

Summary of "One Way Ticket to New Zealand" MA -thesis - Auckland 1998 [continued and end]

Autor(en): **Baumer, Helen**

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Summary of "ONE WAY TICKET TO NEW ZEALAND"

MA -thesis - Auckland 1998
by HELEN BAUMER

Part 2; with permission to print from Helen Baumer.

In the nineties, many more individuals are leaving Switzerland because of a perceived lack of freedom or space, or occasionally because of misgivings about the political situation, in particular the role of banks. Restrictions and lack of freedom in Switzerland were mentioned by 12 people interviewed in my study, six of them emigrants of the nineties.

Without prompting, for of the interviewees made explicit comments to the effect that they had never belonged in Switzerland. For instance, a French-speaker who emigrated in the eighties said: "Deep inside me was something in Switzerland that did not agree with me," and a German-speaking emigrant of the sixties said: "Even as a small boy I had the impression I'd been born in the wrong country".

- But why did emigrants choose New Zealand? In a great number of cases, those interviewed in my study cited factors such as New Zealand's climate, natural beauty, sea, space, the easy going way of life. Consideration such as better job opportunities or housing were mentioned less frequently.

- Interestingly, many interviewees said New Zealand had not been their first choice. Many of them had given preference to Australia, in particular. All but one of these were immigrants of the eighties or nineties. Six interviewees, almost all of them immigrants of the fifties and sixties, would have chosen the USA. All in all, almost half the sample had given preference to another



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country before choosing New Zealand.

A large number had accompanied New Zealand spouses or partners, a category which accounted for almost a quarter of the sample.

- Which part of the country have recent migrants favoured? Swiss Embassy figures show that by far the largest concentration of Swiss is to be found in the Auckland district, which has been the main area of settlement since the Second World War. At 927 in June 1997, the number of Swiss in Auckland is more than twice as large as anywhere else in the country. The Waikato and Wellington areas both number between 300 and 400 Swiss. Taranaki is now home to over 200 Swiss.

- The second part of my study looked at the integration of New Zealand Swiss in their adopted country, particularly in view of the fact that for so many post-war migrants New Zealand was not first choice. Interestingly, of those that migrated to New Zealand, only five of the entire sample had tried resettling in Switzerland. Looking at homesickness, too, fewer than 30 percent said they had ever felt homesick. Women were far more prone to homesickness: two thirds of women had experienced homesickness and only 14 % of men. Overall, French-speakers in both Australia and New Zealand experienced less homesickness than German-speakers.

- A clear majority of Swiss settling in New Zealand - over 60 % - were impressed or even overwhelmed by the welcome they received by New Zealand people. Only 23 % had difficulty with the New Zealand mentality, and in many cases this was just a matter of becoming accustomed to the laid-back, informal approach of New Zealanders. However, many Swiss found the type of friendship in New Zealand to be less satisfying, less deep, than what they were used to with Swiss. 23 % of the people I talked to said all three of their best friends had been born in Switzerland, while only 12 % replied that their

three best friends had all been born in New Zealand. A large number said their best friends came from other migrant groups.

- New Zealand Swiss in the sample very much liked the New Zealand way of life - the nature, climate, freedom, space and lifestyle of the country. These factors were mentioned by a majority of the interview sample, over 60 %. There were some disappointments and difficulties: shoddy goods and lack of consumer choice in the earlier decades, New Zealand's failure to live up to its clean-green image as well as perceived educational shortcomings in recent years. The greatest difficulties encountered by New Zealand Swiss were in the socio-cultural field. Many Swiss in New Zealand found they missed Swiss food, in particular. 40 % told me they visited Swiss butchers occasionally while 33 % made occasional visits to genuine Swiss bakers.

- Apart from culinary tastes and friendships, a number of the Swiss I spoke to had retained their Swiss mother tongue within the family. Indeed in a couple of cases the use of Swiss German had persisted into the third generation. It was also striking how many second generation Swiss had made a point of travelling to Switzerland on their own, as youngsters or as adults, to visit or to work. At least five children had spent time in Switzerland as adolescents, attending Swiss schools. In at least seven cases, second generation Swiss had lived and worked in Switzerland. One daughter, for instance, had worked in a bank in Switzerland, and met her Swiss husband there. The couple now lives in New Zealand. In a further three cases, children were actually working in Switzerland at the time the interviews were conducted, one doing a bank apprenticeship and another working in a university library. All in all, independent visits to Switzerland had taken place in 15 of the 32 families analysed.

- Almost a quarter of Swiss families in New Zealand spoke mainly Swiss German, but there

were no French-speaking or Italian-speaking families where the Swiss language predominated, probably because none of the French-speakers or Italian-speakers were married to Swiss. In fact, partnerships amongst New Zealand Swiss would appear to indicate a high level of assimilation into New Zealand society, with a 'mixed marriage' factor - marriage to a non-Swiss in New Zealand - of 82.4 %, a very high figure in comparison to other studies of migrant groups. Figures obtained in studies of Australian immigrant groups show the 'mixed marriage' factor amongst Australian Swiss to be high too, higher indeed than any non-English-speaking immigrant group and comparable to that for British immigrants.

- All in all, I noted a high level of integration amongst New Zealand Swiss, as evidenced by factors such as partnerships, use of language and identification with the New Zealand way of life. At the same time, most have retained elements of Swiss culture and maintain contacts with the 'home' country.

- I asked all the Swiss I spoke to whether they felt more Swiss or more Kiwi, and the response made by an immigrant who settled in the Waikato in the fifties serves as a good summary of the feelings of many: "Emotionally we feel we are both; both are completely mingled. We are proud of our Swiss origins. We are also very happy that we have committed ourselves to New Zealand; we want to live here and die here. Probably we are still more Swiss than New Zealanders. We have one foot in New Zealand and one foot in Switzerland."

The Editor and his team are grateful for this condensed summary of Helen Baumer's Thesis and congratulate her on her comprehensive study.



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