prohibitionist*, 24/10/1891, 3).

Kate Sheppard was, undoubtedly, aided in her campaigns for female suffrage by the external factors connected with the unique social and economic conditions of New Zealand as the society was naturally more receptive to the argumentation promoting the idea of the equality of genders. It was also relatively easier for the activists to enlist the support of the representatives of authorities as New Zealand political scene still lacked the rigidity that characterized the governmental structures of both the United Kingdom and the United States, where the well-developed suffrage movement could not hope to breach the wall of patriarchal prejudice in order to succeed in their attempt to introduce gender equality into legislation. Finally, many New Zealand women, even those who were not actively involved or even interested in politics, were much more familiar with ventures into the public life and, by extension, more sympathetic towards the WCTU’s suffrage campaigns.

Still, Kate Sheppard was, undeniably, remarkably proficient in combining the elements of persuasive argumentation, a wide perspective on the role the patriarchal perspective on gender roles in New Zealand and the steadfastness in defence of the official stance of WCTU on the issue of gender equality in her texts. Her active campaign work, which apart from her prolific writing in support of suffrage, included close cooperation with prominent male politicians, helped significantly to propel the introduction of the new Electoral Bill. What is also characteristic, Sheppard did not see herself as the most important element in the structures of Women’s Christian Temperance Union but considered the suffrage campaign to be more of a group effort to which all the members had to contribute in order to succeed. Just before the launch of the final petition in favour of granting New Zealand women the right to vote, she wrote in the *Prohibitionist*:

Are we each doing all we can? Some members we know, are using every atom of time and nerve-power in our work. But they are few. Others there are who attend our meetings, yet by their carping and fault-

finding spirit, not only pain and discourage our best workers, but also by their needless jarring prevent lovers of peace from joining our ranks. Do we not all need reminding that in things doubtful there should be liberty, and in all things charity? Then we fear there some who, by their apathy, are depriving themselves of the privilege of making the world better. Will they not ask themselves the question: What can I do to serve?' (*Prohibitionist*, 31/12/1892, 3)

That is also why, strong insistence was put on the inclusion building a network of local leaders of the suffrage movements who were perfectly aware of not the national issues connected with gender equality but also could write about the problems of specific communities in the way that their readers could identify with and respond to favourably. WCTU's outreach included all social, age and ethnic groups as the universal equality in democratic elections became the most viable avenue through which the Union could hope to achieve the desired changes in legislation as well as the structure of the society.

5.5 The suffrage movement in New Zealand's political, social and economic context

Helen Lyster Nicol, who led the Dunedin branch of the Union and pioneered the suffrage in the area, was, arguably, one of the most prominent activists promoting the franchise alongside Kate Sheppard. In fact, in 1893 she was instrumental in the conception and writing the third petition which, eventually, proved to be successful. When Kate Sheppard, discouraged by the fact that the Franchise Bill had failed despite having gone through both houses of Parliament, postulated postponement for at least another year, it was Helen Nicol who convinced John Hall that the suffrage movement needed to push through and together they put pressure on Sheppard until she changed her mind. On top of that, under Nicol's efficient canvassing, Dunedin sent significantly more signatures per head than any other city in all three suffrage campaigns predominantly thanks to the activities of Women's Franchise League that Helen set up as an auxiliary support organization for the Dunedin branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 49).

Still, regardless of the close cooperation between Nicol and Sheppard, it is possible to point out distinctive differences between their respective approaches to the significance of the female franchise for New Zealand communities. Nicol spent years teaching in a Sunday school situated in a poor area of Dunedin and was intimately familiar with the consequences of poverty and desertion which affected many of Otago women and children. These experiences led her to a conclusion that alcohol was the fundamental cause of all social evil and convinced her to

become a steadfast abstainer and prohibitionist. Throughout her adult life she joined a number of temperance organisations; at various times she was a member of a Band of Hope, the Juvenile Temple, the Independent Order of Good Templars, the Blue Ribbon Army before she became one of the leaders of the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union. Therefore, in her writings Nicol put distinct emphasis on what she perceived to be a direct connection between the female franchise and prohibition. In her opinion, thanks to the ability to cast their vote women would gain the opportunity to elect “men of good moral character” who would see the need to support and, eventually, introduce prohibition for the benefit of the whole society as it would be certain to restore purity and peace to New Zealand household (Devaliant *Kate Sheppard* 49).

Helen Nicol gave voice to her beliefs in numerous articles and letters to editor published in local newspapers and periodicals in order to persuade as large group of their readers as possible to the validity of the claim that the issue of female franchise was inextricably connected and vital to the solution of the problem of overindulgence in alcohol through the means of prohibition. For instance in May 1890, she wrote a letter to the editor of the *Evening Star* which she opens with a bold statement as to the readiness of Dunedin women to get involved in politics. “It is now about time”, she says “that we women of Dunedin were rousing ourselves to act in some way or other to gain our right to vote on political questions, especially those affecting ourselves”. She continues with a statement according to which gaining the right to vote and, therefore, influence on politics and legislation of the new country, is now particularly essential as the need to introduce prohibition is gradually becoming more pressing because “when Prohibition is in motion many other evils will cease to exist which at present fall with an unmerciful hand upon innocent women” (*Evening Star*, 13/05/1890, 2).

Nicol continues with the assertion that, contrary to popular belief, New Zealand women are not timid by nature or afraid to get involved even in the most demanding areas of public life such as politics. What is even more important, they are ready and willing to put their time and energy into the creation of structured organization aimed at campaigning in favour of gender equality following the example of suffrage movements from other countries within the scope of British Commonwealth. In the following paragraphs of her letter, Helen Nicol appeals directly to New Zealand women, especially to the ones already actively involved in the structures of organizations vitally interested in the betterment of the quality of female way of life in order to motivate them to take interest in the issue of female franchise. It is especially important in the light of the increasingly international character of the suffrage movement and its growing chances of achieving its most important goals:

Have we not ladies in our City with sufficient backbone to call a public meeting of women to test this question? I think we have some fearless women in our Women's Christian Temperance Union who do not hesitate in working with a will for the right. Then we have the Good Templar Order, who was among the first to strike at prejudice existing against the right of woman to take her place in the lodge room, on the platform, or where else she could maintain her position, based alone upon mental equality with the sterner sex. Then I would appeal to every lodge to take up this question for the sake of the sisters. All over the world our cause is being taken up by very able and influential ladies and gentlemen, with very marked results, which will soon terminate in our ultimate success. But are we going to sit with our hands folded in the meantime, while our sisters in neighbouring colonies are doing their best to gain this franchise for women?' (*Evening Star*, 13/05/1890, 2)

In order to support her claims, Helen Nicol quotes the opinion of a prominent New Zealand philanthropist and writer on historical and social subjects, Frederick George Ewington. Despite his strict conservative political ideas including the criticism of the Liberal government's populism which, according to him, led to the rule of ignorant and rowdy majority over the small elite of intellectuals more fitting to govern the country, Ewington was openly appreciative of the activities of New Zealand suffrage activists and acknowledged their inherent right to demand the access into the realm of politics. He saw the international female movement as the expression of women's protest against the unjust laws which frequently discriminated against the female half of society. Nicol sees Ewing's assertions as the best confirmation of the validity of the argumentation used by not only by herself but the whole temperance movement as she reminds of the words used by Ewing in his text entitled "Leader":

The women of the Christian Temperance Union did only what might have been expected of them in asking the assistance from Christian and temperance organisations to get them political rights. They are too sensible, influential, and united to be put down. Women of their class who feel that they can do something else than household duties without letting household duties suffer are developing a world-wide federation, which has proved its right to be entrusted with the vote they ask for. In the State of Iowa they gave a majority of 30,000 votes in favour of the constitutional abolition of the liquor traffic in 1882, and through them a similar law was passed in Rhode Island in 1886. They have shown they can organise and carry through a political campaign. We could state numberless cases where women are unjustly treated through bad and cruel laws. (*Evening Star*, 13/05/1890, 2)

Nicol's texts reflect the way the approach adopted by a majority of WCTU's leaders who did not consider the issue of franchise to be the ultimate goal of the female rights movement but as merely one link in a vast, interconnected chain of social and political factors contributing to the condition and quality of women's lives in New Zealand. Therefore, they often pointed out connections between gender equality in legislation and various social ills stemming from the discrimination and patriarchal stereotypes which were still embedded deeply in the consciousness of a large group within the society. In the case of Helen Nicol, it was the question

of temperance and prohibition and its possible resolution through the implementation of the franchise that was deemed to be of utmost importance, but other temperance leaders focused their references and in-depth analyses of the interconnectedness of a wide range of factors and the introduction of equal gender rights. Depending on the region in which they operated, the suffragists focused on topics as diverse as dress reform, the education of women in political and economic principles, equal remuneration for the same job as well as issues connected with the charities directed at “unfortunate women”.

Still, despite strong emphasis put on the independence and the appreciation of skills and talents of women of all classes and circumstances, practically all the temperance and suffrage activists did not promote confrontational attitude but insisted on advocating cooperation between genders both when it came to familial relationships and the formal associations with the representatives of the authorities. In fact, in this way they were capitalizing on the more accepting and even reverent attitude that New Zealand had towards women but also, especially in the case of male politicians, on their desire to portray New Zealand as one of the most progressive countries in the world. As Jad Adams comments: “There was also a merely nationalistic pride in New Zealand in being the ‘experiment station’ of advanced legislation as governments enacted a wide array of programmes that interested progressive thinkers in distant countries” (116). Moreover, the politicians of both parties were eager to secure a possible gain of a substantial number of new voters and they realized that alienating the increasingly active members of the suffrage movement could deprive them that of this opportunity. In later years, it was a frequent claim that, when it came to debates in Parliament, the issue of female franchise was quite separate from other matters that were prominent in party politics. The attitude towards suffrage did seem to be determined by personal beliefs of particular politician and not by party considerations (Grimshaw 73).

What is more, the leaders of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union were perfectly aware of the significance of the role that the movement for equal gender rights had to play not only in the limited scope of New Zealand local politics but in a wider, international context. It was not only political thought that was affected but also social and philosophical schools of thought and the roots and implications of the potential gender equality could be traced back as far as the eighteenth century and its focus on “the physical upliftment, betterment, emancipation of man” (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2). One of the authors exploring these connections between New Zealand female franchise and other concepts was Margaret Sievwright, the president of the Gisborne branch of WCTU and a prominent member of the New Zealand Women’s Council that was set up after the introduction of the new Electoral Bill. She presented

her ideas in a paper entitled “*The New Woman*”. The text was originally read in front of the Council’s assembly and met with such an acclaim that *Lyttelton Times* decided to print it in its entirety in April 1896 in order to invite the readers to participate in the debate on the potential future of the female rights movement (Coney 15).

Sievwright’s main goal in “*The New Woman*” is to demonstrate clearly that gaining the right to vote can be in no way perceived as the ultimate goal of any of female organizations. In fact, she presents it as merely a stepping stone in a natural process of finding social balance not only between genders but classes as well. She takes the example of the greatest thinkers of the eighteenth century such as Hugo, Mirabeau, Diderot and Condorcet all of whom advocated the concept of equality of all mankind as a starting point on the analysis of the true nature of the so-called “the New Woman”. She rejects the highly critical image of this “new type of femininity” promoted by authors such as Mrs Lynn Linton who were afraid of the potentially detrimental effects of the emancipation of women. As Sievwright comments: “I think you will agree with me that as truly, if also more unkindly, has Mrs Lynn Linton taught us exactly what the New Woman is not. To Mrs Lynn Linton I am by no means grateful, and were it not that she is widely read, and, I am told, even believed in, I should certainly have ignored both herself and her tirades tonight” (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2).

Instead of focusing on the negative image of the ‘New Woman’ as the potential threat to the stability of social order, Sievwright puts forward an argument according to which the features ascribed to this supposedly new model of femininity are not, in fact, outrageous and unprecedented as it is possible to argue that they stem from an ancient and long-standing tradition of gender equal or even matriarchal civilizations that were only displaced and forgotten about in the last few centuries:

Let me call your attention for one moment to the fact that this great woman movement is not the evolution of a belated sex. Woman was not always in the secondary position in which the last few centuries have found her. The civilisation first known to humanity is based, to quote the words of Gerard Tenlon, ‘On the pre-eminence of the woman in the family, in religion, in civil life, and sometimes even in the State.’ And in Mr Herbert Spencer’s studies of the status of women we find an indifference of employment between the sexes. The male sometimes indoor cooking and washing up, the female at the primitive following of agriculture and trading. Two thousand years before Christ there was a lady Pharaoh, whose personality has been described both by Miss Edwards, the Egyptian historian, and by Mr Petrie, the discoverer, and whose deeds appear in no way to have fallen short of her male peers in originality and brilliancy. (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2)

On the other hand, Sievwright realizes that the pace at which the changes in the social status of women have been happening throughout the nineteenth century significantly exceed the rate of

development expected from natural evolution. It is especially visible when the legal situation of women at the beginning of the century is taken into consideration as “married women, that is, it would seem to most people, women who have most completely fulfilled their life purpose, had lost, not only every vestige of leadership but also all individual right to property, person, and progeny” (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2). Therefore, as a natural reaction to this total submission, a movement of resistance against this state of affairs was born as the level of frustration increased. As Sievwright notices, the way for the equality of gender rights was paved, more directly by “the revolt of man against his oppressing brother man” but, in actuality, was initiated by exceptional women, such as Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft. Even though, they were not branded as “new women” Sievwright reckons that their contribution to the development of the ideas that eventually blossomed into suffrage movement cannot be overestimated and should be acknowledged and remembered. “It is to women such as these,” she says “that we latter-day women owe all we have already gained, and we should be ungrateful or poor spirited indeed if we did not strive, so far as in us lies, to follow in their footsteps – to be – to delight to be new women – loyal to their lofty standards” (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2).

As Shelley and Wollstonecraft were followed by a succession of intelligent and independent women both in Britain and the United States their collective intellectual legacy eventually contributed to what Sievwright refers to as “The New Woman movement”. In her estimation, despite its reputation among the conservative circles of politicians and New Zealand society at large, the immense changes incited by the appearance and activities of “The New Woman” are not destructive but reflective of a general, positive trend which saw the rise of appreciation for the inherent equality of all people. Far from being directed against male half of society, the convictions fuelling the progress of these modern nineteenth century women are focused on overcoming restrictions that women struggle against in various areas of their lives as well as encouragement of the development of all skills and talents that they possess. All these factors render “The New Woman” an integral element of the social revolution even if the representatives of this new type of femininity frequently struggle to make their voices heard or, in their frustration, overstep the boundaries of generally accepted decorum and politeness. As Sievwright notices :

The New Woman movement teaches nothing if not this, that the new woman, child as she is, of the great bloodless, sometimes even wordless, revolt of the century, must be, is already becoming, will yet be triumphantly acknowledged the deliverer of her sex. The new woman is she who has discovered herself – not relatively as mother, wife, sister, but absolutely: ‘A man’s a man for all that’ is true of a woman,

too. True, she recognises that these restrictions must be struggled against, not in the direction of denying her nature, but rather of shaking off every artificial restraint and repression which will in any way hinder or retard her own full and free development. The new woman knows that till these restrictions are not only struggled against but completely overcome, her influence can take but a second place in the world's councils, she can lift but feeble protest against the evils with which she knows the world terms. She knows, and when I think what she does know, oh! friends, words fail me to tell the thoughts that arise in me of loathing, and disgust and despair. I would rather have this new woman – even in her occasional perversity, exaggeration and revolt – than the female oyster that discovers no interest in life outside the limits of her own shell. (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2)

Moreover, even though in New Zealand the influence of “The New Woman” has been arguably greater as evidenced by the peaceful and relatively meteoric progression of the suffrage campaigns, Sievwright points out that the granting women the right to vote cannot be perceived as the pinnacle of the equal gender rights movement. In fact, it is merely a starting point for more profound changes that are essential not only when it comes to social structures but in the mentality of both men and women alike if New Zealand wants to boast to be a truly equal and progressive country. The fact that women were granted the franchise is inarguably a cause for celebration, however it does not change the simple truth that the large part of female population will require a great deal of education and conditioning in order to be able to exercise this right purposefully as:

women may do what is just and right, many of course will, but I know and you know how many women there are who do nothing and think nothing that someone else has not told them to do or think, nor does it much matter to them – and here comes in the sadness – who that someone is. Often a woman is incapable of independent thought; more often she does not wish to be bettered? The shallowness of many a girl's mind makes one's heart ache. One has a young friend or relative, bright, beautiful, educated to some extent it may be, and yet so silly! (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2)

In Sievwright's estimation this state of ignorance and the resulting passivity is one of the greatest threats to integrity and the future of the female rights movement as it leaves women who persist in remaining in this state open to manipulation, in particular on the part of unscrupulous politicians. What is more, they are also deprived of any chance of evoking respect in their fellow men, who are not likely to treat them as equals in a situation when some of women willingly bend to the most restrictive patriarchal stereotypes in order to avoid taking responsibility for their own words and deeds. It is especially destructive in the light of undeniable need for cooperation between genders that is required for further modifications leading to the eventual full gender equality in public life. Sievwright supports her claims with a quote from a text penned by an unnamed male supporter of female suffrage and equality

expressing his frustration with the backward and passive attitude displayed by a significant portion of New Zealand woman:

If,' writes a man in a pamphlet I lately read, 'instead of what I saw women everywhere awake to their degradation, complaining bitterly of their moral chains, and striving unanimously to cast them off, with mean jealousies and petty rivalries for worthless objects laid aside in presence of that great purpose, just as the heterogeneous States of a federation waive their differences in order to withstand a common enemy, not a hint would I have breathed touching their acknowledged evils, which I should regard as already put away by the earnest determination that they shall be. But when, so far from perceiving such a mind in women, I find them, for the most part, indolent and apathetic, and that, not because their sympathies or interests are absorbed in some other great problem demanding imperatively a prompt solution, but merely because they find it less troublesome to bow before idols than to be valiant for any form of truth upon earth, less irksome to submit to small trials and feel small pleasures, to live in a sphere altogether small, than to ennoble themselves by one serious effort; then I am bound to say that it is not so much vice or crime that can drag human nature down to the lowest depths, as this vile, sneaking, pitiful weakness of character which amalgamates only with the worst side of experience, not having energy to turn adversity to account, to make past pain an instrument of present wisdom. All things in lower nature either answer their purpose perfectly as they are, or struggle onwards in gradual development to its accomplishment. She alone who is the crown and archetype of nature stands in her own light, and perpetuates her own and man's misery.' (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2)

That is why, Sievwright turns to the young members of her audience as she perceives them as the hope for the future of the gender equality movement. From her perspective the women who set up WCTU have already made significant contribution to the cause by giving the next generation of young New Zealanders the foundation to build upon in order to bring about permanent to the society. "Many of us are growing old," she says "and will soon have done our little work. You are young, and life – beautiful life – is all before you. Go forth with glad hearts, and have but one fear before your eyes, namely, this, lest you should sully the fair, unblemished sheet of the future with records unworthy of men and women, who believe themselves struggling to evolve light and sweet reasonableness out of a present apparent chaos" (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2). Characteristically, Sievwright addresses not only women but men as well as she emphasizes her belief in the cooperation between the genders which is indispensable for the execution of a real social transformation that has merely started with the introduction of the female franchise. In the conclusion of her speech she states straightforwardly:

To us women of New Zealand especially, enfranchisement opens a new era of opportunity. Good men are rallying around us, and men have been trained in many ways that women have not. This training adds that weight and depth which is discernible in the average woman. Let woman accept this training, learn for ever learn, forward, for ever forward, amid all the changes that are about to come the new woman, instead

of being jeered at by thoughtless men, and made a by-word for all that is weak and pitiful, will honoured and respected, her first thought being how to group with men, so as to form a beautiful and efficient whole. (*Lyttelton Times*, 30/04/1896, 2)

Even though Sievwright makes it clear that her analysis of the condition of the female right movement is conducted from a personal perspective, her conclusions represent the general tone of writings by a majority of leaders of Women's Christian Temperance Union as they tirelessly promoted the importance of team work and insisted on underplaying the individual contributions to the cause. It is characteristic, that even the most active and prolific leaders whose efforts were, undeniably, instrumental in pushing the suffrage cause forward, did not make any attempts at boosting their own egos by enumerating or emphasizing their own accomplishments but always focused on the aspects of collectiveness and the need for action on all levels as the only way to increase the chances of introducing more profound and permanent changes to gender balance in New Zealand.

Moreover, it is difficult to find any instances of texts that use polarizing rhetoric as the leaders of WCTU and other important female organizations considered cooperation with men, male politicians in particular, to be of vital importance to the success of franchise campaigns. This kind of attitude distinguished them from their counterparts in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America as the question of equality was not supposed to engender antagonisms but be resolved through forging of a peaceful contract between genders not only in politics but, even more importantly, in social interactions. According to Anna Stout, the conflict that seems to arise from the emergence of new gender roles could easily become a thing of the past if men and women started to communicate with each other. In this way, both the bonds of marriage and the future happiness of the offspring would be secured and assured as the main source of discordance in a marriage lies in ignorance of moral, physical and mental laws (*Women and the Vote*, 20).

The egalitarian character of the entirety of the New Zealand campaign for the female suffrage is equally confirmed by the fact that Maori communities were in no way excluded from legislation. To the contrary, unlike in other countries in various parts of the world, New Zealand suffrage activists were eager to involve Maori women in the fight for granting women the right to vote. As a result, in the last decade of the nineteenth century they simultaneously got involved in two, parallel suffrage movements as there were Maori branches of the Women's Christian Temperance Union created across both New Zealand islands and Maori women also sought the right to vote and to stand as members of the Maori Parliament – Te Kotahitanga. Arguably, in sharp contrast to New Zealand Parliament where no women were allowed to speak, Maori

women had a certain degree of influence on the formal proceedings of the Maori Parliament as the most influential of them could be given authority by their iwi to address the representatives. In May of 1893, Meri Mangakahia of Te Rarawa, the wife of a prominent member of Te Kotahitanga named Hamiora Manakahia, appeared before the assembly on behalf of all Maori women to implore the members to consider the necessity of granting female members of the tribes the full rights of participation in the legislative processes initiated by Te Kotahitanga.

Meri Mangakahia originally addressed the representatives in their native language but her speech was duly translated into English before both versions were printed in the records of the Maori Parliament proceedings. The text itself, which consists of five, concise points, is a curious mixture of the rhetoric used by the activists of WCTU and the reasons stemming from the particular conditions of Maori communities in New Zealand. As, according to tribal traditions, women were entitled to inherit land from their male relatives, Meri points out that regardless of whether they become heirs after the death of their husbands or fathers, women need to be able to vote and get their fair representation at Parliament. Moreover, these privileges should in no way be limited to independent female landowners as “there are many women who are knowledgeable of the management of the land where their husbands are not” (Rei 17), while single women can live with fathers who are elderly and incapable of taking care of their possessions. The most important argument, however, expresses the ingrained belief in the innate capabilities of women that are no lesser than those displayed by men as Meri comments that ‘there have been many male leaders who have petitioned the Queen concerning the many issues that affect us all, however, we have not yet been adequately compensated according to those petitions. Therefore I pray to this gathering that women members be appointed (Rei 18). Meri bases this last part of her plea for female franchise and the right for representation on the assumption that, despite essential equality of genders, there exists a greater rapport between representatives of the same sex and, therefore, “perhaps the Queen may listen to the petitions if they presented by her Maori sisters, since she is a woman as well” (Rei 18). According to Mangakahia, that kind of natural affinity of sisterhood makes cooperation in the process of changing the legislation swifter and render it more effective.

This sentiment found resonance with the Te Kotahitanga representatives as the Speaker commented that it was surprising that women had not been yet granted these right. The motion was also supported by Akenahi Tomoana, a woman of high rank from Ngati Kahungunu tribe but she stated that she thought that the status of Maori women during the proceedings of Te Kotahitanga should be lower than that of male members. Still, despite this apparent approval, the matter got delayed twice before it was decided that it should be abandoned altogether due

to the fact that the Constitution of Te Kotahitanga had already been completed and it was not advisable to alter it at this time. Overall, however, Meri's address proved to have long-reaching consequences as it inspired Maori women to continue to organize themselves in order to tackle problems such as land health and education which remained serious concerns for their communities. Eventually, they formed the organization named Nga Komiti Wahine which consisted of a national network of tribally based Maori women's committees. Over the next few decades local branches of Nga Komiti engaged in a broad range of issues ranging from domestic violence, smoking, promiscuity and alcohol consumption to treatment of solo and retention of traditional Maori women's skills and the religion of the communities. In this aspect, the activity of Nga Komiti not only matched but exceeded that of the WCTU's activists but both organization worked tirelessly to improve living and working conditions of all women in New Zealand (Rei 35).

Therefore, even though the leaders of both WCTU and Nga Komiti Wahine put a great deal of effort into the campaigns for female franchise it was in no way considered to be the pinnacle of their efforts. The rhetoric used in their texts as well as their favourable reception by authorities and a majority of society demonstrate the effectiveness of the calls for cooperation and the avoidance of antagonism between the genders especially in a society faced with demographical and economical challenges. The introduction of the new Electoral Bill was merely the first step in the long succession of transformations not the least of which affected the way women perceived themselves and their ability to succeed. Still, it is possible to claim that this undeniable victory had a profound impact on the way women perceived themselves and their role in public life.

5.6 Summary and conclusions

A hundred years after New Zealand succeeded in gaining the right to vote, American historian, Gerda Lerner came up with her definition of what she termed "feminist consciousness" that lies at the basis of all gender equality movements. According to her:

Feminist consciousness consists (1) of the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group and that, as members of such a group, they have suffered wrongs; (2) the recognition that their condition of subordination is not natural, but societally determined; (3) the development of a sense of sisterhood; (4) the autonomous definition by women of their goals and strategies for changing their condition; and (5) the development of an alternate vision of the future. (Lerner 274)

Arguably, the development of New Zealand suffrage and equality movement displays all of the features deemed to be indispensable for the appearance of feminist consciousness in this young society. The awareness of the existence of gender inequalities and their patriarchal determinants inspired early texts by Mary Ann Muller and Mary Taylor in the period when the structures of the New Zealand legislature were still in their formative stage. Their activity was followed by the creation of female organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union that allowed women to unite in the sense of a common goal and plan the campaigns aimed at achieving it together. Their vision was not limited to the relatively straightforward issue of female franchise, either as they explored avenues available for feminist organization to improve the future quality of all New Zealand women.

On top of that, the rhetorical devices used by the movement were carefully chosen and chiselled in a way which promoted and cultivated the atmosphere of rational debate which, ultimately, offered the most conducive environment for the introduction of the changes that the activists were trying to introduce. Instead of focusing on the aspects such as the injustice and their frustration connected with the conservative character of the gender roles in the society, the suffragists subtly underlined the importance of the contribution that women brought to the new communities and outlined and suggested further ways in which women could continue to improve the quality of life not only for themselves but for all the members of the society. This tactics of allowing the readers to draw their own conclusions resulted in a decisively more receptive and unemotional approach to the actual arguments that led to the eventual introduction of the female franchise in the former colony.

In this way, the legacy of New Zealand suffrage movement fits perfectly within the frames of feminist consciousness definition coined by Lerner and places it alongside European and American feminist organization. Still, the activities of Kate Sheppard and her associates were distinguished by the uniqueness of the conditions prevailing in New Zealand in the second half of the nineteenth century which allowed them to succeed swiftly and peacefully while their counterparts in other countries struggled to make their message heard. There were numerous factors that added weight to the arguments and rhetoric used in the texts by New Zealand suffragist and eventually moderated the tone of the pieces used in the campaigns. Some of the most important included the limited impact of "educational deprivation and of their economic dependence on males" (Lerner 274) as in New Zealand the realities of the pioneering life meant that women were given both educational and economic opportunities unavailable anywhere else within the scope of the former British Empire.

Conclusion

The New Zealand suffrage movement was unique, both when it comes to its methods and rhetoric, as well as the reception it received from the male part of the society. While in Britain and the campaigns of female rights activists were met not only with scorn and criticism but with active and structured resistance, in New Zealand the introduction of female franchise in 1893 was met with calm acceptance or even a certain dose of pride, as it was perceived as a sign of progressiveness of the young country. What is also characteristic of the relatively short New Zealand suffrage campaign, its eventual success was achieved through close cooperation of female activists with a group of prominent male politicians who acknowledged the indispensability of the roles that women played in communities and appreciated the inevitability of their presence in public life. The joint efforts did result in the enfranchisement of all adult New Zealand women, with no further restrictions as to race or marital and financial status at a time when, in a majority of countries equality of genders was still placed firmly within the sphere of political and social conjecture rather than feasible reality.

Still, even though, against all expectations, the New Zealand activists did prove that, unlike what Emmeline Pankhurst postulated, it was possible to introduce a major shift in gender dynamics predominantly thanks to the power of words and not only deeds, the introduction of female franchise was not as straightforward as the progress and the outcome of the suffrage campaign in New Zealand would suggest. As the texts analysed in the chapters of this dissertation demonstrate, securing the right to vote for women was not achieved as a matter of chance or coincidence, but was a direct result of the convergence of a host of diverse social, cultural and economic factors, which not only influenced the way women perceived their own ability to participate in public life, but also made their position in the newly fledged society unique and relatively privileged. Demographically speaking, women found themselves in minority in the new community which had profound consequences when it came to their cultural importance in society, for example, gave them an opportunity to gain access to comprehensive education and, eventually, boosted the economic value of their work outside of their households.

In general, white, female settlers who arrived in New Zealand in the nineteenth century from Britain were brought up in the spirit of steadfast perseverance, which gave them the

strength to face the inevitable hardships as well as the sense of their skills and capabilities. What is even more important, they chose to move to a new country on the other side of the world in search for better life for themselves and their families and showed a great deal of persistence in pursuing their goals when faced with adversities connected with the pioneering way of life. Moreover, the new roles they chose or were forced to assume outside the bounds of domesticity not only constituted a direct proof of their talents and capabilities, but also boosted their confidence and bolstered their courage in the pursuit of the acknowledgment of female contribution to the development of the new society through the introduction of the extension of the civil rights. This dissertation focuses, more comprehensively than in comparable analyses, on the close reading of the texts penned by the suffragettes themselves as well as people who witnessed the process that led to the introduction of the female franchise in New Zealand. The words of the suffragettes and their contemporaries reflect the conditions of the new colony as well as constitute the most thorough confirmation of the nature of the campaign for female franchise.

Moreover, the position of women in New Zealand society was equally positively influenced by external factors, demography being predominant among them. In the realities of the new colony, the term of “surplus women” lost all its significance and as, unlike in Great Britain, in New Zealand women were in distinct minority, which meant that the male members of settler communities tended to be more appreciative of their contribution to public life. The academic successes of pioneers such as Kate Edger and Ethel Benjamin met with practically unanimous acclaim and even pride expressed by contemporary journalists as well as the representatives of local and national authorities. Admittedly, the first, tentative forays of women into politics, as evidenced by Elizabeth Yates’ short term in office as the Mayor of Onehunga, proved to be unquestionably more controversial, which can be interpreted as the evidence of the limits of tolerance and the extent to which gender equality could function in any nineteenth-century society. Still, the opportunities that New Zealand offered to its female citizens in the areas of education and the opportunities for professional career were unrivalled in the scale of not only the other countries of the former British Empire, but the rest of the world as well.

Consequently, the history and the eventual success of the New Zealand suffrage can be considered to be the result of a unique convergence of the above-mentioned factors, which demonstrates that achieving even a most rudimentary gender balance requires a fulfilment of certain conditions which influence the way both women and men function and perceive reality. What is even more important, it can be argued that an absence or distortion of even one of these vital elements results in the creation of noticeably less democratic and inclusive systems. A

good example of this regularity can be found in the history of Australian suffrage movement. Australia followed New Zealand as the second country in the world to grant women the right to vote when, in 1902, the Commonwealth Parliament, which was in session for the first time, chose to exercise its powers it was given in 1901 Constitution to proclaim adult suffrage for all future federal elections. Still, admittedly, the Australian road to female franchise was much more complicated and prolonged due to separate systems of legislation in individual states. In fact, the whole process took almost twenty eight years as New South Wales and Tasmanian women gained their state franchises in 1902 and 1903 respectively, but Queensland did not follow suit until 1905 and in Victoria, it took angry confrontation before Victorian women were given the right to vote in 1908 (Oldfield 15).

In addition, despite the numerous similarities which allowed New Zealand and Australia to find their individual ways to the forefront of the fight for gender equality in legislation, it is possible to claim that the New Zealand female organizations managed to arrive at a noticeably more comprehensive solutions to the problem of the lack of female representation, most notably when it comes to the inclusion of native populations. While the suffrage movement in all former British territories has been recently frequently regarded and analysed as part of the oppressive colonial system, which did not allow for the consideration of the rights and customs of the ethnic minorities, in the case of New Zealand, Maori women were an integral part of the campaigns and their contribution found its reflection in the final draft of the 1893 Electoral Act. Australia, on the other hand, not only did not extend a universal voting rights to the aboriginal men and women but explicitly restricted their access to the democratic processes. In fact, it was not until 1962 that the liberal government composed of members of Menzies Liberal and Country Party finally gave the right to vote to all Aboriginal people (Oldfield 23). Still, the question of the exact nature of the reasons behind these distinct differences in the way New Zealand and Australia approached the issue of the civic rights of ethnic minorities, would require a closer analysis and comparison of the texts penned by early colonists in both countries.

Another intriguing aspect of the suffrage movements in New Zealand and Australia is connected with the outcomes and consequences of the early introduction of the female franchise. Curiously enough, the fact that in Australasia women could participate in democratic elections at the time when the rights of their peers in other countries of the world were not recognized or even actively denied did not mean that it their progression to the legal opportunity for standing for Parliament was a smooth or quick process. To the contrary, in New Zealand, a quarter of a century had to pass until the authorities even contemplated such an option and it took another fourteen years until Elizabeth McCombs was finally successful in taking a seat in

Parliament in 1933. A similar situation occurred in Australia where no woman sat in any of Australian local Parliaments until 1921 and in Commonwealth Parliament as late as 1943. It was an odd development as in other countries of the British Commonwealth that resisted the introduction of the female franchise for decades, the timeline for the inclusion of women as Members of Parliament looks noticeably more progressive than in either in New Zealand or Australia. For instance, at that time, in Britain there had been at least fifteen women Members of Parliament, and in America the first congresswoman, Jeanette Rankin was elected in 1916 (Coney 36).

What is more, even after the first women managed to breach the barriers that prevented them from becoming active participants in the world of politics and government, the numbers of female representative in New Zealand Parliament did not reach significant levels in the first half of the twentieth century. In reality, there had been only eight women in Parliament by 1960, only one of whom was a member of a Maori tribe¹ and the situation in Australia developed in a strikingly similar fashion, with only handful of women elected to either state or Commonwealth Parliaments during the same period. It is entirely feasible that, in this case, it was simply the demography that worked against them and the poor female representation in New Zealand and Australian Parliaments was, predominantly the reflection of the fact that, in both societies, women were in a distinct minority. Still, it is still striking that after New Zealand and Australia went against the predominant gender prejudice and became leaders when it came to a more inclusive legislation, after the introduction of female franchise the female rights and equality movements seemed to have lost their momentum and did not manage to achieve any notable successes until well into the second half of the twentieth century. The answer to the question of why the matters concerning the participation of women in public life were resolved in this way could be potentially found in the texts of the members of various female organizations who came together to create The National Council of Women of New Zealand in 1896, as well as of some of male politicians and contemporary commentators. The further analysis of these writings could offer even fuller understanding of all the complexities of the gender relations in the unique conditions of the former colony.

All in all, the history of New Zealand suffrage, from its beginnings to the early and unprecedented success gives us an insight into the dynamics between genders and the

¹ These representatives were: Elizabeth McCombs in 1933, Catherine Stewart in 1938, Mary Dreaver in 1941, Mary Griggs in 1942, Mabel Howard in 1943, Hilda Ross in 1945, Iriaka Ratana in 1949 and Ethel McMillan in 1953 (McCallum x).

conditions necessary for achieving the most comprehensive balance between the patriarchal traditions and tendencies and the natural inclinations and steadily growing demands of women who wanted to be included in the processes governing the public life. Despite the temporary lull in the pace at which female organizations gained further rights that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century, New Zealand remains a country on the forefront of the gender equality struggle, with 149 women MPs elected since Elizabeth McCombs first entered Parliament and three female Prime Ministers to date. As Jacinda Arden stated in an interview that she and her predecessors in the office gave as the part of the celebrations connected with 125th anniversary of the introduction of the female franchise in New Zealand: “I think we’re near normalising women in leadership. In a role like Prime Minister, if you’ve got three, then you’re pretty close to normalising it” (*Otago Daily Times*, 19/09/2018, 2). Still it was the first woman PM, Jenny Shipley who summed up the reasons why, despite certain setbacks and adversities to overcome, New Zealand has been and still remains one of the most progressive countries when it comes to gender equality and female inclusion: “Each of us has made different life choices and, actually, that gives women everywhere role models. It’s legitimate to choose. We don’t have to be the same, we don’t have to judge each other, we make our own choices. [...] We offer three really unique role model pathways for girls in New Zealand, but also women globally” (*Otago Daily Times*, 19/09/2018, 2). In the last few years these sentiments found their reflection in the attitude and approach that Jacinda Arden adopted towards fighting the uncertainty of the corona virus pandemics which resulted in *The Atlantic* hailing her to be possibly “the Most Effective Leader on the Planet” (*The Atlantic*, 19/04/2020, 3).

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Abstract

In 1893, New Zealand became the first self-governing country in the world to grant all its female citizens the right to vote in parliamentary elections. Both the campaign promoting the enfranchisement of New Zealand women and the legislative process itself were peaceful and, predominantly, conducted in the atmosphere of a rational debate. The present thesis offers an analysis of this campaign from the perspective of cultural history and argues that the enfranchisement of 1893 was not solely a result of the efforts of the women rights' movement, nor the goodwill of the authorities. The granting of franchise to New Zealand women was due to a combination of several factors, the most important of which were: the effects of the harsh conditions the settlers had to face in the new colony on its emerging society, the demographic situation in New Zealand as compared to European societies, and the stoic quality which characterized British Victorian society.

The dissertation is divided into the introductory part, five chapters and conclusion. Chapter One "The development of the ideology of European suffrage movement: from the Levellers to militant suffragettes" is devoted to the presentation of the creation, development and progress of political movements aiming at the enfranchisement of women. Chapter Two, "A social and cultural history of New Zealand" offers a short overview of the early history of colonisation of the islands and social structure, economy, everyday life, leisure, as well as the possibilities for social and economic advancement in nineteenth-century New Zealand. The following three chapters, "The British female pioneers in New Zealand", "The support network of the New Zealand suffrage movement" and "The rhetoric of the New Zealand suffrage movement", are devoted to the analysis of the primary source texts divided into thematic sections. These include diaries, letters, articles and memoirs of the female immigrants and their immediate descendants showing various aspects of life in the early New Zealand society.

Streszczenie

W 1883 roku, Nowa Zelandia została pierwszym krajem o autonomicznym rządzie, który przyznał wszystkim swoim obywatelkom prawo do głosowania w wyborach parlamentarnych. Zarówno kampania promująca nadanie praw wyborczych jak i sam proces legislacyjny były pokojowe i przeprowadzone w atmosferze racjonalnej debaty. Niniejsza rozprawa prezentuje analizę tej kampanii z perspektywy historii kultury oraz wysuwa tezę iż wprowadzenie praw wyborczych dla kobiet w 1883 nie było wyłącznie efektem wysiłków ruchu na rzecz praw kobiet ani dobrej woli władz Nowej Zelandii. W istocie, nastąpiło ono w rezultacie kumulacji szeregu czynników, a najważniejsze z nich to: efekty jakie ciężkie warunki z którymi osadnicy musieli zmagać się w nowej kolonii wywarły na ich tworzące się społeczeństwo, demograficzna sytuacja w Nowej Zelandii w porównaniu z europejskimi społeczeństwami i stoickim podejściem do rzeczywistości, charakteryzująca wiktoriańskie społeczeństwo.

Rozprawa jest podzielona na wstęp, pięć rozdziałów i zakończenie. Rozdział pierwszy “Rozwój ideologii europejskiego ruchu sufrażystek: od ruchu Levellers do wojowniczych sufrażystek” jest poświęcony prezentacji stworzenia, rozwoju i osiągnięć ruchów politycznych dążących do wprowadzenia prawa wyborczego dla kobiet. Rozdział drugi, “Społeczna i kulturalna historia Nowej Zelandii” prezentuje krótkie omówienie wczesnej historii i kolonizacji nowozelandzkich wysp oraz struktury społecznej, ekonomii, warunków życia codziennego oraz wypoczynku a także opcji społecznego i ekonomicznego awansu w dziewiętnastowiecznej Nowej Zelandii. Kolejne trzy rozdziały, “Brytyjskie pionierki w Nowej Zelandii”, “System wsparcia nowozelandzkiego ruchu sufrażystek” oraz “Retoryka nowozelandzkiego ruchu sufrażystek” są poświęcone analizie tekstów źródłowych podzielonych na sekcje tematyczne. Źródła te to między innymi, dzienniki, listy, artykuły oraz pamiętniki imigrantek oraz ich bezpośrednich potomków ukazujących różnorodność aspektów życia w społeczeństwie wczesnej Nowej Zelandii.