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The Institutionalisation of Geography in New Zealand: an interpretation

Thesis submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Geography
Massey University

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For Sue

You encouraged me to begin university all those years ago

You put the children to bed all those nights while I was at uni

And you never once complained

Your total unselfishness as a wife and mother continues to amaze me

Dedicating this to you is just a small way of saying

thanks ♥

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANZAAS	Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science
AUC	Auckland University College
BOGT	Board of Geography Teachers
BRP	Bachelor of Regional Planning
CUC	Canterbury University College
DSIR	Division of Scientific and Industrial Research
GRC	Geography Resource Centre
IGU	International Geographical Union
MU	Massey University
NGCC	National Geography Curriculum Committee
NZGS	New Zealand Geographical Society
NZPD	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PNUC	Palmerston North University College
PPTA	Post Primary Teachers Association
RSES	Research School of Earth Sciences
SCEB	School Certificate Examination Board
UEB	University Entrance Board
UGC	University Grants Committee
VUC	Victoria University College
VUW	Victoria University of Wellington

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ABSTRACT

When geography, as an abstract form of knowledge, becomes identified with a set of practices involving agents, it assumes a coherent structural form and may be said to have become institutionalised. Institutionalisation, however, is a process in which the interactions between structures and agents continue to evolve through contest.

An epochal account of academic geography supports any understanding of what has taken place in New Zealand geography because it legitimates a theoretical placement of geographical inquiry in the setting of global capitalism. Critical institutional theory, as an analytical tool, is propelled by the focusing questions of 'Why?' 'For Whom?' and 'To Whose Advantage'? It is naive to assume that the overall conduct of institutional life is anything but a contested process, the site of ideological, methodological, personal and administrative differences. To complete the theoretical discussion, the need to elicit a processual account of institutionalising phenomena mandates a consideration of oral history as a legitimate research form.

As part of the educational agenda in New Zealand since the 1840s when the first European settlers arrived, geography first became institutionalised in the high schools in the late 19th Century, reflecting the political and educational agendas of the time. The discourse on the institutionalisation of high school geography coincides with the later trajectory of university geography which took effect with the establishment of the first Department of Geography at Canterbury University College in 1937. Since then, the form and practice of geography have gone through considerable change. The perceived need to achieve ideological and methodological conformity affected both high school and university geography, providing a setting for some of the major contests in New Zealand geography. A documentation of 'how and why' change takes place and an insight into the underlying circumstances in contested matters, enables an understanding of the processes involved. It is only when one understands the milieu in which geography is set, that it is possible to articulate reasons for change.

Geography in New Zealand grew to maturity, primarily through the six university departments. The activities of the agents working within the structural conditions of the university environment, reveal how the departments, individually and in concert, have been the sites of the more significant institutionalising activities, including the contemporary debates relating to feminist approaches and a sensitivity to a Maori

perspective in geography. The community of academic and professional geographers have interacted with each other and with the larger sphere of society in the institutionalising actions by which this thesis measures institutionalisation. Reinforcing theory with practice, by revisiting the conditions of the structure and agency relationship, is essential to understanding institutionalisation which not only probes how geographical practice in New Zealand was initiated but how and why it is has been continuously reproduced and transformed. Apprehending this process suggests that the agents within New Zealand geography may benefit from an institutional appraisal of their discipline. A theoretically informed view of the way the discipline evolved, provides clues about conduct of future geographical practice.