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PhD Summary

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

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The period of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) was the time of rapid and profound change in Britain, brought about through the combined influence of the technological progress of the Industrial Revolution, relentless expansion of the territories of the British Empire and the rise of the modern model of trade. At the same time, however, gender roles with accompanying stereotypes became more precisely defined than ever before in British history. 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. 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.

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.

One of the most straightforward explanations for the suffragettes' success in their campaign for the voting rights is the skilful way in which Kate Sheppard and her associates presented women 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. Indeed it is possible to identify a whole range of elements that contributed to that unique achievement, but it is the hypothesis that this dissertation aims to prove that among the most important aspects it is a combination of the effects of the harsh and trying conditions the settlers had to face 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 stoic quality which characterized British society during the reign of Queen Victoria, that played the most significant role in the enfranchisement of New Zealand women.

The dissertation is divided into the introductory part, five chapters and conclusion. Chapter One, "Tracing the Development of Global Suffrage Movement Ideology: from 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 model of a patriarchal social system however, other countries' histories are outlined as well in order to emphasise the uniqueness of New Zealand suffrage.

In Chapter Two, "History, Society and Culture of New Zealand" the 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 relationship 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 section. 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, "Female Pioneers", 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 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 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 are explored in Chapter Four, "Suffrage Movement's Support Network" in which the analysis focuses 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 three,

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 main focus of the analysis consists of 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 employed completely different rhetorical devices adjusted to the contrasting attitudes towards women and their role in the societies of the United Kingdom and New Zealand. The material includes early texts published in the late 1860's and 1870's by Mary Ann Muller (Femina) and Mary Ann Colclough (Polly Plum) as well as the members of WCTU, such as Kate Sheppard, Amey Daldy, Meri Te Tai Mangakāhia and Harriet Morison, writing during the period of the build-up before women were granted the right to vote in 1893. 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.

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.

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