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Insights from past and present social science literature on the (unequal) development of New Zealand's rural communities

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Abstract

A review of social research on rural New Zealand undertaken as part of the National Science Challenge (NSC 11) “Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities” allows a fresh look at rural development within the context of New Zealand's colonial history. The research suggests that government development programmes and legislation privileged those responsible for producing the bulk of New Zealand's export income. Cultural attitudes, structural inequalities and a failure to understand how the character of, and social relations in, rural areas have changed has impeded particularly Māori economic growth, the participation of women, and non-farm sectors of rural society, to the detriment of all.

KEYWORDS

community development, Māori, resilience, rural, social research

1 | INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s a suite of papers on rural development was produced by the New Zealand government's Ministry of Agriculture's short-lived Rural Affairs (later Rural Resources) Unit (RRU). They were based on statistical analyses and research projects on the issues and trends affecting farming and rural communities—the latter defined as people living in rural settlements with fewer than 10,000 people, and in the rural areas surrounding these settlements (Pomeroy, 1994).

One report (published June 1994) which reviewed RRU's programme “Integrated Rural Development” suggested that “rural development will be successful if there is effective community ownership of the activity” (Pomeroy, 1994, p. 9). It saw government's role as working in partnership with community, providing information and facilitation. Twenty-five years on it is clear this complacent, uncritical, review missed the point. While recognising women-farmers and that rural encompassed more than farming communities, structural inequalities that shaped rural New Zealand from the nineteenth century were ignored.

A second report, dated July 1994, re-visited grassroots community development initiatives originally investigated in 1990 in Whanganui and the eastern Bay of Plenty (Boswell, Brown, Maniapoto, & Kruger, 1994). Māori researchers in the team interviewed representatives from five Eastern Bay of Plenty iwi. This report, which documented government funding and rural support mechanisms available at the time, created consternation. It dared criticise officials and government programmes.

Both reports saw the goal of development as improving local well-being, but it was the second report with its uncompromising clarity about disparities and omissions (such as officials' lack of appreciation that iwi economic development at a sub-regional level must be consistent “with cultural values rather than at the expense of those values” (Boswell et al., 1994)), which was of greater value. The second report

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recognised that government policies had accelerated the breakdown of traditional social structures for Māori. These continued into the economic-reform period post-1984 when the separation of the Crown's commercial and non-commercial activities further distorted social issues (Boswell et al., 1994; Easton, 2018).

The National Science Challenge's (NSC) research programme: "Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities" provided an opportunity to undertake a review of research on New Zealand's rural communities to establish what it tells us about rural society, its development and government's actions supporting (or thwarting) sub-regional development. This was undertaken with the objective of better explaining current realities and informing future decisions. The review brought together literature on rural communities from a range of disciplines and sources. It focused attention on the importance of cultural considerations for understanding resilience and growth, and the unintended consequences of "top-down" development schemes. It pointed to the need for sub-regional analysis to understand life in the 90% of the country outside our largest cities and secondary urban centres—where most of our foreign exchange is generated.

Based on the NSC review, this paper divides New Zealand's rural history into four parts: our rural roots (Māori pre-contact to colonial settlement); 1900–1950 (early technical development); 1950–1984 (post-war); and post-1984 government reforms and recent events, to illustrate the inequity of Government development programmes within the context of colonialisation and its aftermath. While attention is drawn to often negative drivers of rural social transformation, rural communities per se, remain resilient (although the resilience of Māori communities, the majority of whose populations live elsewhere, lies more in the cultural sphere than the economic—with economic resilience only recently emerging following Waitangi Tribunal findings and reparations). It is true that many rural centres (populations of 300–1,000 people) are waning, and some have struggled economically, particularly where national-level policy changes have removed local employment opportunities (Connelly & Nel, 2017). On the other hand, the populations of most rural districts[1] and minor urban areas (1,000–10,000 people) are steady or growing (Spoonley, 2016; Brabyn and Schuler, 2019). The paper concludes with a discussion on widening perspectives on rural development.

2 | RURAL ROOTS

Prior to European contact, hapū, the social and economic unit of Māori society, averaged around 50 people but (in the populous Bay of Plenty) several hapū residing together reached settlement sizes of up to 1,300 people (Parsonson, 1981). Estimates of the population at that time range between 100,000 and 150,000 people in eighteenth century New Zealand (Anderson, 2014; Pool, 1991). Whanau were rarely fixed in one place but roamed across long distances to take advantage of available resources, trading with other hapū. Māori believed they belonged to the land, rather than that the land belonged to them. Rights to occupy were held collectively by all members of a hapū or iwi, not individually (Whaanga, 2012). Ownership was confirmed by settlement and occupation or maintaining the lighted fires (*take ahi kā*) and subsequently transformed into an ancestral right (*take tipuna*). Other rights to land included right of conquest (*take raupatu*) and right of gift (*take tuku*). In most cases the occupancy, use and protection of any resource were sufficient evidence of ownership and the foundation for individual and group property rights (Kawharu, 1977; Kingi, 2008).

Māori were quick to pick up on trading opportunities with the various Europeans who arrived in New Zealand in the 1820s and 1830s. Assets acquired through trade were invested in crop cultivation, flour mills, whaling stations, horses, cattle, coastal shipping, market gardens, printing presses and so on (Binney, O'Malley, & Ward, 2014; Goodall, 2005; Petrie, 2006). Māori also shipped food to the Australian market (Binney et al., 2014). The historical sections of many Treaty of Waitangi Deeds of Settlement reiterate that iwi were prosperous and economically successful until the late 1850s, although introduced diseases, particularly measles, mumps and tuberculosis, were beginning to decimate Māori communities in the 1840s and 1850s. The peripatetic nature of the Māori lifestyle meant easy pickings for a government intent on scooping up "abandoned land" for colonial settlement.[2] Dubious and illegal land purchasing, confiscation and land alienation by the Crown of the richest soils and best classes of land, particularly from the 1860s, left Māori marginalised on the poorest lands and with a fraction of the land holdings they had once utilised. Many Māori had few options but to leave their home territories to find food, work and income elsewhere. War, disease, land alienation and privation meant that by 1896, the Māori population, still around 90% rural, had dropped to just over 42,000 people (Pool, 1977).

European smallholder settlement from the 1840s, and the development of vast pastoral runs from the 1850s, reduced Māori landholding to just under 11 million acres (40% of the North Island) by 1891 (Binney et al., 2014). By 1900, Māori-owned land had fallen to 10% of the area of their original tribal estates (Goodall, 2005). Driven off their lands, Māori turned to seasonal labour for local bodies and European run-holders (road building, drain laying, scrub cutting, fencing and shearing) and subsistence farming (King, 1981). Māori and Pākehā societies were almost completely separate in the 1890s: "Māori communities were mainly rural, or located in separate neighbourhoods from those of Pākehā in small towns and provincial centres" (Ballara,

1993, p. 127). While from the mid-1860s hapū had sought to develop and farm their lands to make an income in the same way as their Pākehā neighbours, by the turn of the century this was no longer possible. A combination of factors conspired against their endeavours to make an economic success of working their remaining lands (Gilling, 2008). By the 1890s the lands held by Māori were of poorer quality to those farmed by Pākehā. Māori had little knowledge and experience of (western) farming practices and received no instruction on running farm businesses. Pākehā settlers acquired development-funding under the Advances to Settlers Act 1894 to break-in and develop land, but this was not available to Māori. The amount of land allocated to Māori, 10 acres per head in most districts, was too small to support farming and quickly became overworked (Binney et al., 2014; Gilling, 2008; Howse, 1987).

Refrigeration from the 1890s enabled small scale fat-lamb farming and dairying to emerge alongside wool production from the pastoral estates. Unlike the stations and runs, small family farms did not use hired labour. Women and girls in these settler households, whether on family farms or in the small service villages, had a heavy workload (Toynbee, 1995). They were responsible for the kitchen garden: planting, tending and harvesting, foraging and preparing food for the family, making clothes and keeping them and the house clean in a pre-electricity era. Those who lived on small farms also helped-out with seasonal farm tasks. Even where there was electricity, people owned few appliances, so there was little leisure time. Families were large, child-rearing was women's work. People walked long distances or relied on horse-drawn vehicles for transport. Farm households were isolated. Roads were hazardous, muddy and prone to slips.

The larger farms, estates and runs employed a combination of permanent staff (including cooks and maids), and itinerant wage workers. Wage work in the arable sector included crop cultivation and harvesting, utilising general farm hands, labourers, ploughmen, haymakers, harvesters and threshing-mill hands. In the pastoral sector sheep-work engaged station hands, shepherds and boundary-keepers, musterers, drovers, shearers and shearing-shed hands. Dairying at the time did not employ much labour. Casual and seasonal work included land clearance and bush felling, sowing of grass-seed and crops, grass-seed harvesting, rabbiting, fencing, gold and coal mining, gum digging, road and railway construction (Martin, 1990). There was a fluidity of occupation and it was relatively common for small farmers and farmers' sons to supplement their income by wage work at harvest or shearing. Nevertheless, few could generate sufficient income to buy land of their own, and properties they did purchase were small. There was unemployment, hardship and industrial conflict in rural areas but, since many workers lived in the same house and sat at the same table as their employer, opposition to employers tended to be suppressed (Martin, 1990).

3 | 1900 TO 1950

The plight of the majority of Māori alienated from their land by the end of the nineteenth century was largely invisible and their conditions continued to deteriorate. By the 1920s, rural Māori were experiencing living standards well below those of Pākehā (Harris & Williams, 2014). Government attention was drawn to the state of Māori housing by the impact of disease on the community. The 1918–1919 influenza epidemic took seven times as many Māori as Pākehā lives, while the prevalence of tuberculosis, typhoid, dysentery and respiratory disease meant that in 1938 the Māori death rate was 24.31 per 1,000 compared to a Pākehā rate of 9.71 (King, 1981). Despite this, high fertility saw a spectacular increase in the rural Māori population from 1926 with resultant pressures on the limited land available. Māori often had little choice but to consider relocating, often to nearby centres (Poulsen, Rowland, & Johnston, 1975). As a result, a lack of employment in rural areas, "forced increasing numbers of Māori to seek work elsewhere … [in] military service and by recruitment into wartime industries" (Bedford & Pool, 2004, p. 55). While large numbers of Māori moved of their own accord to the chief towns and cities, "successive post-war governments actively encouraged movements of Māori to areas with potential for economic development … [to] neighbouring towns and small cities, Auckland and Wellington urban areas and, to a lesser degree, … Christchurch and Dunedin" (Bedford & Pool, 2004, pp. 57–58).

To make ends meet during the 1930s depression, Māori were heavily reliant on casual work, travelling long distances from their home marae to wherever there was a temporary demand for unskilled workers (Harris & Williams, 2014). By 1933, 75% of adult Māori men were registered unemployed, but few met relief criteria and payments were at a lower rate since Māori were expected to "live off the land" (Harris & Williams, 2014, p. 370). Minister for Māori Development, Sir Āpirana Ngata's schemes[3] to develop Māori land aimed at enabling prosperous Māori farmers to live and work in rural areas, but there was insufficient land for the growing numbers of people with land rights. The programme merely gave the Crown complete control over land within the schemes and locked the occupiers into debt-ridden farms that could never offer more than a subsistence living (Gilling, 2008).

Loans made under the Māori land development schemes prior to World War 2 (WW2) did provide a useful source of finance for constructing new rural houses (Harris & Wiliams, 2014). A key piece of post-war Māori legislation was

the Māori Social and Economic Advancement Act of 1945 (King, 1981). This legislation set up tribal committees and executives from the marae to the regional level, focusing on welfare and marae administration, initially mostly in rural areas. It enabled the formation of the Māori Women's Welfare League in 1951, an organisation strongly instrumental in improving Māori housing and health. Nevertheless, the situation of dire poverty in which most rural Māori lived was only relieved with the migration of large numbers to the cities after WW2. While this eased the pressure on limited resources and overcrowded homes, it undermined community cohesion and removed key workers responsible for facilitating collective activities for food gathering and production (Harris & Williams, 2014).

Meanwhile, the extension of the roading network across the rural hinterland, and the arrival of motorised transportation and electricity to rural areas revolutionised conditions for Pākehā farmers, although rural living standards remained primitive. One 1940 survey of dairy-farm families showed only 46% had running water to sink, bath and tubs attached to a drainage system, and 16% a septic tank, although 78% had a car and 63% a telephone (Doig, 1940). Many returned soldiers from both World Wars were rehabilitated by being allocated ballot farms,[4] but these were often too small, on difficult terrain, and costly to develop. Most farmers were sheep/beef producers. The 1926 census showed 60% hired no labour, relying on family and neighbours to get work done (Brooking, 1981). New technology continued to reduce labour demands. Between 1921 and 1951 the proportion of the workforce employed in farming dropped by one-fifth (Watson, 1990). Rural workers, though not well paid, had patronised local businesses in the small rural settlements (Watson, 1990). Their falling numbers plus rising car ownership "killed" the small rural villages (Cant, 1960; Franklin, 1960). Offsetting this trend was the arrival of urban commuters seeking holiday houses along beaches and riverbanks or establishing country homes and commuting to urban centres to work (Watson, 1990).

4 | 1950 TO 1984

The national government which took office in 1949 was determined to "purge Māori land titles of multiple ownership" (Harris & Williams, 2014), making it easy to sell land that had been in Māori possession for over 25 generations. By allowing the Māori Trustee, under the Māori Affairs Act 1953, to acquire "uneconomic interests" in Māori land, including compulsory acquisition in certain circumstances, the Māori trustee (a Crown agent) became the owner of a significant stockpile of land designated as "uneconomic" (Belgrave, 2017; Harris & Williams, 2014), and allowed further land to pass out of Māori ownership.

Useful case studies of life in various rural settlements paint a picture of 1950s farm communities. For example, Hohepa's study of the small Northland rural community of Waima in the Hokianga, shows that European settlers had colonised the valley flats from the 1880s for dairying, and the steep uplands for sheep farming. Remaining Māori land in the district was taken over by the government for "rehab" farms and through various land development schemes aimed at getting Māori to "give-up" communal holdings (Hohepa, 1964). Despite their poor living conditions, Hohepa made it clear that the local tribe (iwi), Ngāpuhi, were holding to their traditional ways (albeit somewhat modified) and were living by a different set of cultural values to those of their Pākehā neighbours (Hohepa, 1964).

Ngāpuhi, in common with other iwi, were not on a level playing field. The government did not aid even Māori farmers with individual title, despite their need for government assistance. No effort was made to find ways of enabling land under multiple ownership to be developed. There was no provision of developmental or housing finance, farm management advice, or advice on alternative economic opportunities (all of which was available to Pākehā landowners). Nor was there oversight of the fairness or long-term consequences of the activities of the government agency farming Māori-owned land (Harris & Williams, 2014). Similarly, the crisis in Māori rural housing was ignored. The issue was not recognised by the National Housing Commission until its final report in 1988 (Davey & Kearns, 1994). Architectural historian Deidre Brown noted that the government ignored Māori designs that combined Māori and Pākehā building materials and technologies and were therefore much cheaper to build (Brown, 2016). The designs of prominent architects which met Māori needs by providing for large extended families, and which did not combine activities Māori kept separate or separated activities usually shared, were also not funded by the state housing programme (Brown, 2016).

The rural–urban migration of Māori detailed above, accelerated after World War 2 significantly impacting on social structures and well-being (Ryks, Pearson, & Waa, 2016). These changes were cemented by an official "relocation" policy which emerged from the 1961 Hunn report. To implement Hunn's recommendations the government enacted the Māori Affairs Amendment Act 1967 allowing for the compulsory acquisition of what were described as "uneconomic" Māori interests in blocks of land, mostly to be sold to non-Māori owners (Belgrave, 2017).

Alongside this, changes in town and country planning policy, while affecting all rural communities, impacted most severely on rural Māori. In the 1960s, "town planning became increasingly concerned with the forced urbanising of rural communities. This was largely because of the cost of improving standards of water and sewage disposal systems, and the

belief that this was much more easily and effectively managed in towns" (Belgrave, 2017, p. 58). Māori land previously ignored by planners was severely affected because Pākehā employed to develop and monitor compliance with town and country planning regimes had little understanding of Māori culture and made it impossible for Māori to build or maintain village-style cluster-housing on land remaining under Māori title or on rural-zoned land (Belgrave, 2017; Stokes, 1979). Māori had few options but to move into urban settlements.

With difficulties accessing finance and advisory services, and government unwillingness to find ways to legislate effectively for lands managed under collective ownership, many iwi found their only option was to lease whatever land they still had for forestry. Forestry leases were seen as providing income: forestry development would provide employment and declining rural communities would be rejuvenated, whilst iwi still retained ownership and control over the land (Nuttall, 1981; Rotarangi, 2012). Unfortunately, contracts tended to tie land into long-term leases (up to 99 years), mechanisation reduced job opportunities, there was little work for women and in the towns where forestry workers lived, large numbers of young single males distorted demographic structures (Roche, 2008).

The inevitable outcome of these government policies was the depopulation of many rural Māori villages (Meredith, 2006). For example, the rural district of Te Ohāki (central Bay of Plenty) supported 30 households in the 1930s but was deserted by the 1970s (Stokes, 1979). Most Māori had no alternative but to migrate, "escaping landlessness, poverty and a lack of opportunity … [to fill] a demand for low-skilled workers in the cities" (Taonui, 2006, p. 76). Māori went from 26% urban in 1945, to 62% urban in 1966 (urban being centres over 5,000 people), to 80% urban by 1986. Nevertheless, kinship ties remained strong and were sustained by periodic visits back to rural marae. Those who reached retirement age often returned to their rohe (district/territory) permanently if they could. Urban unemployment also saw Māori migrants returning to rural areas (Douglas, 1979). The desire of urban Māori to "return home" to their papakāinga (home marae/communities) was however, thwarted by "the practical economics of rural living" (Stokes, 1979, p. 36).

Several rural (Pākehā) community studies from this period list the range of functions provided by rural centres and minor urban settlements. There were more small rural centres than were actually needed and many declined, losing their commercial units, residences and social purpose, while others prospered (Cant, 1960). The former geographic isolation which meant families in farming communities had to work together for haymaking or supporting each through illness or on community projects such as building a local hall or school facility, was eroding. People could now travel to the larger urban settlements for entertainment or stay at home to watch television (where there was reception), and the district sports days, movie nights, and socials (dances) at the local community hall, became less frequent (Parr et al., 1975; Scott, Park, Cocklin, & Blunden, 1997).

A spate of industry development and regional development conferences held in the 1960s and 1970s focused on depopulation (seen as the outmigration of particularly young people from rural areas), a lack of social services and perceived reduction in the standard of social services (Glendining, 1976; Lloyd, 1977; Ross, 1973). Speakers observed that young women were no longer staying home to help in the house and/or farm but were moving to urban areas for training/education and, increasingly, paid work. The arrival in rural areas of older male workers and relatively well-educated urban women as farmers' brides, was overlooked. From the mid-70s, families were smaller and young adults were postponing family-formation (Pool, Dharmalingam, & Sceats, 2007). This resulted in the closure of maternity hospitals, and in the trough between the end of the baby-boom and the 90s baby-blip, many primary schools amalgamated. Also, by the 1980s, on-farm mechanisation and labour-saving innovations meant far fewer workers were required for pastoral farming. Older people now retired to urban centres (and better medical services), rather than remaining in on-farm accommodation.

The social division between farm owners and wage workers was still strong (Glendining, 1976; Hall, 1987; Hatch, 1992; Thompson, 1983). The loss of once assured markets when Britain entered the European Economic Community and the dramatic increases in petrol prices in the early 70s hit farm workers and small settlement wage-workers particularly hard, affecting access to social life, employment and services (particularly specialist medical and secondary schooling which were now located in the large urban centres). At that time farm owners could write-off such travel costs as tax expenses, workers could not. Class distinctions continued into the voluntary sector. Farm owners tended to be office holders on most boards and committees, including in local government (Hall, 1987; Mahar, 1985; Melser, Lloyd, Moore, & Levett, 1982).

Small farms continued to amalgamate to remain economic, there was a major consolidation of dairy factories and sale yards, outdated meat-processing plants closed, and government agencies relocated to larger settlements (Glendining, 1978; Melser et al., 1982; Willis, 1982). The more remote hard hill-country areas with gravel roads and difficult access (which should probably never have been developed for pastoral farming), continued to shed people (Kaplan, 1979; Walter, 1979). Background papers to the Land Use Advisory Council's seminar on rural depopulation and resettlement (Barker & Brown, 1980) reiterated a long list of problems and needs of people living in rural districts, such as the lack of adequate all-weather roads to essential

services, inadequate school bus services, unnecessary building restrictions, unavailability of loans for rural housing, and a lack of job opportunities for the wives of rural workers. Women were not encouraged to train for jobs as electricians, builders, painters/decorators, or mechanics, despite the difficulty accessing those services in rural locations.

Development in rural New Zealand was, however, uneven. Despite continuing concerns about rural depopulation, analysis of centres with 500–4,999 people showed more than two-thirds had grown by over 9% between 1971 and 1976, reversing rural decline experienced in the 1960s (Bedford, 1983; Cant, 1980). In some locations rural centre growth was a consequence of "resource development" such as the construction of hydro-electric power stations/dams, petrochemical production, pulp and paper mills, large-scale plantation forestry, horticulture, viticulture and tourism. The construction phases of these resource developments brought short-term economic growth, but also problems for rural districts and small centres. They frequently created housing shortages, overcrowded schools, and environmental degradation. From an economic perspective such development while valuable from a national perspective, was highly problematic (particularly in the short-term) for the local community since once the development finished, jobs disappeared, workers left, and the reduced ratepayer-base struggled to maintain amenities and cope with a diminished range of services (Hunt, Robertson, & Rossi, 1984; Landon, 1982; Little, 1979; Taylor & McClintock, 1984).

Forestry provides a useful case study of resource development impacted by global pricing shifts. While planting of exotic forests began in the 1920s, numbers engaged in forestry were tiny compared to farming, and those engaged in forestry tended to live in district centres, small towns and cities rather than in the dispersed residential patterns displayed in pastoral farming districts (Smith, 1981). Social research literature on forestry and forestry communities is scarce (particularly in comparison to that on farming communities). Exotic forestry for construction timber and especially pulp and paper boomed from the 1950s on the volcanic plateau (Kāingaroa, Bay of Plenty) becoming a key source of employment. Forestry-stimulated colonial invasion saw a population explosion in Murupara from 225 in 1951 to 2,961 in 1971 but this "violated the cultural integrity of Murupara" bringing in new cultural practices and ignoring social norms (Ritchie, 1992, p. 35; Pomeroy & Tapuke, 2016). Forestry was significant on the West Coast in the 1970s, like farming, supporting about 20% of that region's population. However, unlike the "solid core of farmers," mill and forestry workers, while seen as skilled, were regarded as having little interest in the local area (Houghton, 1979, p. 31). Privatisation of state-owned forestry and rationalisation of corporate-owned timber processing in the mid-1980s (and closure of timber processing mills in Westland in the 1990s) resulted in massive redundancies in towns such as Harihari and Murupara. While some Harihari residents were able to take lower paying jobs in tourism or dairying (Sampson, Goodrich, & McManus, 2011), in the Eastern Bay of Plenty, settlements such as Murupara, Minginui and Kāingaroa, built to house forestry workers in the 1950s, lost people and gained beneficiaries[5] as forest-work declined in the late-1980s[6] (Roche, 2008).

While depopulation continued to be a major theme into the 1980s, it became clearer that it was a change in the location and composition of the rural population that was at issue, not population loss per se. The real difficulty was poor communications (party-lines on telephone services, toll calls to service centres, unsealed narrow winding roads and poor television reception), and problems accessing services increasingly only available in the larger urban areas, all of which negatively affected business. Accessing social and government-funded services was made more difficult due to problems complying with government regulations and with complex overlapping administrative boundaries which meant visits to different centres for medical and sometimes educational services (Gilling, 1997; Houghton, 1979). Problems defining rural often meant rural communities' service needs were unrecognised (Reynolds, 2018).

Nevertheless, even before the shift to neoliberalism from 1984, major changes were impacting on rural and minor urban centres. The availability of a stable (female) workforce in small settlements, along with regional development incentives, had drawn manufacturers to small towns post-WW2. The removal of tariff protection and regional assistance in the manufacturing sector in the early 1980s meant these businesses were no longer sustainable. Employment in textiles, clothing and leather, food and beverages, declined and this impacted on rural centres and minor urban areas. For example, Shannon's nylon extrusion factory closed in 1980, and all but one of its other industries had gone by 1987 (McKinnon, 2015), and clothing manufacturers in Hokitika, Greymouth, Westport and Reefton had all closed by 1990 (Pawson & Scott, 1992). Private sector centralisation and restructuring saw the closure of dairy factories and freezing works with major adverse impacts on local communities such as Huntly and Te Kuiti in the Waikato (SIU, 1988; SSC and WUC, 1988). In Taranaki the number of dairy factories dropped from 40 to six between 1968 and 1982 (Willis, 1982). While the merger of dairy companies was a sound economic move for the dairy factory owners, the resultant local unemployment had a flow-on effect weakening local retail and community services (Willis, 1988). Similarly, in Patea (South Taranaki), 70% of the jobs held by Patea residents (predominantly Māori) were at the freezing works and most became unemployed when the works

closed. While some people moved (not necessarily permanently) to urban areas or overseas for work (Melser et al., 1982), others could not sell their homes for a price sufficient to establish elsewhere, or lacked skills and confidence to take new jobs, becoming reliant on benefits (Peck, 1985).

5 | AFTER 1984

Subsidies from the late 1970s to support pastoral production (in the face of falling international prices) inflated land values, and farm-debt rose as interest rates on borrowing increased. Much needed financial adjustments (including devaluation) and removal of all farm support in 1984/1985 left farm businesses caught in a vicious cost/price squeeze at a time when the sector was also being crippled by droughts (Pomeroy, 2015). To prevent a major industry collapse the government encouraged farm-debt restructuring and wrote-off some loans (Walker & Bell, 1994). Few banks foreclosed and despite predictions, relatively few farmers walked off the land (Cloke, 1996; Willis, 2003), although many families were left in difficult circumstances due to the way restructuring took place (Christie, 1991). Drought, lack of stock food and inability to process stock due to freezing works strikes, maximised stress for farmers (Elvidge, 1987; Smith & McMath, 1988), more so than any other factor including the impacts of the 1987 global stock market crash and 1997 Asian financial crisis on primary products' market access (Pomeroy, 2015).

While research attention focused on the farm sector, it was the small service communities that felt the brunt of economic reform when the government switched from a highly protected and controlled economy to neoliberal policies (and withdrawal of regional support) from 1984 (Connelly & Nel, 2017). The response of the farm sector to the loss of subsidies was to immediately cut business and personal/family spending and this impacted on the service community. Walker and Bell (1994) estimated that for each dollar not spent by a farm family, approximately three dollars were no longer available to be spent in rural communities. In addition, state sector restructuring saw over 5,000 people laid-off in rural New Zealand from jobs in forestry (West Coast and Bay of Plenty), the post-office, the railways and coal-mining (Waikato and Southland) often in locations where there was already high unemployment (Boston, 1987; SIU, 1988; SSC, 2013). Mass redundancies meant unemployment in, for example, the rural Far North reached over 30%.

Community facilitation to build employment opportunities in rural areas and small towns undertaken by the Community Employment Group and its predecessors between 1984 and 2004 (when it was disestablished) were durable because based on local resources or amenities, usually in partnership with local iwi. Examples such as the Rodney Tourism and Community Development project (De Bruin, Power, & Toko, 2000) and Kaikoura's Whale Watch (Crozier, 1997) became the nucleus of tourism-based and other enterprise developments and generated new employment opportunities. Local entrepreneurs were also instrumental in encouraging economic diversification, social wellbeing and other traders to their towns (Nel & Stevenson, 2014). While the industries contributing to the economies of these centres were changing, their labour-servicing role did not (Campbell & Fairweather, 1991). Tourism was particularly important in providing new work opportunities and attracting diverse nationalities to work in catering, accommodation and outdoor recreation industries in settlements like Methven, Franz Josef and Ohakune. Urban welfare-beneficiaries were also moving to rural centres and minor urban areas for cheap housing (Waldegrave & Stuart, 1997). Where there was little casual or permanent work available for these newcomers, attitudes towards them tended to be mixed (Wilkinson, 1990). Whether beneficiary or worker, the elitism of "long established" families made it difficult for newcomers to integrate into communities (Scott, Park, Cocklin, & Kearns, 1996). As had been observed nearly a decade earlier, which family a woman married-into was critical in determining into which social networks she would be accepted, particularly in farming circles (Mahar, 1985; Smith & McMath, 1988).

Despite the continuing importance of farming to the economy, numbers engaged in the sector were declining. Newell (2011) identified that the industry mix of jobs held by rural residents continued to shift from agriculture to other industry sectors at successive censuses over the 25-year period (1981–2006) of his study. Using the Statistics New Zealand definition of "rural" as outside centres of 1,000 or more people, Newell found that whereas 49% of jobs held by rural residents in 1981 were in agriculture, by 2006 this figure had dropped to 29% (with a further 3% working in other primary industries). By 2006, the majority of rural people (59%) were employed in the service sector (including building and construction), and 9% worked in the manufacturing sector. There were also more jobs. Newell calculated that jobs in in rural New Zealand increased by around 50% between 1981 and 2006, with a marked increase in female participation in the labour force as it became acceptable for married women to take-up paid work (particularly in the service sector).

Not everyone works where they live. As rural roading improves, more people (from both lifestyle blocks and commercial farms) are commuting to larger urban centres to engage (or re-engage) in non-farm careers. In 2006, around 200,000 jobs were in rural areas, while just over 300,000 jobs were held by rural residents. This indicates that despite rural residents' multiple jobholding and given that urban people also commute to work in rural areas, at least one-third of rural

residents commute from rural locations to work in the cities and secondary urban centres (Newell, 2011; Pomeroy, 2019). Commuting means small centres do not provide many retail goods, such as (fashion) clothing, appliances and furniture. Commuting also means fewer people in the rural areas closest to larger settlements available to engage in local social activities or run voluntary activities (like coaching sports teams or operating local ambulance services), prompting a shift in the social fabric of these communities.

6 | DISCUSSION

The default position which conflates agriculture with rural frequently results in researchers focusing on farming (and pastoral, or more recently, dairy farming) and ignoring the multiplicity of other economic and social activities which occur in rural New Zealand. Reviewing trends over time highlights mistakes made about causes and consequences of perceived trends. This brief essay on rural New Zealand suggests that the growth, development and resilience of rural communities requires attention to and understanding of the diverse range of people living there, as well as to the social divisions between groups. While some were assisted, others were either actively denied support or provided paternalistic support which perpetuated inequalities. Development was top-down, Māori populations side-lined, and tikanga[7] ignored (see Ryks et al., 2019; Riddle and Thompson-Fawcett, 2019, for contemporary discussion of opportunities of better integrating cultural aspirations into development discussions).

The story of rural New Zealand is one of inequality in terms of which groups could access support mechanisms and development policies. Most stark were the treatment of the Māori rural population and the creation of a dual economy (Binney et al., 2014). Pākehā farmers had ready access to mortgages and development loans, enabling them to acquire stock, farm machinery and improved pastures. Māori farmers did not. Māori communities also missed out on key infrastructure like the roads and bridges built to connect Pākehā farmers to their markets.

In 1947, Jacoby (Jacoby, 1947) criticised the government for not addressing problems of social life in farm communities due to its emphasis on agricultural policy. In the 1990s, 50-years later, nothing had changed. Rural Affairs was still located within Agriculture, rural policy still focused on farming. Analysis of rural community change aimed at understanding impacts on agriculture, with little reflection on the situation and outlook for the rest of rural society. Agriculture fed the economy, and being vulnerable to fluctuations in global markets, government policy focused on ameliorating the effects of our exposure to the international marketplace—well before neoliberal policies were implemented. Because government focused on "economic units" amalgamation of hill-country properties (farm enlargement) was correlated with rural depopulation. The value of an expanding small-holder sector (horticulturalists and viticulturalists, part-time/stepping-stone and retiring farmers) was overlooked, as was the contribution of non-farmers to local economies and community resilience. Not depopulation but major shifts in industry and occupational engagement had altered the character of, and social relations within, rural New Zealand (Webber & Rivers, 1992). Having always been vulnerable to global pressures, the real impact of the 1984 change of government on rural communities was the replacement of welfare-state supports with a neoliberal agenda which presumed trickle-down benefit. It was this that "impacted directly on local employment prospects, economic opportunities, and ultimately the viability of many small town and rural communities" (Connelly & Nel, 2017, p. 223). Government sponsored social research which might have been undertaken in the 1990s to build understanding of the growing numbers of wageworkers servicing rural industries like tourism, viticulture, perfume-making and artisan activity, did not happen.

The Rural Communities portfolio restoration within the Ministry of Primary Industry (MPI) in 2017 repeats earlier mistakes. No-one would disagree that: "Healthy and vibrant rural communities are central to the continued success of New Zealand's primary industries" (MPI, 2019), but this is a decidedly narrow view. Vibrant rural communities are essential for the well-being of New Zealand's entire society and economy. MPI is not mandated to work with local government employees, non-farm contract and professional workers, tourism and outdoor-recreation operators, artists, pharmaceutical manufacturers, wine-makers, chefs, and a host of other entrepreneurs, their dependents, and retirees who contribute to the rating base, social structures and economies of rural areas alongside farm owners and farm workers. Currently no agency is. In the absence of a Community Employment Group-type entity, mandated to facilitate rural development and observing social and environmental outcomes alongside economic imperatives, the corrosive effects of structural inequalities remain unaddressed. A Rural Affairs Agency responsible for undertaking research on the full range of rural communities, Māori as well as Pākehā, service, manufacturing and non-farming, would balance national and regional analysis which currently takes no account of sub-regional situations and issues.

Understanding what is happening in rural localities is critical given that "Places are not bounded geographical units, arbitrarily created and independent of social order. Rather they are 'meeting places' of networks of interdependent local, national and global forces" (Pawson & Scott, 1992, p. 375). The economic growth and social wellbeing of rural New Zealand requires understanding of the full range of activities taking place there. Effective policies take account of different value systems to ensure that

entrenched social and political inequalities do not hinder rural development and the viability of rural communities.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Rural districts consist of statistical area units outside settlements of (generally) 300 or more people. When combined the rural districts of territorial authorities often have populations of over 5,000 people, some in the order of 10,000 or more people.

[2] Ironically the British and European colonial "invaders" were products of land clearances (especially in the 1850s), and demise of agricultural and craft (including carpentry) work (1870s), in their own countries.

[3] From information in the *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* Gilling cites the Ruatoki Land Development Scheme in Te Urewera, and notes that four schemes in the Wairarapa were all on difficult country since fertile lands on the flats had been taken by Pākehā settlers (Gilling, 2008:25–29)

[4] Under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act 1915 and a similar act in 1943, the government purchased undeveloped farmland for which eligible returned soldiers could apply to lease, then freehold later. Where there were too many applicants for these "rehab" farms, ballots were held.

[5] Murupara's population dropped from a peak of 3,003 people in 1981 to 2,394 in 1991, then to 1,959 in 2001 and to 1,656 by 2013 following the restructure of the forestry industry. According to the Ngāti Manawa Claims Settlement Act 2012, para 109, by 1993 almost two-thirds of Murupara's population was on a welfare benefit.

[6] This was from a combination of improved mechanisation, closure of indigenous forests to logging (a conservation measure), and deregulation on the back of poor international prices, which saw the sale of government-owned forests (but not the land) to private, often international investors.

[7] Tikanga means culture, customs, traditions, values (i.e., the practical codes of conduct that come from the dawn of time and permeate all aspects of life).

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