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**Contemporary Ritual-Makers: A Study of  
Independent Celebrants in New Zealand**

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## ***Abstract***

Ritual-makers' roles as religious specialists with unique expertise on the rituals of their particular societies' religions and cultures have been studied closely by anthropologists, but less well understood is how ritual-makers operate in contemporary western societies, taking into account their postmodern characteristics and influences, increasing heterogeneity, and wide diversity of spiritual and cultural traditions, beliefs, influences, and practices. This study re-examines what being a ritual-maker means, based on participant observation and oral histories with independent celebrants in New Zealand.

Independent celebrants are one group of contemporary ritual-makers who ritualise in private contexts, operating as functionaries who are experts in the processes of ritual-making rather than religious specialists. Independent celebrants' primary focus is to devise rituals that reflect the significance and meanings their clients attribute to life transitions they choose to mark ritually. There are approximately two thousand independent celebrants in New Zealand facilitating commonly marked rites of passage, including half of all marriages and an estimated similar proportion of funerals, as well as a broad range of other ceremonies including civil unions, namings, ceremonies of commitment, remembrance ceremonies marking death and loss, healing ceremonies, and seasonal celebrations. Individualism is central to these independent celebrants' values, attitudes, rituals, and practices. In responding to clients' needs and expectations, celebrants create rituals which enact and convey both the continuity of traditions according to culturally-determined expectations along with current personalised meanings.

Growing secularism was partly behind the emergence of this group of celebrants from the late 1970s onwards, as civil marriage and secular funeral celebrants responded to demands for non-religious alternatives to the mainly Christian denominational ceremonies predominant at that time. However, in examining spirituality as it relates to independent celebrants now, rites of passage can be seen as being often richly spiritual, reflecting the personal spiritualities of clients and to an extent those of the individual celebrants with whom clients choose to work. Within

celebrants' dynamic ritual-making practices, these ritual-makers take an active role in changing ritual traditions as they go about their work of honouring and accommodating the diverse and changing spiritualities of New Zealanders.

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# ***1 Introduction***

Ritual-makers' roles as religious specialists with unique expertise on their particular societies' religious rituals have been studied closely by anthropologists. However there has not been so much attention, yet, to how ritual-makers operate in contemporary western societies. This study of a group of ritual-makers at work in a contemporary context re-examines what being a ritual-maker means, based on participant observation and oral histories with independent celebrants in New Zealand. The study investigates independent celebrants as ritual-makers, their perspectives on their work, and the rituals they create and perform. As well as exploring the nature of the contemporary rites of passage independent celebrants commonly lead, this study shows how celebrants employ client-centred, dynamic processes of ritual-making to create and adapt rituals. Individualism is central to these independent celebrants' values, attitudes, and practices. Independent celebrants create rituals which enact and convey both current personalised meanings (their own and their clients') along with the continuity of traditions according to culturally determined expectations. Describing how the changing nature of the celebrant-led ritual relates to changes in New Zealand society provides a fresh angle from which to reflect on New Zealanders' diverse range of spiritual values and beliefs which underlie many contemporary rites of passage. An examination of the unique history and development of this type of ritual-making also provides insights into the nature and changing patterns of ritual and underlying values and beliefs in contemporary New Zealand society. Many people still choose to celebrate important transitions in their lives in more traditional contexts, particularly in Christian churches with ordained clergy performing the ceremony. This thesis does not deal with this area of ritual and ceremony. Its focus is specifically on ceremonies conducted outside the traditional contexts of Church or Registry Office.

This study contributes to ritual theory in several areas. It provides a new way of understanding the role of ritual-maker, one who operates in a contemporary, western, pluralist society as a functionary with expertise in ritual-making. Unlike the ritual-makers discussed in classic ritual theory, these ritual-makers are not characterised as having cultural religious authority, they are not assumed to have supernatural

connections, nor is their ritual-making knowledge held exclusive from the ritual participants they perform it for. Secondly, the study reinforces the important interpersonal, social functions of ritual. In this contemporary context where societal and religious norms do not require that everyone engages in rituals, there are ritual-makers who are responsive to the demands of people who do. Some people choose to mark a range of rites of passage, and these can be seen as generative of individual identities and collective culture. Thirdly, this study reflects on unique aspects of contemporary ritual as it is described by independent celebrants who lead some of those rituals and so provides an angle from which to consider aspects of contemporary New Zealand spirituality and culture.

The people at the centre of the study are independent celebrants, who are one group of contemporary ritual-makers who ritualise in private contexts, and who are skilled in the processes of ritual-making and performance. Independent celebrants' primary focus is to devise rituals that reflect the significance and meanings their clients attribute to life transitions they choose to mark ritually. Independent celebrancy is well established in New Zealand and continues to grow. There are approximately two thousand independent celebrants in New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> Key groups of independent celebrants are registered marriage celebrants, registered civil union celebrants, and funeral celebrants, and some celebrants are involved in several types of ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> To officiate at marriages and civil unions, celebrants are required to be registered independent marriage celebrants and registered civil union celebrants respectively. There is no registration requirement for funeral or other celebrants. Independent celebrants facilitate commonly marked rites of passage, including nearly half of all marriages (Department of Internal Affairs, 2005) and an estimated similar proportion

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<sup>1</sup> In 2010 there were 1631 independent celebrants (Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, 2010, personal communication). Added to this number are civil union celebrants (one third of the 613 civil union celebrants are not marriage celebrants), and those involved in other ceremonies. See p111 for further details.

<sup>2</sup> Civil union is a legally recognised commitment made between same sex and opposite sex couples which came into effect in New Zealand in April 2005, following the Civil Union Act 2004. New Zealand couples in a civil union are subject to the same legal rights and obligations in relation to immigration, next-of-kin status, social welfare, and matrimonial property as couples who are married or in de-facto partnerships.

of funerals, as well as a broad range of other ceremonies including civil unions and namings.<sup>3</sup>

There is a larger group of organisational marriage celebrants (7,831 in 2010), comprising mainly religious celebrants, who officiate at 35 per cent of marriages as well as some funerals and other ceremonies (e.g. baptisms). Organisational celebrants' ways of ritual-making are not necessarily dissimilar to those of independent celebrants. In the case of organisational marriage celebrants, it is the organisation not the person that is registered under the Marriage Act, and the organisation decides, on the basis of its own criteria, which members can solemnise marriages and the form those ceremonies may take. Registrars of marriages who are local government employees officiate at 18 per cent of marriages. Organisational marriage celebrants and registrars of marriage are outside the scope of this study. Consequently use of the term 'celebrant' in this text refers to independent celebrants, unless otherwise specified.

Early anthropological ritual theory emphasised how ritual and religion shaped people's understanding of the world and preserved stability and order amongst cultural groups (Bell 1997), and mainly derived from cultures comprised of a single ethnic group where religious and social life were closely intertwined. For example, Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) was based on indigenous inhabitants of Mexico and the United States; Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1965) drew primarily on Australian Aboriginal peoples; Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* (1922) was about the religious and social structures of a relatively isolated, island tribal people in the Indian Ocean. Many of the more recent influential ritual theorists' works, too, are based on research carried out in cultural contexts quite distant from New Zealand. For example, Victor Turner's earlier works such as *The Ritual Process* (1969) is based on fieldwork among the Ndembu of Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Schechner's *Performance Theory* (1994) examines ritual dances from Highland Papua New Guinea. Attention was directed towards ritual's function as perpetuating beliefs, the maintenance of tradition, or a means to maintain social control. For example, Tylor's (1871) intellectualist approach emphasised how

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<sup>3</sup> Publicly available statistics on the numbers of ceremonies officiated by independent celebrants relate to marriages and civil unions only. See page 106 for further discussion.

ritual's carefully prescribed structure and repetition helped maintain order by showing the way things were meant to be done, Radcliffe-Brown (1945) stressed the social function of ritual as a means for the establishment and preservation of the social order, Durkheim's (1965 [1915]) symbolist approach highlighted the nature of ritual as being expressive of the social order of societies, Geertz, from a structural perspective regarded religion as a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence (1973: 90). These different approaches shared in common an emphasis on the importance of belief over ritual. Their focus was on understanding how ritual served long-lasting relatively stable cultural phenomena, such as religion. Ritual, then, was primarily enactment of religious beliefs and principles, a means of social control and conformity, or a reflection of traditional, slow-changing, cultural or religious context.

Later ritual theory shifted towards how ritual relates to social life, function, and structure and as a form of cultural communication (Bell, 1997). Instead of seeing ritual purely in terms of preserving or enacting stable sets of religious beliefs, ritual practice came to be regarded as significant in itself, thereby emphasising the creative or revolutionary aspect of ritual. Ritual is the dramatic, expressive, embodied performance of sacred moments and transitions. Ritual, therefore, can be viewed both in terms of what it means, expressing beliefs and values around important life transitions, as symbolic of our communities and cultures, and also by what it does, as transformative, a process by which people construct, create, and modify their identity and social relationships with their community or society. From the 1960s ritual studies extended to the exploration of ritual in non-religious settings, with theories grounded in the perceptions and experiences of ritual participants. Notions of ritual as a distinct phenomenon with a fixed set of criteria by which it could be identified and defined were superseded by the notion of ritual as a characteristic, or mode of interaction and communication.

Two strong theoretical themes introduced in the latter part of the 20th century are around ritual as a form of cultural communication, and ritual as performance. Moore and Myerhoff (1977) concentrated their work on ritual in non-religious settings, studying ritual separately from the belief systems enacted through it, and focusing on

ways in which ceremony and ritual were used in the secular affairs of life in urban, mobile, 20th-century western societies to lend authority and legitimacy to people, organisations, moral values, and views of the world. Myerhoff regarded ritual's function as a 'frame' and she likened ritual's framing feature to Durkheim's (1965 [1915]) concept of the sacred as the 'set apart'. Moore and Myerhoff described ritual as a medium with formal properties (repetition, stylisation, ordering, evocative presentational style and staging, acting, and the collective dimension of ritual) which have the power to traditionalise messages (1977: 7-8). They referred to the active process of 'ritualization', by which people 'structure and present particular interpretations of social reality in a way which endows them with legitimacy' (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977: 3-4). Moore and Myerhoff's works brought a critical component into the theory by identifying that rituals can have multiple, contradictory, and contested meanings.

A large body of ritual theory has developed with regard to ritual as a form of communication and ritualising as a performative, and transformative, mode of action, several of which are relevant to the contemporary rites of passage which are at the centre of this study. Tambiah (1981) described ritual as being a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication, as collective or communal enactment devoted to the achievement of a particular objective, and as involving an awareness that the event is differentiated from ordinary everyday events (1981: 119-124). Drawing from communications theory, he saw ritual as 'constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterised in varying degrees by formality, stereotypy, condensation, and redundancy' (Tambiah, 1981: 119). Tambiah saw ritual as performance in so much that participants stage it to experience events intensively (1981: 119) and also as an 'instrument of passage' participants use to support, focus, and transport them in their separation from ordinary daily life (1981: 140-142). This perspective focuses not just in the constituent 'parts' of ritual, but in the convergence and interplay of these parts of the form. Ritual, Tambiah felt, needed also to be understood as a total, single, experience of 'dramatic actualization', of 'heightened and intensified and fused communication' (1981: 140).

Rappaport's (1979) approach was similar to those of Moore and Myerhoff and Tambiah in that it focused on ritual format as well as function. In this manner of isolating the overall structure and functional characteristics of ritual, Grimes (1990) identified ritual modes which he saw as varying from ritual to ritual depending on the desired function of ritual in a particular context: ritualisation, decorum, ceremony, magic, liturgy, and celebration. The purpose of modes was to acknowledge the breadth of what different rituals comprised and also that their very nature could vary depending on the interests and intentions of those who were ritual-making (Grimes, 1995). Further developing Turner's (1974, 1982) theory of ritual as drama, Schechner (1973, 2003) examined closely the performative, dramatic aspects of ritual. Schechner saw ritual as sharing many of the fundamental characteristics of drama, play, and theatre, concentrating on the transformation of people and crisis or conflict resolution. By the end of the 20th century ritual had come to be regarded as a form of cultural communication that transmitted the cognitive categories and dispositions that provide people with important aspects of their sense of reality (Bell, 1997: 2). Bell refers to ritual as expressive of paradigmatic values concerning death and rebirth; ritual as a mechanism for bringing individuals into the community and establishing a social entity; and ritual as a process which can effect social transformation, for catharsis, for embodying symbolic values, for defining the nature of what is real, and for struggling for control of the sign (Bell, 1997: 89).

Twenty-first century ritual theory centres on the experiences and meanings individuals connect to it and the ways in which people who are active agents consciously utilise ritual as a particular form of interaction and cultural expression. Kapferer (2004), for example, argued for a change of emphasis from ritual performance analysis to one of seeking to understand the experience and meaning of ritual by looking at the dynamics of how people construct their rituals (2004: 20-21). A perspective of ritual as a fixed thing has been superseded by the view of ritual as a constantly changing and renewing process of 'embodied and communal enactment' (Grimes, 2000:5). Seligman, Weller, Puet, and Simon emphasise rituals as 'different forms of self-expression and of individual authenticity' (2008: 10). Kapferer (2004) describes ritual as a means by which people explicitly intervene and transform their own situations. Through the virtuality of ritual, in Kapferer's view, people are able to slow down the tempo of everyday life and adjust, restore, or introduce new elements,

thereby readjusting the dynamics of ordinary lived processes (2004: 16-18). Grimes (2006) reflects on issues of boundaries and contested meanings of rituals when it is in different spaces and being utilised and studied by various interested parties in the media and in western universities where it is frequently taught and studied. Grimes defines ritual according to how people in these powerful and increasingly globalised settings use it socially, personally, and creatively to protect and preserve, or bridge, cognitive and cultural domains (Grimes, 2006: 12).

## **Contemporary New Zealand**

How well does existing theory explain celebrant-led ritual? Some aspects of the theory derived from different cultural contexts are applicable to western, contemporary settings as aspects of cultures including rituals can be universal, and cross-cultural comparison of ritual reveals many conceptual commonalities. For example, Levi-Strauss (1960) showed that different cultures' myths have much in common and elements transfer and transform over time. In ritual theory, enduring elements from classic works such as Turner's (1967, 1974, 1982) are relevant to contemporary western ritual. Turner compared rituals across different cultures in order to identify common features. Some theorists set out explicitly to develop widely applicable frameworks for interpreting ritual and cast widely across many cultures to understand similarities and patterns. Rites of passage are a particular subset of ritual, concerned with how people frame, mark, and traditionalise important changes in our lives, and van Gennep's (1960) theory provides the landmark which underpins how rites of passage are understood today. It is rites of passage that celebrants are mainly involved in facilitating. Van Gennep's cross-cultural framework for understanding life transition rituals was developed from analysis of a wide range of rituals to discern an underlying structure. He saw rites of passage as a universal structuring device by which people ritually mark collective or individual life transitions.

The three-part ritual structure identified one hundred years ago has been widely embraced by contemporary western ritual-makers, including independent celebrants in New Zealand. I found it being utilised as a template for ritual design in contemporary settings. The eclectic mix of ritual elements, symbols, and traditions

selected from a variety of cultural contexts and remade into pastiche contemporary ceremonies was very commonly built around van Gennep's framework.

The particular local cultural and historical elements of the context within which celebrants lead rites of passage are not fully incorporated in to existing ritual theory, however. It is essential to take into account New Zealand's unique socio-cultural setting and the ways these ritual-makers (independent celebrants) work since contemporary, western settings are different from traditional ones in important ways, and as well, there are features unique to 21st-century New Zealand which impact fundamentally on the nature of ritual. In traditional contexts, for example, there tends to be a shared religion to which everyone adheres; ritual-makers frequently work on behalf of an entire community, not particular individuals within it; traditional ritual-makers hold exclusive expertise on the rites of their own religion and culture, and their unique role within their communities is to provide appropriate ritual which reinforces shared beliefs. Unlike the situation in traditional contexts, in contemporary western societies such as New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States of America, not everyone conforms to the same world-views or religious belief. New Zealand has never been a society where everyone was expected to adhere to the same system of belief. More so now than ever before, there is a multiplicity of world-views and religions within New Zealand society. Processes of migration, transnationalism, intercultural relationships, and globalisation contribute to this increasing complexity and variety. This means people can know about a variety of different ritual practices and cultural traditions, and freedom to practise these is taken for granted. The implications for contemporary ritual-makers are twofold. Firstly, ritual-makers are a diverse group in terms of their own belief allegiances and practices. Secondly, ritual-makers do not necessarily share the same world-view or religion as people in their communities and people for whom they are creating and performing rituals.

Unlike traditional contexts where ritual-makers work on behalf of the collective community, this group of contemporary western ritual-makers are accountable, foremost, to their individual clients. They are paid directly by their clients, and commercial market models explain some of the dynamics between ritual-makers and clients. Clients have considerable influence over the meanings expressed in the

rituals created for them by celebrants, rather than the meanings being determined by the wider community. Each individual, couple, or family who opts to ritualise aspects of a life transition expects to be able to specify the role for ritual for that occasion and have their personally selected beliefs and meanings built into the ritual led by the ritual-makers whose services they have hired. People's motives for what they wish ritual to reflect and what function they intend it to fulfil range in nature across secular, religious, spiritual, or social orientations and reflect combinations of beliefs, values, and traditions from a variety of sources.

The relative homogeneity, stability, and conformity which characterised Pakeha society culturally until the latter half of the 20th century was superseded rapidly by more multicultural and diverse values and practices, particularly from the 1970s onwards.<sup>4</sup> With the substantial freedoms which emerged from the countercultural era of the 1960s and 1970s, the declining influence of the church over rites of passage, the apparent growth in people's interest in exploring new forms of personal religious and spiritual expression, the situation now is a complicated and diverse one. New Zealand has experienced a rapidly growing and increasingly ethnically diverse population in over the last 40 years to a position where the society now comprises people who identify with a diverse range of ethnicities, religious and cultural traditions, spiritual preferences, beliefs, and lifestyles (Boston, Callister, & Wolf, 2006: xiii). The diverse and changing spiritualities are relevant to individuals' identities and their personalised rituals. Independent celebrants navigate amongst all of this. No longer do they have the role of upholding and perpetuating traditions in terms of religious beliefs or ritual forms. They must fit in with the changes whilst navigating a safe, respectful path that honours the diversity and satisfies clients.

## **Thesis**

This research has shown that individualism plays a central role in the values, attitudes, and practices of this group of contemporary ritual-makers. Traditionally the role of ritual-makers has been emphasised as one relating to the maintenance and

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<sup>4</sup> Pakeha refers to New Zealanders of European descent (Treaty Resource Centre, 2007: 78). See (Bayard, 1995: 151-162) for a discussion of the term Pakeha.

continuity of stable ritual traditions. Theorists in the nineteenth century such as Tylor, in the twentieth century such as Radcliffe-Brown, Durkheim, through to Clifford Geertz in the 1970s understood the performance of rituals as primarily centred on upholding and perpetuating religious beliefs and stable cultural norms. Rites of passage are one type of ritual, and are the focus of the work of the ritual-makers in this study. Van Gennep (1960) theorised rites of passage as organised events in which societies took people by the hand and led them through inevitable life transitions, and I show how the emphasis is different in contemporary contexts where individuals have greater choice and authority over ritual meanings.

The scope of my research extended to: understanding the role of the ritual-makers and how they constructed their cultural identities and community, examining the function these ritual-makers fulfil in a western, pluralist, multicultural society, exploring ritual-makers' own thoughts and feelings about their work and how they do it, and consideration of issues of secularism and spiritualism in ritual, remembering that independent celebrants emerged in New Zealand in the late 1970s partly based on their offering alternatives to the mainly Christian denominational rites of passage which were commonly practised then. The study is significant because it provides a fresh perspective on the role of ritual-maker, one who operates as a functionary, and who has expertise in the processes of creating as well as performing ritual. It is significant also because it reinforces the important interpersonal, social function of rites of passage. These rites convey personalised meanings, be these secular, spiritual, religious, or, typically, eclectic combinations of these. The study is also significant because it reveals that despite the diversity implied in everyone having individualised rituals, there are commonalities in the cultural and spiritual themes they contain: Christianity is one, and the other is to do with the significance and spiritual links many people feel for the land. Characteristics of the study are that it provides a contemporary New Zealand flavour to ritual theory, and, by analysing the phenomenon of independent celebrants as ritual-makers, it departs slightly from the common anthropological approach of making the rituals themselves the central focus of study. Independent celebrants' rituals do not by definition differ radically from those of other ritual makers such as clergy, nowadays. But this has not always been the case.

Independent celebrants have a unique history and this research adds to this history both through this thesis and also through the oral histories collected. Key contributions of the study are in the following four areas.

Firstly, it provides support for understanding ritual in line with contemporary theorists (including Grimes 1990, 2000) who show it as a spiritual technology which individuals employ, where ritual is a form of self expression and means of establishing individual authenticity (Seligman 2008), and a means by which people explicitly intervene and transform their own situations (Kapferer 2004). Interestingly it is not essentially different from how contemporary religious ritual is sometimes discussed, for example by Salomonsen's (2003) Pagans and Christians reclaiming and reinventing ritual, and Sered's (2005) Jewish people's flexible and innovative ritual-making which was accompanied by a concurrent, tenacious concern for tradition.

Secondly, in a diverse and fast-changing social and cultural context, ritual-makers are not proponents of one fixed worldview, set of values, or system of belief. Like everyone, ritual-makers are individuals with unique characteristics. One implication for researchers is to be careful not to assume or attribute undue cohesiveness, stability, or homogeneity to ritual-makers. Applying this to the work of Schafer (2005), for instance, who showed secular funeral celebrants as articulating bio-power over their clients through their pastoral role as an extension of the funeral directing industry, this raises a question about how to account for the diversity and variation amongst secular funeral celebrants, their own ethics and the autonomy they hold within the ritual-making relationship.

Thirdly, somewhat in contrast to how ritual-makers have traditionally been portrayed in anthropology, my research has shown ritual-makers' primary role as functional. They are agents of their clients first and foremost. Also, in some instances, and perhaps inevitably, the values and beliefs of individual ritual-makers can be seen as impacting on the rituals they create and perform.

Fourthly, my study underlines the importance of interpreting ritual holistically, as an interconnected whole (Myerhoff, 1979), not merely in terms of its constituent parts.

Performance theory approaches from the 1970s (e.g. Turner) through to the 1990s (e.g. Schechner) asserted this. My research affirmed Kapferer's (2004) approach as insightful. He advocated for a 'back of house' behind the scenes strategy, in order to discourage theorists from over-emphasising interpretation of ritual performance in its finished form and polished enactment. In my research I found this useful, attempting to pay careful attention to the dynamics of how ritual-makers approach their work and how the various parties work together to influence the ritual construction, the processes, tensions and negotiations involved. It can also be seen as a response to Bell's (1992) statement that the role of the ritual experts was more widespread, dynamic, and complicated than theoretical models were reflecting. Also, Collins (1998) spoke of the need to differentiate between various parties' expectations and interpretations of ritual. This study provides a partial perspective in this regard, from the perspective of the ritual-makers themselves.

This thesis argues that independent celebrants as ritual makers are actively engaged in changing ritual traditions. Their role is no longer simply one of performing and perpetuating religious traditions or ritual forms. It is to create rituals that satisfy the demands and honour the diversity of their clients' personal spiritualities, to prioritise individuals' values and preferences. Furthermore, I argue that these ritual-makers are further blurring, or destabilising, the theoretical distinctions between what is secular, spiritual, and religious. The nature of the rites of passage they trade in is first and foremost secular. However they are often also richly spiritual, resonating with the diverse personal spiritualities of clients. These rituals commonly contain elements, sometimes intentional, sometime not, of the strong Christian pluralist heritage and affiliations of many New Zealanders. Spirituality is integrated into people's overall identities and worldviews, and so is inseparable from the ritual-making relationship.

## **International context**

In societies where there has been a trend away from strong affiliations with religious institutions and many people identify as being non-religious, those people do not necessarily feel less need for ritual expression of life transitions (Kimball, 1975; te Haar, 2005: 166). Certainly in the New Zealand situation, independent celebrants emerged as ritual-makers in a relatively secular context. Here I consider how the

experience in New Zealand compares with similar societies and explore whether New Zealanders were involved with, or impacted by, developments elsewhere.

The modern, western, secularising socio-cultural context surrounding the emergence of civil marriage celebrants and secular funeral celebrants in Australia was similar in many ways to New Zealand's. In the 20th century, up until the 1960s, religious celebrants were most frequently chosen as celebrants by Australian couples who were getting married.<sup>5</sup> Australia preceded New Zealand in terms of the establishment of (independent) civil marriage celebrants. Australian civil marriage celebrants were first appointed in 1973 (Cant, 2009: 18) and a professional body, the *Association of Marriage Celebrants in Australia*, was formed in 1974. The legislative changes which created the option for celebrant-led civil marriages are largely attributed to the work of Senator Lionel Murphy, who was then Attorney General in the federal government (Messenger, 1992: 160). Murphy's reason for supporting the civil celebrant programme was to give couples seeking civil weddings freedom of choice, and to ensure couples were given ceremonies with substance, meanings, and dignity (Cant, 2009: 15). Messenger reflected on Murphy's reason as being 'because of the arts, because he was appalled at the total lack of beauty in the "ceremony", as then executed by the Registry Office. It was so dry, legal, rote, and assembly-lined that it stripped the participants, in his words, of "human dignity"' (Messenger, 2001). Civil celebrant weddings quickly became popular, and some civil marriage celebrants were also asked to conduct funerals, by people they had previously married. The role of funeral celebrant was gradually established (Walter 1990 in Schafer 1998: 218). Australian secular funeral celebrants feature in academic literature on death (Griffin & Tobin, 1997; Walter, 1990); however, research has yet to emerge which centres on celebrants as a group of ritual-makers and their distinct approaches, and accounts for the breadth of ceremony and ritual they lead. The most comprehensive descriptions of their work are non-academic publications by practising celebrants (Messenger, 1979, 1992; Cant, 2009).

A similar socio-cultural context and similar legal framework allow Australian and New Zealand marriage celebrants and funeral celebrants to operate freely in

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<sup>5</sup> In 1908, 97 per cent of Australian marriages were performed by ministers of religion and 3 per cent by registrars. In 1969, 89 per cent of Australian marriages were performed by ministers of religion and 11 per cent by registrars (Qu & Parker, 2007: 9).

accordance with the ritual and ceremonial requests of their clients. There is also a history of close relationships, and considerable interaction between some of the pioneer celebrants who were emerging around the same time in both countries. Interactions included communication, visits and sharing of knowledge and experiences. As a result of the mutual influences between Australian and New Zealand celebrants on each others' work, there were many similarities in the ways in which the field of celebrancy developed in both countries, and in the actual ceremonies performed. One of the first celebrants appointed by Murphy, Messenger was influential in the development of civil celebrancy in Australia as well as in New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. In his celebrant work since the early 1970s Messenger has conducted a large number and wide range of ceremonies, delivered conference papers in Australia and abroad on the Australian experience, been active in the establishment and development of civil celebrant professional bodies (for example *The Funeral Celebrants Association of Australia* which was formed in 1977), advocated on issues of pre-registration entry requirements and training for celebrants, provided training and professional development to celebrants (through directing educational programmes in the *Australian College of Celebrancy* and the *International College of Celebrancy*), and made available resources and information via publications and websites. His book *Ceremonies for Today* (1979) became an important reference for civil celebrants in Australia (Schäfer 1998: 10). This book was the first published guide widely available for celebrants in New Zealand.

Messenger developed close relationships and shared his knowledge with New Zealand counterparts when independent celebrancy was in its early days, and is considered by celebrants to be influential in how ceremonies were devised. In his dissertation on the development of secular funeral celebrancy in New Zealand, Schäfer concluded that the 'similarities that exist between these two countries indicate that New Zealand has adopted numerous Australian celebrant concepts' (1998: 11). Schäfer also says that in the course of his research in the late 1990s, a celebrant had pointed out to him that New Zealand 'is leading the way in ritual development, and that Australia is adopting many of these innovations' (1998: 11). Thus there was a process of mutually influencing trends in the two countries.

New Zealand and Australia are still quite similar in terms of civil marriage celebrancy. As it is in New Zealand, civil celebrancy in Australia is well established, and growing. In 2007 almost two-thirds of Australian marriages were presided over by civil celebrants, confirming a trend which has seen steady growth of civil ceremonies from 39 per cent of all marriages in 1983 to 63 per cent in 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, Cant 2009:16).<sup>6</sup> In 2009 in Australia there were around 8,000 active civil marriage celebrants. Cant attributes the increase in the number of Australians choosing civil marriage ceremonies to the increased availability of celebrants in an ever-increasing secular community (2009: 16). The establishment of funeral celebrants in New Zealand followed similar developments in Australia (Schäfer, 2005: 203). As in New Zealand, funeral celebrants in Australia do not operate under a legal mandate: anyone can lead a funeral. Consequently it is difficult to accurately gauge how many are active in this work and the best information available is held by funeral directing companies. Indications of the proportion of celebrant-led funerals vary considerably. Over ten years ago, Messenger estimated that 23 per cent of Australians in urban areas used the services of a secular funeral celebrant (Schäfer, 1998: 10). In 2006, indications were that there had been further growth in the proportion of funerals which were celebrant-led, although the evidence was incomplete.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, the range of ceremonies celebrants lead in Australia may not be as broad as it is in New Zealand, suggesting that the wide-ranging repertoire of ritual celebrants in New Zealand is a local phenomenon. Australian civil celebrants lead a range of ceremonies and rituals in addition to the most common ones: civil marriage, funeral, and baby naming ceremonies. In some parts of Australia civil unions are

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<sup>6</sup> In 1999 51.3 per cent of marriages were performed by civil celebrants. This was the year when the number of civil marriages first outnumbered the number of religious marriage ceremonies, a trend which has continued. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> One source, a survey, reportedly found that 56 per cent of funerals in Melbourne (Victoria) were led by funeral celebrants. Another source, a Victoria-based funeral company, reported the proportion of funerals led by civil funeral celebrants in its company as 82 per cent. However statistics on involvement of celebrants in funerals are likely to be higher in the state of Victoria where the fee ceiling on how much celebrants can legally charge is substantially higher than for the rest of Australia and this higher paid work is more attractive to celebrants (\$495 in Victoria compared with \$180 elsewhere). (Messenger, 2010, personal communication, 20 February)

legal and some civil celebrants lead civil union ceremonies.<sup>8</sup> Some celebrants are involved in other types of ceremonies, such as divorce ceremonies and ceremonies to mark the transition to adolescence. Messenger's view is that there has been a broadening in the knowledge of Australian celebrants of what they can do, driven, interestingly, by the influence of Mary Hancock (prominent New Zealand celebrant and trainer introduced in chapter three) who visited Australia several times during the mid to late 1990s to share with celebrants in Australia New Zealand celebrant experiences, including developments such as celebrant-led house blessings, menopause ceremonies, crowning ceremonies, and significant birthday ceremonies. According to Messenger, these 'innovative ceremonies' are still rare in Australia, and whilst there are Australian celebrants who have performed ceremonies outside of the usual namings, weddings, and funerals, and some who specialise in particular ceremonies (and have performed hundreds of a particular type, such as divorce ceremonies, or ceremonies of adolescence), the established celebrant-led ceremonies remain namings, funerals, and weddings. Innovative ceremonies are not regularly performed by Australian celebrants, and most people would not be prepared to pay a celebrant to create and lead such ceremonies for them.<sup>9</sup> Another possible difference between the Australian and the New Zealand experiences is the ways in which the spiritualities and traditions of indigenous Australians have had relatively little influence on celebrant-led rites of passage there, compared with how Māori cultural and spiritual values have permeated the ritual practices of non-Māori New Zealanders in some instances.

Since the emergence of contemporary independent celebrant-led civil rites of passage ceremonies in Australia and New Zealand in the 1970s, similar developments have occurred in the United Kingdom and parts of the United States. There have been complex, major changes in the religiosity of the British population (Purdam, Afkhami, Crockett, & Olsen, 2007). Some of the trends are similar to those in New Zealand. As in New Zealand, in Britain the latter part of the 20th century saw a steady declining trend in religious attendance and belief (Crockett & Voas, 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> Civil unions exist in Australian Capital Territory, 'The Civil Partnership Act 2008', Tasmania, 'The Relationships Act 2003', and Victoria, 'The Relationships Act 2008'. The Civil unions are open to residents of the particular state or territory which provides them and are generally not recognised by other states or territories.

<sup>9</sup> Messenger, (2010), personal communication, 20 February

Also similar to New Zealand, the increasing diversity of religious and cultural beliefs across the British population are mainly attributable to immigration. However, religious affiliation (of different kinds) is still more important across the population in the United Kingdom than in New Zealand. In the 2001 census 76 per cent of the UK population identified as religious (Purdham et al. 2007: 149). The corresponding percentage for the New Zealand population, in the 2006 census, was 62 per cent having some religious affiliation (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b). Diversity is also a defining feature of the British population; the United Kingdom has one of the most religiously diverse populations in the European Community in terms of diversity within Christianity and different world religions (Purdam, et al., 2007: 148) and people in the United Kingdom have greater choice now, than in the past, in being able to follow individualised paths of changing faiths and cultural identities. Cook and Walter observed that ‘the typical reliance on those religious rituals which have evolved over hundreds of years is no longer able to fulfil everyone’s demands’ (Cook & Walter, 2005: 366-7). Whilst this context might seem theoretically open to the emergence of celebrants outside of the traditional Christian churches such as independent celebrants, this did not occur in the United Kingdom in the 1970s as it did in Australia and New Zealand at that time.

The situation in United Kingdom is by no means the same as New Zealand’s in terms of the role civil celebrants play in rite of passage ceremonies there. *Civil* celebrants operate differently in different parts of the United Kingdom. In England, for instance, civil celebrants perform a function similar to that of registrars of marriage in New Zealand, providing non-religious ceremonies to a small minority of clients. Whilst it has been observed that ‘the 1990s in England have witnessed more innovative rites of passage than any decade in the previous 150 years’ (Cook & Walter, 2005: 369), *independent* celebrancy as it exists in New Zealand does not find an equivalent in the United Kingdom. A comprehensive analysis of the complex situation in the United Kingdom is beyond the scope of this thesis, but consideration of some United Kingdom scenarios and the roles independent celebrants perform are useful to contrast and compare, and so helpfully illuminate, what is distinct about the New Zealand phenomenon. For example, the growth of independent celebrants as prominent ritual-makers in contemporary British society is likely to be inhibited by some differences between the operating environment for United Kingdom celebrants

compared to their New Zealand counterparts, most notably that United Kingdom independent celebrants are not able to officiate over legal aspects of marrying.

The extent to which Christian religious traditions are entrenched in British culture, including the stronger influence religious institutions have over affairs of the state, has meant that the important legislative change which facilitated the establishment of independent marriage celebrants who can offer their clients individualised ceremonies in Australia and New Zealand has never been achieved in the United Kingdom. To be legally married in England, couples must take part in a civil (non-religious) ceremony led by a registrar or a ceremony led by an authorised minister. Up until 1994 civil ceremonies took place only in registry offices in England or Wales. Since 1994, it has been possible to have civil ceremonies at a range of specified venues approved by local authorities. There are stronger controls on the actual wording of civil ceremonies in the United Kingdom compared with New Zealand, with specified legal wording stipulated. In contrast to the freedom independent celebrants in New Zealand (and Australia) have to reflect the personal spiritual and religious traditions of their clients in personalised ceremonies, civil marriage ceremonies in the United Kingdom may not contain any religious content or symbolism. Some personalisation of ceremonies is allowed but this must be non-religious.<sup>10</sup> A small number of independent celebrants also conduct wedding ceremonies, but the status of these celebrants in England differs considerably from those in Australia or New Zealand. English independent celebrants cannot officiate over the legal aspects of marriage (which means that couples who choose to have a ‘personal and meaningful’ service performed by an independent celebrant must also arrange for a registrar to carry out the legal part of the wedding). Interestingly, a characteristic of ceremonies led by independent celebrants is that they often include some religious aspects because people want ‘beautiful, unique and dignified ceremonies that are not wholly religious or wholly non-religious’ (AOIC, 2010).

One of the more ‘experienced’ independent celebrants in the United Kingdom (who has been a celebrant for six years, trains other independent celebrants in England, and is a past president of the Association of Independent Celebrants there) described independent celebrancy, in 2010, as still being very much in its infancy in England,

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<sup>10</sup> The specified legal wording of civil ceremonies can be altered to incorporate ‘individual touches such as non-religious music and readings’ (UK Government, 2010)

but growing in terms of an increasing number of celebrants setting up and in popularity with the public, especially independent celebrant-led funerals.<sup>11</sup> Not long ago, the concept of secular funeral celebrants in Britain was noted to be relatively unfamiliar (Schäfer, 2005: 202). Innovation in funerary ritual in the United Kingdom throughout the 1990s has risen and also received publicity, however such innovatory funeral practices, which include secular, humanist, woodland, and do-it-yourself, whilst rising rapidly, are only a tiny fraction of all funerals (Cook & Walter, 2005: 369-370).<sup>12</sup> Most (more than 90 per cent) of funerals in England are still led by clergy of the Church of England.

Individualisation meant that people sought personalisation, where life transition ceremonies were customised, at least in part, to people's particular circumstances and beliefs. International studies show increasing personalisation of funerary rituals in Britain (Davies, 2002; Walter, 1990), particularly in the South of England (Cook & Walter 2005: 369-370). Ceremonies were written by a range of people, individual celebrants, registrars, voluntary organisations (such as the British Humanist Association), commercial companies, parents, couples, and mourners (Cook & Walter, 2005: 366).<sup>13</sup> In addition to civil funerals and weddings, since 2001 registrars in England have conducted secular baby-naming ceremonies. On 5 December 2005, The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into effect in the UK, allowing couples of the same sex to have legal recognition of their relationship. A civil partnership is legally formed by the signing of the civil partnership schedule. Like civil marriages, these are also non-religious. Outside of the government agencies the three main bodies representing celebrants in England are the British Humanist Society, the Institute of

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<sup>11</sup> Shanks, (2010), personal communication, 18 February

<sup>12</sup> Cook & Walter (2005) reported that humanist celebrants do less than 1 per cent of all funerals, but do not give a figure for all celebrants. Ten percent of all funerals in one area of England (Sussex) are reportedly led by civil celebrants, and less in other areas where there are fewer celebrants. (Shanks, 2010, personal communication, 18 February)

<sup>13</sup> Since 2002 a private company called Civil Ceremonies Limited has offered civil funerals, employing registrars to lead these ceremonies.

Civil Funerals established in 2004, and the Association of Independent Celebrants (AOIC). The AOIC was formed in 2007 and now has 85 members.<sup>14</sup>

The situation in Scotland with regard to marriages is different from the rest of Britain. Since June 2005 couples marrying in Scotland can be married by humanist celebrants (who are similar to independent celebrants in New Zealand), authorised by the Registrar General for Scotland and members of the Humanist Society of Scotland. In consequence, there has been a trend of increasing numbers of weddings conducted by humanist celebrants (from 40, in 2005 to 500, in 2006), and the Society reports couples travel to Scotland specifically to be legally married in humanist ceremonies. Evidence of personalisation in civil marriage ceremonies can be seen in humanist ceremonies. I have not found evidence of substantive interaction or influence between New Zealanders and the recent developments of the British independent celebrant movement (however I am aware that the Australian, Messenger, discussed earlier, has worked with celebrant professional organisations and trainers in England and Scotland).<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary religiosity in the United States shows a very different picture to that in Britain, Australia, or New Zealand. In the United States there have been significant changes in the religious landscape from the 1960s through into the 21st century.<sup>16</sup> The important distinction, though, is that religion continues to be important in more individuals' everyday lives even for those who do not belong to religious institutions (McLeod, 2007: 298). Consequently, important rite of passage ceremonies in the

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<sup>14</sup> British Humanist Association, [www.humanism.org.uk](http://www.humanism.org.uk), Accessed 19/2/10, Association of Independent Celebrants, <http://www.independentcelebrants.com/ceremonies.html>, Accessed 19/2/10 Institute of Civil Funerals, <http://www.iocf.org.uk/index.htm>, Accessed 19/2/10

<sup>15</sup> Up until 2009 Messenger took a similar role in the development of celebrant training and activities in New Jersey in the United States, including the establishment of a celebrant organisation in 2002.

<sup>16</sup> These changes include: a dramatic decline in the numbers of people affiliated to traditional Protestant denominations, the growth of socially and theologically conservative denominations (e.g. Southern Baptists, Assemblies of God, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) as well as theologically open and liberal movements (e.g. Neo-Paganism), increasing numbers of people who do not affiliate with any religious organisation (14 per cent of total population in 2001), (although, notably, for whom religion tends to remain important), and increased visibility of 'combinative' religious practices among many Americans. Combinative means the 'improvisatory picking, mixing, and combining of beliefs and practices from a variety of spiritual traditions' (McLeod 2007: 295-298).

Self-identified atheists, agnostics, humanists, and secularists combined made up less than 2 per cent of the population in 2001 (Kosmin, Mayer and Keysar in McLeod 2007: 297).

United States take place within religious settings for most people. For example, in the 1990s, three-quarters of American weddings took place in religious settings, churches, synagogues, or temples, and were presided over by clergy (Pleck 1997 in Grimes 2000:153). In a few North Eastern states of the United States, independent celebrancy closer in nature to that in New Zealand is beginning to emerge. In Canada, as in the United States, religious rites of passage are very common. For example, in 2001, three-quarters (76.4 per cent) of Canadian marriages were performed by members of the clergy, with the remainder (23.6 per cent) comprising civil marriages performed by marriage commissioners, judges, justices of the peace or clerks of the court (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Nevertheless, some North American studies are very relevant to my work because they discuss contemporary western lifestyles and practices. Grimes (2000) explores a range of different, mainly western, rites of passage and shows themes of diversification of cultural and spiritual beliefs, individualism, and consumerism; Grimes (2006) examines implications for public and academic understandings of ritual arising from how the media (mainly television) and the arts (via universities) define and treat it; Leeds-Hurwitz (2002) examines the role of celebrants in ensuring that participants in intercultural rituals understand the significance of the various parts; Prothero (2001) and Garces-Foley (2003) refer to personalisation in North American funerals. Works by other key North American theorists also contribute essential dimensions to understanding ritual in a contemporary, western socio-cultural context, and these include Moore and Myerhoff (1977) on secular ritual (mentioned earlier), Catherine Bell (1992, 1997) on individualism, and Sered (2005) on how individuals change ritual.

### **Independent celebrant-led ritual**

Individualism shapes celebrant-led ritual and personalisation in the nature of rites of passage demonstrates this clearly. The rituals performed by the celebrants who are the focus of this study are predominantly life transition rituals, the ritual-marking of transformations and significant life changes whereby individuals and communities and societies communicate, celebrate, and commemorate changing social roles. A defining characteristic of this contemporary ritual is the personalised meanings

conveyed and enacted by them, reflective of the people who commission them. For many New Zealanders, rites of passage now have a primarily secular focus which commonly relates to changing relationships and expressions of commitment (as people enter, leave, or change their roles in partnerships, families, and other groups), and assisting and supporting one another during times of loss and grief. These rites of passage express meanings, values, and preferences particular to the individuals participating. In a case study of a wedding in Chapter Seven, the ritual performance that the celebrant and clients co-create is a dramatic enactment of a scripted ritual which tells and shows the transformation taking place. The people present are aware that the ceremony has been constructed to be both recognisable as a marriage ceremony and personalised to the couple, thus blending the 'traditional' with the uniquely creative. The celebrant as ritual-maker is accepted as having expertise in understanding ritual form, in leading a process of constructing personalised ceremonies, and in delivering a seamless dramatic performance. This contemporary ritual-maker's role is both passive and active. In a passive sense, ritual-makers respond to the requests of their clients. In an active sense, they advocate for the role of ritual and proactively suggest the inclusion of elements and symbols to support people in times of loss or to celebrate or mark appropriately other life transitions or occasions. Actively changing New Zealand's ritual traditions, this group of ritual-makers can be seen as adding to the diversity and as clearing the way for those who want to do things in their own way.

Contemporary New Zealanders' enthusiasm for, and participation in, retaining and innovating around the ritual-marking of significant life events and transitions has been commented on by several authors (Lineham, 2009; Pryor, 2006; Morris, 1999) but there is a dearth of quantitative trend data on this issue, the biggest events – weddings, funerals, and civil unions – excepted. The sense I gained from this qualitative study was that the types of rituals led by independent celebrants are becoming broader as they include anniversaries, awards recognising achievement, blessings of a place or event, honouring the milestones for birthdays for any age, burial of the placenta as part of a naming ceremony, civil union, cleansing and celebration of new beginnings, coming of age, commitment, crowning and honouring of age and transition to wise womanhood, divorce and separation, engagement, farewells, funerals, interment or scattering of ashes, launching ceremonies, Matariki

(the Māori celebration of New Year and the rising of the Pleiades), memorial services, ceremonies specially for women or specially for men, name-giving, pet and animal farewell ceremonies, recognition of seasons, celebrations of promotions and new challenges, renewal of vows and reaffirmation of relationships, retirement, reunions, marking the seasonal cycles, and unveiling of permanent memorials. Thus, the scope of ritual-making assumed by this group of contemporary ritual-makers is not limited to enacting existing or reclaiming previous New Zealand or ancestral rites of passage. An observation has been celebrants' openness to innovation around the types of ritual performed and adaptation of past rites. Forces of globalism and the ease by which information can be accessed through media and the internet have fuelled existing attitudes of openness by many people to borrowing elements of rituals from other cultures. This openness extends, also, to invention of new rituals around events not previously marked by ritual, or things which are features of contemporary society which we regard as worthy of ritualising. Clients choose whether they wish to ritualise life transitions and other significant life events, and those who do commission celebrants on a ritual by ritual basis. From this qualitative study, albeit from celebrants' and not the public's point of view, it seems that independent celebrants in particular, and some more than others, are at the leading edge of this trend towards exploring and innovating. This is both in terms of their willing response to clients' curiosity and demand for something different, something new, something out of the ordinary that may not have been done before, and also in terms of their advocacy for the role for ritual, making known what they offer and explaining why people might find it appropriate, beneficial, healing, or meaningful. Driving the variation in the nature of rituals are the personal circumstances and choices of the particular individuals for whom the rituals are tailored.

Instead of being experts in the rites of a shared religion or world-view, contemporary ritual-makers in New Zealand are experts in processes of ritual-making. The exact role of the celebrant is negotiated on a client-by-client, ritual-by-ritual basis. Examples of roles include: performing, facilitating or leading a ritual specified by the client; offering a template or outline of a ritual form and gathering information which adapts this to reflect the meaning and style chosen by their clients; co-creating a ritual in partnership with clients, or creating a ritual in response to a client's request when the client does not wish to be involved. Celebrants use their ritual-making

skills to construct and adapt rituals which reflect, primarily, the particular views, beliefs, and desires of particular individuals or other specified small groups of ritual participants. The rituals do not necessarily reflect the views of the ritual-makers themselves (although they may), nor are they intended to bring about broader social order to the groups of ritual participants with whom they are shared. This ritual-making expertise is recognised and rewarded. However, this knowledge is not held exclusively by the ritual-makers. In contemporary contexts, people who are interested in ritual can easily find out about how to do it and how it has been done historically, and what rituals are like in other cultures. Some contemporary ritual-makers co-create rituals with clients. Others construct rituals on behalf of their clients, and typically clients would bring to this process, particular requests for ritual elements that are personally meaningful to them. The rightness of ritual lies with the individuals who sponsor and participate in it. It is not straightforward to identify a style of ritual which could be considered conventional or right across the whole of society.

Independent celebrants bring to their work a broad range of backgrounds and motivations. They are a diverse group of individuals, which is not surprising given that New Zealand society is made up of people with diverse lifestyles, attitudes, experiences, and beliefs. Whilst celebrants' backgrounds differ, the research identified similarities in one or more of three areas, all of which relate to interpersonal communication competencies: performing or public speaking, people-based care and support service work, community and civic work. In describing their motivations, celebrants referred to multiple, interrelated factors that brought them into this work and kept them involved. The main motivating factors included a desire to give community service, an opportunity to undertake paid work, an opportunity to extend their interest or career in communications, a belief in the power of ritual to help people cope with change and loss, and an opportunity for their own and their clients' creative expression. Some celebrants conveyed a sense of calling to their work and their ritual-making skills came mainly from other areas of their life and work experience. These factors are often intertwined for any one celebrant; they are not mutually exclusive in any way. Sometimes the original motivating factors differ from those which best explain the celebrant's ongoing connection with the work. In comparison with memorable, 'exotic', ritual-makers in traditional ethnographic

accounts, such as shamans and witch-doctors, these independent celebrant ritual-makers appear rather ordinary. Celebrants are not regarded by others in New Zealand society as notably different or special by virtue of the fact that they hold status as celebrants: celebrants as ritual-makers are remarkable more for how much they are like everyone else than for how they stand apart.

Growing secularism was partly behind the emergence of this group of celebrants from the late 1970s onwards, as civil marriage and secular funeral celebrants responded to demands for non-religious alternatives to the mainly Christian denominational ceremonies predominant at that time. Many celebrants articulated a secular belief about the role for ritual in assisting people to adjust to change and cope with loss and grief. However, an examination of spirituality as it relates to independent celebrants now shows rites of passage as often richly spiritual, reflecting the personal spiritualities of clients. Spirituality can be seen as an important aspect of a person's life, and one that is not always conceptualised or experienced as separate from other aspects of life. The term spirituality often covers its existential elements (e.g. searching for meaning, making choices, taking responsibility for actions, and connectedness with other people and the universe), theistic elements (e.g. a sense of the sacred and where sacredness lies in relation to a person), and indigenous, holistic, land-based concepts of Māori, the tangata whenua (indigenous people of Aotearoa / New Zealand). For many Pakeha New Zealanders Christian precepts and practices form part of their spiritual heritage.

Amongst some celebrants there is a growing recognition of spirituality being inseparable from the ritual-making relationship and of the importance of celebrants being knowledgeable and spiritually sensitive in their practice. But this view is not shared by all celebrants. There can be some awkwardness in discussing matters of spirituality, reflecting people's tentativeness around changing cultural identities and spiritualities. Thus, celebrants sometimes work in situations where their clients lack the confidence and language to articulate their beliefs and requests, or they express seemingly contradictory requests on matters which are deeply personal to them. In a relationship of trust, and recognising that spirituality cannot be separated from other aspects of a person's culture, celebrants do not usually try to resolve or correct ambiguities and contradictions expressed by their clients in relation to their spiritual

beliefs. They seek appropriate, inclusive responses to such circumstances through creative ritual-making practices. Processes of personalisation extend to the expression of clients' personal spiritualities in ritual. A client's desires that these are incorporated means that ritual-makers need to be sensitive to this and have processes by which to understand and integrate spiritual aspects with other components of rituals. Through dynamic ritual-making practices, celebrants take an active role in changing ritual traditions as they go about their work of honouring and accommodating the diverse and changing spiritualities of New Zealanders.

In relation to spirituality in ritual, the role of the celebrant as a ritual functionary rather than a religious specialist is emphasised. This is different from the traditional role of ritual-maker, where ritual participants are led through 'correct' forms of ritual which convey important shared cultural meanings relating to the occasion, the individuals' identities, and their belonging to a particular culture or faith. The diversity of personal spiritualities means that where ceremonies are focused around the needs and participation of more than one individual, a task for ritual-makers is negotiating how to reflect or respect multiple spiritual perspectives within the ritual framework. Clients request spiritual and religious elements from diverse cultures and traditions to be reflected in independent celebrant-led ritual. Celebrants sometimes work with New Zealanders of European descent reviving European spiritual traditions linked to their ancestry or life experiences as these clients seek to strengthen their knowledge of, and participation in, the spiritual traditions of their European ancestors.

This study did not set out to be a comprehensive look at Christianity in New Zealand. Nevertheless, from its angle of independent celebrants, the study does illuminate aspects of how Christianity continues to effect the ways in which a large number of New Zealanders celebrate and mark important rites of passage, including many which are primarily secular in orientation. The contemporary ambivalence of many New Zealanders towards Christianity can lead them to claim to want nothing to do with it; however, New Zealand's strong Christian pluralist heritage clearly impacts on contemporary ritual. Christian elements may be included in ceremonies as part of the familiar, folk heritage of New Zealand rather than as a direct expression of the religious beliefs of the participants. While the intention of the celebrant is to try to

express the beliefs of the clients, in actuality, the ritual expresses a combination of beliefs that reflect the celebrant's own social and cultural contexts, along with the client's. Christian beliefs and traditions are familiar to many celebrants who incorporate them in their ritual-making, sometimes knowingly and other times not.

## **Background to study**

Personal curiosity led me to choose this topic of study. I trained in celebrant studies in 2000–1 then registered as a marriage celebrant in 2001. During my training I realised that although many ceremonies and rituals were being performed by celebrants, these contemporary ritual-makers had a low profile in anthropological discourse on ritual. Celebrants I talked to about the idea of this study were enthusiastic, which contributed to my decision to pursue the topic for my doctoral research. By going ahead I would be able to begin to document and discuss a previously unexamined aspect of contemporary New Zealand culture. I was aware, also, that this research would take place at a time when the celebrant community was undergoing increasingly rapid change. Some celebrants who had been active in establishing independent celebrant work in the late 1970s and early 1980s (whom I have referred to as pioneers) were retiring from their roles and there were many more recent entrants who were influencing how celebrants operated as a community. Early on in my research design I determined that an aim of the study would be to record oral histories with some celebrants, including some of the pioneers in the field. In addition to being a method of data gathering, oral histories with practising and former celebrants represented a rich strand of the community's history which, apart from my anthropological analysis of them, had their own historical value. Through this study I wanted to honour and preserve the narratives of some people who established the field of celebrancy in New Zealand. I therefore set out to record oral histories to the technical standard and quality that enabled their inclusion in the Oral History Centre at the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand. The study was carried out between 2005 and 2010. In 2006 I registered as a civil union celebrant. Whilst studying I continued to officiate at marriages and civil union ceremonies. Reflecting on the experience and the time spent undertaking the research, I feel a tremendous sense of privilege and delight to have had the

opportunity to listen to other celebrants tell their stories, and to discuss, analyse and write about an aspect of society which I regard as vital to our wellbeing.

## **Thesis structure**

The thesis is set out in nine chapters. Chapter Two sets out the main components of my ethnographic method, participant observation and the recording of oral histories. As noted, I am an independent celebrant, as well as a researcher, and so issues of situating myself as an insider are addressed. I discuss my research participants, the material gathered, ethical considerations, and reflections on the research process. Chapter Three reviews the literature on ritual and ritual-makers and analyses the context this provides for this ethnographic study. The roles and influences of the ritual-makers who performed rites of passage ceremonies in the past are compared with those of celebrants today. I examine ritual change and the role of ritualists in these processes of creation and adaptation.

Chapter Four discusses the socio-cultural context of ritual and belief in New Zealand. It introduces key historical and socio-cultural themes which have influenced the emergence and current popularity of contemporary celebrant-led ritual. It looks at the changing and diversifying cultural and spiritual world-views of New Zealanders which lead them to seek out equally diverse civil celebrants to facilitate rituals and ceremonies. The questions it addresses are: What is important to New Zealanders? What do we value and believe in? What are the social and cultural processes which most impact on how we live our lives? How do we mark the rites of passages? Broad themes include: biculturalism, Christian denominational pluralism, Christian traditions in contemporary ritual, secularism and the declining importance of rituals being hosted in religious settings. The diversification of religious and spiritual and secular beliefs in 21<sup>st</sup> century New Zealand society and the broadening range of rituals we celebrate set the scene for examining the role of independent celebrants today.

Chapter Five defines independent celebrants, explores the emergence of their work, and introduces the types of rituals they perform. Different types of rituals are used to illustrate aspects of ritual-making processes, including marriage and civil unions and

funerals. It then introduces celebrants who feature by name in this thesis. Chapter Six explores the role of celebrants as ritual-makers. It covers their intentions and the dynamic processes by which they create ceremonies, the range of backgrounds and varying motivations celebrants bring to their work. I consider how celebrants work with ceremonies: the roles they take in relation to their clients, the processes they employ in order to understand their clients' needs, and how, in the process of creating ceremonies, they mediate between varying influences and expectations. This sets the scene for a discussion on how celebrants adapt traditional rituals, personalise them, and create new rituals to reflect the beliefs and requests of their clients. The chapter also looks at situations where celebrants are faced with balancing and integrating their own beliefs and values about ritual with those of their clients and how celebrants manage the tensions and complexities which arise in this relationship. Chapter Seven is a case study of a contemporary celebrant-led marriage. Ritual eclecticism, personalisation, and appropriation are themes discussed.

Chapter Eight examines the topic of spirituality and how the spiritual and religious beliefs of both celebrants and their clients can be intrinsic to the rituals they practise. Themes include: the increasing importance of personal spiritualities, New Zealanders' diverse mix of beliefs and cultural traditions, and the active role celebrants take in changing ritual traditions. Christian ritual traditions and ways in which the land is reflected in contemporary New Zealand spirituality and ritual are also explored. Chapter Nine sets out conclusions and discusses future research possibilities.

## **2 Method**

In this chapter I explain the ethnographic approach used in this study and how it suited my aim of exploring my research questions about contemporary ritual-makers and their work. I detail the main components of my ethnographic method: participant observation and the recording of oral histories. Particular attention is given to the oral histories as a method for data gathering and the oral history recording and archiving processes. Because I am a celebrant myself, my experiences of conducting research amongst celebrants as an insider are examined, and I reflect on the range of participants included in the study, ethical considerations, and my personal experiences of the research process. The research for this ethnography involved engagement with celebrants across a range of criteria, regions, and cultural groups, and included pioneers in the field.

### **Ethnography**

An ethnographic approach was most suited to the exploratory nature of this study and participant observation has been core to my research approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 3). Since there was so little written about this group of ritual-makers, one task for me was to write a descriptive account of the community of celebrants, how they see themselves and each other, and what they did: ritual-making in a contemporary western context, namely New Zealand. This tradition of ‘thick description’ was described by Clifford Geertz as central to the anthropologist’s task (1973: chapter 1). In my interpretation and in the written account I have sought to foreground the people who were the focus of the study, to give a sense of their particular experiences and ways of working. The methodological approach is critical poststructuralist. The research process, like any other social process, is not value-neutral. It inevitably reflects the social character, structured institutional practices, and politics of the academic context from which I conduct it and also the socio-historical position and background assumptions I bring to it as a researcher. Addressing the implications of my subjectivity and the socially constructed nature of research required consideration of the important concept of reflexivity. Reflexivity is an aspect of all social research, and one to which ethnographers pay particular

attention (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 19). Ethnography does not assert one privileged interpretation as a 'final, overriding version of the world' (Norman K Denzin, 1997). The interpretation encompasses the points of view and conceptual frameworks of the research participants, rather than from 'a priori theoretical assumptions or claimed philosophies' (Salomonsen 2002: 11). This requires a balance of emphasis on subjectivity, dialogue, reflexivity, and the ethical grounding of the research (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, & Cohen, 1989: 7-33). The rationale for including myself as a researcher in my work, now an established feature of ethnography, has been to assist the positioning of my work as contestable. It represents one view, but not the only possible one. As researchers we are part of the world we study, and therefore we influence what we study. Accepting that we cannot remove these effects, we can choose to self-consciously reflect on what we do and how we go about it, which is termed reflexivity. The purpose of this reflection is to show how as researchers, our understanding is more than analytical, it is also based on personal experience and position (Salzman, 2001). In reflexive ethnography researchers openly examine and reflect on the agenda, influences, and experiences they have brought to their work so that readers can more fully understand the 'rigor and the intricacies' of the methodology (Hume & Mulcock, 2004: xvii) and 'make an assessment about the degree of influence these may have had on the interpretation and analysis of the finished product' (Andrews, 2005:19).

### **An insider perspective**

Like many other insider anthropologists, my research experience was aided by the fact that I was studying a familiar field and amongst a community where I know, and am known by, many of the people. As a celebrant myself, the focus of my study was familiar cultural territory to me, and this had both positive and negative dimensions to it. I anticipated that there would be a positive dimension for me as a researcher in already being a member of the celebrant community which was the focus of this study. I hoped that my familiarity with the field and networks would prove helpful in facilitating access to, and the trust of, other celebrants. This was indeed the case. All celebrants I have encountered during my research have been interested in my work, supportive of my efforts, and agreeable towards participating in it.

Knowing how celebrants worked was useful. A number of researchers have argued for the advantages of carrying out research about phenomena and settings about which the researcher is already familiar, where there is trust and shared conceptual frameworks and language between the researcher and the participants, where the researcher can explore and evaluate experiences in relation to their own experience, for example, Elisabeth Kirtsoglou's ethnography (2004: 15-17), Jeffrey Riemer's sociological studies (1977: 474), and Sasha Roseneil's ethnography (1993: 189). In my study, it meant that I could frame my conversations and exploration of the ways other celebrants work in an in-depth manner, since I was familiar with the broad territory of their role and work. What I experienced had been explained by Hume and Mulcock: that sometimes researchers in ethnographic fieldwork reveal 'parts of ourselves and our background' which 'often enhances our relationships with others and encourages the sharing of information that informants might otherwise be reluctant to disclose' (2004: xx). Through 'resonance' and 'empathetic understanding' I was able to build my knowledge and appreciate others' standpoints (Hume & Mulcock, 2004: xxi). When I interviewed, I offered my own points of view and experiences in conversations with celebrants, and my familiarity and experience with the work of a celebrant meant that I delved into areas where I thought there were stories to be told because they were within my realm of knowledge and experience.

Attempting to study celebrants whilst already having my own understanding and values in relation to the work created challenges as well. Looking at these ritual-makers as an ethnographer required me to attempt to deconstruct my own knowledge and values and scrutinise these in the context of scrutinising the work of celebrants more broadly. No doubt also, at times, my personal interest led me to favour exploration of particular aspects of the work and I may have inadvertently missed others, which is perhaps an inevitable outcome of research as an insider. For example, I placed a strong emphasis on exploring the link between spirituality and ritual-making in my research objectives and highlight this in Chapter Eight. I also asked celebrants about their backgrounds and other life and work experiences, and how they felt these related to their motivation, skills, and ways of working as celebrants. Like the topic of spirituality, this yielded incredibly rich data and I have written in depth about this in Chapter Six. These are both areas where I felt, based on

my own knowledge and experience, that other celebrants would have stories to tell. Sometimes I had in mind a topic which I raised with celebrants and they answered, but in doing so, they changed the focus of what they were telling me so that it made more sense to their own experience and point of view. On other occasions, celebrants would raise with me what they felt was important for me to know. One celebrant, for example, told me that I had not asked her about how much she charged. She had expected that I would, and felt it was important, so she wanted to tell me about this. This led me to include a discussion on rewards and payment in the thesis.

There were some aspects of my experience as a researcher which were different from other insider anthropologists and these relate to the nature of how celebrants operate, ritual-making, in private settings. The celebrant community is dispersed; celebrants undertake their work separately from one another, in discrete and temporary settings where they work in trust relationships with their clients. (Chapter Five provides a fuller description of this.) These ritual-makers are therefore not easily observable going about the ‘behind the scenes’ aspects of their ritual-making which precede ritual performances. Further, in this study, observing celebrants at their work was not central to my aims and therefore did not drive the research design. Overall, this meant that the celebrants who participated in this study retained a high degree of control over what I was able to learn about from them, because they could talk about their work to the extent to, and in ways, which they wanted others – including me – to know about it. A method open to me, but which I did not employ in this study, could have been to rigorously examine everything celebrants said about how they work alongside an observational perspective and also clients’ descriptions of their expectations, perceptions, and memories of how their ritual-makers practised. Without this triangulation, my method relies heavily on the views of ritual-makers themselves and my own insider knowledge and interpretation made from my empathetic, insider’s standpoint. Nevertheless I did observe celebrants at their work, because their work is in everyday ritual-making in the society I live in. I also observed celebrants in training situations, and in gatherings where they share, support, and socialise with one another at local and national meetings, activities and conferences.

In my analysis and in the text of my thesis I have tried to account for the effects of my subjectivity in constructing the study and writing the thesis by paying attention to my own pre-existing values, beliefs and experiences in relation to the research topic and my own background and how I came to the research, and including information about these in the text. Since I draw on many different sources of information in constructing my thesis I have tried to be explicit about which of these varying sources have contributed in different parts of the thesis. Thereby readers are provided with relevant contextual information and can be clear on the basis by which I have come to my interpretation.

Participant observation is central to ethnography (Fetterman, 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Herzfeld, 2001). Through long-term, close-contact involvement in the community of interest an ethnographer aims to describe, explain, and make theoretically informed observations about the focus of enquiry. The origins of this anthropological method can be traced to 19th-century western researchers who travelled to non-western communities and cultures very different from their own and actively took part in the interactions at hand in order to come closer to those communities and cultures and thus attempt to experience and understand them from an 'insider's' point of view. During the 20th century ethnography became a legitimate method of researching aspects of our own societies, 'ethnography at home' (A. Jackson, 1987). This meant that sometimes ethnographers were researching settings in which they were already insiders, as is the situation in my study. The practice of ethnography assumes that researchers are able to undertake a critical analysis of the events in which they are participating. A recognised challenge for ethnographers researching settings familiar to them is to be able to step back from the relationships I formed with people to identify and reflect upon some of the taken-for-granted rules and expectations of the social world I was studying. As an ethnographer I need to be able to see with the eyes of an 'outsider' as well as the eyes of an 'insider', acknowledging that both views are only ever partial.

Participant observation meant that I both observed and participated in the social action I documented (Hume & Mulcock, 2004: xi). My participation derived from work as a celebrant, through which I am familiar with the role and tasks of being a celebrant. My own experiences and observations of ceremonies I have created are

central to my understanding of what celebrants do. In addition to my reflections and analysis of my own work, I have sought opportunities where celebrants might reflect and share their ideas and practices so that I could listen and discuss them with colleagues, thereby building my understanding of the phenomenon from the multiple narratives of a broad range of celebrants. The nature of participant observation is such that understanding is developed from immersion in the community and the work, which means that it is not always possible to know exactly where or when you came to know something in a particular way. Some knowledge will be the long-term, gradually acquired knowledge of a native participant in the community, some may not be attributable to one person or particular moment, and so explicit consenting processes cannot always be linked to the gathering of pieces of information. Reflexive considerations are central to ethnographic practice and analysis (Davies, 2008: 81), recognising the impact of the researcher's own role in the research and writing. A reflexive approach, rather than debating the relative strengths of a researcher being able to observe from a distance to achieve detachment compared with how they might participate in what they are researching, reflects that ethnography is 'complicated, messy, personal and subjective' (Reilly 2009: 111). In the tradition of Clifford and Marcus's self-reflexive fieldwork account (1986: 14), in my writing I have sought to critically analyse my role, the context of the study, my relationships with participants, and the impact and consequences of my study on the wider community.

The term 'detachment' is sometimes used in reference to the effect of ethnographers going home, leaving the community they are researching, putting physical distance, and so by implication mental and emotional distance, between themselves in their role as researchers and 'the researched' (Reilly 2009: 112). Detachment through separation was not possible in my study where I was an insider amongst the community who were the focus of the ethnography. My celebrant role was established before the commencement of the study and is central to the ritual-makers' perspective this study brings. Once the research was completed I did not leave my celebrant community, my participation in ritual-making, and my involvement and belonging to the community of celebrants continues. I disagree with the view that detachment is automatically preferable or that insiders being very close to their topic is necessarily problematic, somehow 'too' involved. My attachment to the

community I am studying is inseparable from my ongoing ethical engagement with my celebrant work and my research. Gaining access and establishing rapport with other celebrants was less of a challenge than it may have been if I had needed to start from scratch and negotiate new relationships and networks. Typically, the gains of working from this insider perspective are that insiders are able to ‘participate more easily, have more linguistic competence with which to ask more subtle questions on more complex issues ...’ and so be able to ‘present complex interpretations’(Reilly 2009: 114). In a practical sense, the two activities of participating and observing can be difficult to pursue simultaneously (Davies, 2008: 82). However, both are intrinsic to the ethnographic participant observation orientation, to identifying and understanding the problems and advantages particular to my insider perspective, and to ‘synthesis[ing] emic (insider) and etic (ethnographer’s) representations’ (Reilly, 2009: 116). A common difficulty experienced by insider ethnographers is how to attain emotional and mental distance and be able to stand back and see ourselves as others see us (Reilly 2009: 113-116). I, too, found it demanding to find the intellectual place from which to examine and critique familiar ways of working as a celebrant. Interactions with supervisors and their feedback on drafts of my written work assisted me in undertaking this competently, as did discussions with other researchers. These people were able to review my drafts and assist me to question my data in new ways, beyond my existing thinking, a strategy which had been employed effectively by at least one other qualitative researcher in the analysis phase of ethnographic work (Lareau, 1996: 227).

My experience as a celebrant is with ceremonies of marriage and civil union. My training covered a wide range of different types of ceremonies, including funerals, weddings, healing ceremonies, seasonal celebrations, and others. Personally, I have attended several funerals and have been involved in planning funerals for close family members and for close friends. I consciously attempted to learn about as broad a range of ceremonies as I could in this study, to gain understanding in addition to my own knowledge and experience gained from my personal experiences and my training and work as a celebrant. I did this by listening to other celebrants tell me about their experiences. To be precise, from a methodological point of view my ‘participant observation’ of the social action I was researching varied for different types of ceremonies. Celebrants relayed their accounts to me of their ways of

working with clients and the ceremonies they have performed for them. I gathered celebrants' descriptions of their ways of working but I did not observe celebrants leading ceremonies as part of the formal fieldwork. Nor did I seek to talk with celebrants' clients, the ritual participants.

Because independent celebrants are relatively rare and unstudied, I felt that an examination of the unique history and development of independent celebrancy in New Zealand, from the perspectives of ritual-makers, could provide insights into the nature and changing patterns of ritual and underlying values and beliefs in contemporary New Zealand society. Intrinsic to the role of independent celebrant is the need to balance innovation and tradition. Acting as agents for their clients, independent celebrants respond to their clients' diverse desires and demands for personalised rites of passage, responding to cultural shifts and also creating cultural change. In orienting this study towards understanding how celebrants worked I was able to explore newly emerging ritual, spiritual, and cultural practices. I was also able to gain an understanding of how celebrants brought their own values and agendas to the work through actively advocating for particular ritual-making processes and ritual forms.

My research draws extensively on transcripts of, and notes taken during and after, oral history recording sessions and formal interviews with celebrants. Other experiences and sources of information which contributed further to my understanding and which I drew on to write the thesis were perspectives gleaned from participation in professional development activities and conferences; informal gatherings with celebrant colleagues through membership of one of the celebrant professional bodies; notes from conversations with peers in informal settings; field notes; reflections on the research process; generalised observations of independent celebrants performing ceremonies in everyday life on at least ten occasions and generalised observations of independent celebrants performing ceremonies in training settings on more than thirty occasions, including several of the celebrants who participated formally in the research through interviews. Through my personal interest in ritual I have collected information and experiences over more than a decade – all of which is somehow in this study to the extent that it is part of what I know.

## Oral histories

Listening to research participants tell their own stories and reporting these in their own words is an established ethnographic tradition, for example Myerhoff's *Number Our Days* (1978). Further, recording oral histories is an established ethnographic research approach (Fetterman, 1998; Thompson, 2000: 97). An effect of including oral histories in this way is to make more explicit the inter-subjectivity of the researcher and the researched, and to make issues of voice, interpretive authority, and representation more central to the goal of the study. Oral histories are recorded interviews made by agreement with interviewees willing to tell a particular story about themselves with the intention that this recording be archived (Laurie, 2001: 14). The person who lives each story tells it in their words. As well as being an efficient way to elicit and preserve information about selected narrators' personal experiences, oral history interviews are a 'pathway to people's cultural memory' and so they are a useful technique for 'generating and preserving historically interesting information from people's personal recollection' (Laurie, 2001: 14). Oral histories, as well as being a method of information gathering for my study, have become part of the collective history of the celebrant community.

In the same way that oral histories were an effective means to research the lives and pioneering experiences of early practitioners and the development of the social work (Nash, 2002) and counselling (Heppner, 1994) professions, oral histories were suitable for this study of celebrants. In relation to social work in New Zealand, Mary Nash's experience was that in a small country it is individuals, as well as institutions, who influence what happens in the development of a profession in the early days. Therefore it can be valuable to create documentary evidence of how people influence that development by conducting oral histories with those who were 'closely involved in work and education' and 'because of their connections with provision of training and education'. She found oral histories to be a valuable way to 'discover the opinions held by people closely involved in some of the crucial debates and decisions surrounding the development' of a field (Nash, 2002: 11-12). Also, taking account of the possibility that information could be lost as practices change and workers retire, oral histories which record the contributions of pioneers represent a rich strand of

information and collecting this information as oral histories made their stories available to other researchers, historians, and practitioners who are interested in it (Nash, 2002: 14). These same circumstances were relevant to the community of celebrants I was studying and thus the oral history method was suitable.

By recording the interviews to a specification suitable for accession into the public archive I could also make my material available for other researchers and anyone else who might be interested in it at some future time. This was important to me. I did not need or want exclusive access or ownership of the material. Another consideration was that the opportunity to record an interview might make participating seem more attractive to celebrants. As it turned out, it was not difficult to gain celebrants' interest and their consent to participate. After all, celebrants are great storytellers; it is what they do in their celebrant role. In addition, I wanted to be able to give something back to the community from whom I'd gathered data. In my past experience of research interviewing, I have developed an awareness that the research experience is imbalanced: I take people's time and stories and extract the fragments which interest me or are relevant to my agenda and the rest is effectively discarded. In contrast, the plan to record oral histories seemed to me to be a method where I could both fulfil my requirements from a structured, academic research project perspective and still leave behind individual and intact recordings. These could 'live on' by being accessible, and perhaps valuable, to others.

Participants were each given a typed transcript of their interview to keep. With their consent, the original recordings (on cassette tapes) were placed in the Oral History Centre at the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand. In creating the recordings, my approach was to regard participants as narrators of their own stories and to invite them to tell them in their own voices, with their own words. I guided the direction of the topics we discussed, whilst still leaving scope for participants to introduce further material as they desired. As well as representing part of the ethnographic method, the oral histories are, I consider, a product of my study, further texts in the same way that the thesis is a particular type of text aimed at an academic audience. I hope that the creation of these recordings contributes to the identity-building and collective history of the celebrant community.

## Participants

The nature of being immersed in the community of study for an extended period has associated with it a serendipitous element with regard to whom a researcher has the opportunity to engage with. In my study, purposive sampling (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003: 78-81) was applied so that I could gather as broad a range of perspectives and practices from celebrants as practicable within the scope of a doctoral research project. I made some deliberate choices around whom I sought to participate in this study, in addition to celebrants whom I came across through my connections. Firstly, celebrants are a dispersed group, each working with their own communities and clients. There was no practical way I could 'be' somewhere (in a particular, geographical sense) which would place me amongst them. I decided that I needed a number of interviews with a range of celebrants to be able to gather robust data on how celebrants work. I wanted my fieldwork to extend beyond my own knowledge, experience, and existing connections with celebrants. I sought to include celebrants with a variety of perspectives who worked in different communities and who performed a range of rituals and ceremonies.

To reach a range of celebrants I publicised the study through professional celebrant organisations with an article outlining my idea in the regular national newsletters of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand (CANZ); the Celebrants Guild of New Zealand Incorporated, North Island (CGNI); and Celebrants Guild of New Zealand Incorporated, South Island (CGSI). These appeared in June 2005. Subsequently, a large number of celebrants contacted me and offered to take part in the study – far more than I could practically reach – which presented me with the issue of whom to select. I had also begun approaching particular celebrants and asking them to take part – people I thought would be able to contribute to my building up a broader picture of some of the different groups who comprise celebrants. As noted above, I wanted to include particular pioneer celebrants. I use this term to describe celebrants, identified through consultation and networking, who were regarded as having contributed significantly to the development of the field in New Zealand through their practice, thinking, or innovation in ritual and ceremony. Another illustration of why I wanted to invite particular celebrants whom I knew had particular perspectives related to my knowledge that historically many celebrants worked in comparative

isolation from other celebrants. I did not want to talk only to celebrants in that situation. I was interested also in celebrants connecting in various ways with others through training, professional bodies, and other networks, and wanted to hear about this aspect of the field as well as the ritual-making with individual clients. I wanted to include celebrants who were involved in networks with other celebrants, as I was aware that a change had taken place within the community of celebrants and that several hundred of the roughly two thousand celebrants belonged to organisations. I invited celebrants from each of the main celebrant bodies to take part, including some who had been influential in forming those organisations. Similarly, I wanted to include some celebrants who had undertaken training courses in celebrant studies and some who brought other backgrounds to the role.

## **Ethical matters**

I received ethics committee approval for my study in 2005.<sup>17</sup> The ethical matters I considered prior to commencement were: consultation and ongoing dissemination of my research findings with my participants, any potential for discomfort or harm to individual participants as a result of participation, cultural sensitivity, processes of consent for the research and for the oral histories, issues arising from the lack of anonymity of participation, and potential conflicts of interest associated with my being part of my research community. How I planned to address these matters, my experiences during the research process, and implications for the findings are discussed next.

My processes of consultation and ongoing dissemination of my research findings with my participants were carried out as I planned at the outset. This was to discuss general information about the study with celebrants around the country, including the head of the Celebrant Studies Training Programme, the President of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand (CANZ), and the committee of the Wellington Branch of the CANZ. I wrote articles for professional body newsletters and spoke at national conference gatherings about my intentions in regard to the research. I received only enthusiastic support from celebrants for this study. Information sheets were sent to

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<sup>17</sup> Massey University Albany Human Ethics Committee approval was granted on 15 June 2005 (MUAHEC 05/33). Approval was for three years. All formal interviews took place during this period.

specific individuals who took part in formal oral history interviews. I did not anticipate that individual participants were at high risk of potential discomfort or harm as a result of participation, but the possibility was something I was aware of at all times. Towards the end of one interview I became aware that the person whom I was interviewing was upset. I stopped the interview and asked them to tell me about the issue which had arisen which they found hurtful. I was able to rectify a small misunderstanding, and apologise. A short time after the interview I re-contacted the person and checked again on their consent for their material to remain as part of the research and they agreed that it would.

As I was a Pakeha researcher potentially discussing culturally sensitive information on issues of Māori spirituality, the ethics committee suggested that I invite a Māori academic to review my study design and interview schedule. Rachael Selby, a senior lecturer in Massey University's School of Sociology, Social Policy, and Social Work who teaches Māori Development, and an oral historian and marriage celebrant, agreed to do this. I sent a written outline of my intended research design to her and we met to discuss this in Palmerston North in 2005. She was satisfied with what I proposed and no changes were made at that stage. Processes for providing comprehensive information and obtaining written informed consent for participation in the oral histories element of the study were explicit, and are detailed next in the fieldwork section of this chapter. Issues arising from the lack of anonymity of participation were inevitable in this study given that my research design included recording interviews with identifiable individuals which would be publicly available in the Alexander Turnbull Library Oral History Centre Collection, and also because in my thesis I specifically sought to retain the voices of particular named celebrants with their unique perspectives and contributions. This meant that at all times prior to and during the fieldwork I needed to be mindful of what any potential disclosure could mean for participants and of ways in which I could anticipate their being compromised or embarrassed. After interviews, I included a step in the process which was a comprehensive, written check back over the informed consent which individuals had given prior to their interviews. This included time for interviewees to read a complete transcript of the material they were contributing and to reconsider its inclusion. Everyone consented to their complete interview materials being included. One other ethical issue I identified at the outset was the potential for conflicts of

interest associated with my being part of my research community. I am not aware that any problems arose as a result of this. My membership in CANZ continues as does my participation in professional development.

## **My fieldwork experience**

Fieldwork commenced in July 2005, although fieldwork dates have slightly less relevance to the parameters of the study in that I am writing about work I do and a community I am already a part of. This meant that it has been sometimes difficult to distinguish between what I learnt during the designated fieldwork for this study and what I knew beforehand. I had already had many conversations with celebrants from all over New Zealand during training courses, conferences, and events I had participated in prior to taking on the doctoral study. I knew a number of celebrants locally and nationally. This immersion in the community and the knowledge gained from my experience and networking gave me a strong basis for knowing a considerable amount about the topic before I embarked on formal study. This said, I did make a deliberate effort to extend my exposure to new celebrants whom I had not heard of or met when I began the study. I felt that such an effort could lead to my hearing new and different perspectives. My study was funded mainly through personal funds, and some fieldwork expenses were reimbursed by the Massey University School of Social and Cultural Studies Graduate Research Fund.

The participant observation process yielded data from a range of activities I have been party to, as a researcher, presenter, participant, and celebrant. Whilst working on this study I attended Wellington-based celebrant association branch meetings and professional development activities, and four national conferences of celebrants. In July 2005 I attended the biennial CANZ conference held in Hamilton and, in 2007, the one in Dunedin. I was keynote speaker at the Celebrants Guild 2008 conference in Auckland where I spoke about the emerging findings of my study and gathered information informally from conference attendees on the topic of spirituality in celebrants' work. I took part in the CANZ conference in Auckland in July 2009, leading a workshop on oral histories and also participating in a valuable interactive session at which celebrants shared experiences of how they manage disharmony during ritual preparations. At the Association of Social Anthropologists of

Aotearoa/New Zealand (ASAA/NZ) 2007 conference and the Joint Conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth, Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Australian Anthropological Society (ASA/ASAANZ/AAS) 2008 conference I presented papers to academic audiences.<sup>18</sup>

The interviewing and oral history recording components of the fieldwork were carried out over a period of three years and included a number of trips away from my home in Wellington, as funding, other part-time work, and parenting commitments allowed. I was familiar with having several projects on at one time and, like some other anthropologists, for example Andrews (2005: 37), I found part-time research to be highly efficient and effective. There was a considerable amount of behind-the-scenes preparations for each oral history interview, which I set up in batches to avoid inappropriate delays between initial contact, the interview, and sending back transcripts. An advantage of conducting fieldwork over a relatively long period was that I was able to attend more of the regular (although relatively infrequent) celebrant get-togethers (e.g. workshops and conferences). These were valuable ways to meet with celebrants, listen, discuss, and learn with them. Also, to a small extent, I was able to observe changes and developments in the field over an extended period. For example, the introduction of celebrant accreditation in one celebrant organisation and the establishment of a new training course for celebrants occurred during the course of this study. My ongoing celebrant work continued to be personally very satisfying, as well as important in building my own experience and knowledge about ritual-making as I wrote about it.

As the number of celebrants I had interviewed grew, I kept track of the mix of those who took part and, in the manner of ongoing sampling, tried to include a range of celebrants from different perspectives in the overall sample. The total number of formal interviews was 22. This includes 14 celebrants with whom I recorded oral history interviews and 8 additional interviews with celebrants from Lower Hutt,

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<sup>18</sup> 'Independent celebrants and ritual invention: is nothing taboo? In the era of 'anything goes' who decides what comprises rites of passage?', (2007), ASAA/NZ, Waikato University

'Contemporary ritual-making and appropriation: case study exploring celebrants' ethical frameworks when creating rite of passage ceremonies', (2008), ASA/ASAANZ/AAS, Auckland University

Kapiti Coast, Gisborne, Otaki, Northland, Wellington, and Auckland. Eighteen were women. Four were men. They included celebrants involved in a range of ceremonies. The majority were of New Zealand European/ Pakeha ethnicity, which reflects the national pattern as a whole. Participants also included one Māori and one New Zealander of Fijian Indian descent. Celebrants with a range of experience were represented, including one who was in her first year and several with more than 20 years' experience. About one-quarter had trained in celebrant studies. There were celebrants connected with each of the main professional organisations, some who belonged to both, and some who belonged to none. Part-time and a small number of full-time celebrants participated, with a variety of different employment backgrounds and life experiences. Approximately half those I interviewed were people I identified then invited to take part: all of those I approached agreed to participate. The remainder comprised celebrants who responded to my publicity, offering to participate. More people responded to the publicity than I could reasonably include in the study. I contacted each one, thanked them for their offer, explained the 'oversupply' situation, and how I would not be able to interview everyone face to face. I invited them to contribute their experiences and examples of their work in an alternative manner, through completion of a short email questionnaire. A small number of celebrants took up this offer and I was then able to include what they sent in my fieldwork material.

Those celebrants I interviewed lived mainly in greater Auckland and the Wellington region. Some had lived and worked as celebrants in other areas of New Zealand prior to residing in the cities mentioned. I have engaged informally with celebrants practising in other centres including in the South Island. Overall, my interpretation is based more on my immersion in the ways celebrants work in concentrated urban settings than it is on the experiences of celebrants in smaller provincial or rural communities. A larger, broader-reaching national study might possibly conceive of different issues and different ways celebrants work in smaller communities, perhaps where the celebrant and clients are more likely to know each other prior to their celebrant-client ritual-making relationship, and perhaps involving celebrants having longer-term involvement in families over lifetimes or even generations. It would also be interesting to examine the backgrounds of celebrants in different areas and consider them in the context of local or regional religious and other traditions.

Regionalism in spiritual and ritual traditions is fascinating and relevant to the New Zealand situation, as there is a resurgence of regionalism in some aspects of cultural life. Being able to look at whether there are themes and patterns relating to regional or local celebrant-led traditions would add a dimension to the broader context of New Zealand spirituality and culture to which this study contributes.

Whilst celebrants from a range of ethnic backgrounds took part, I did not record oral histories with any Māori celebrants. My opportunities to do so were limited. Firstly, this was because there are very few Māori independent celebrants practising. The professional associations were not able to provide me with names of Māori celebrants as they did not collect ethnicity information on members. (This had been the method I had identified at the outset of the study by which I was going to attempt to locate Māori celebrants.) By asking celebrants whether they knew of Māori involved in independent celebrant work I became aware of a small number of Māori celebrants, some of whom I was able to talk informally with over the course of the study and I interviewed Rachel Selby, academic and celebrant, who earlier had reviewed my research design.

The processes I followed preparing for and recording oral history interviews involved gaining written informed consent from participants and following closely to the guidelines of the Oral History Centre at the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand. To ensure that I was completely familiar with these processes I attended two, two-day training workshops at the Oral History Centre in late 2005 and early 2006 which covered methodology, planning, equipment, recording, ethics, interviewing, processing and making oral history material available for use. I also consulted with the Curator of the Archive, whilst designing the research and prior to applying for ethics approval from the university, to ensure that my intended method met the requirements I had identified for my study with this community of research participants and the expectations and conventions of both the university and the library simultaneously. My ethics committee application contained the information sheets and two information collection forms. The information sheets were: an Oral History Interview Information Sheet on Massey University letterhead (Appendix 1), an interviewee privacy rights and responsibilities information sheet (Appendix 2), and a National Oral History Association of New Zealand Code of

Ethical and Technical Practice information sheet (Appendix 3). The forms for collecting information were a Participant Consent and Oral History Recording Agreement on Massey University letterhead (Appendix 4) and an interviewee information form on which identifying details are collected to accompany recordings, and an oral history recording agreement (Appendix 5). A draft interview guide accompanied the ethics committee application (Appendix 6).

For each oral history interview I recorded the dates of contact and copies of correspondence with celebrants I approached to take part. Before I recorded oral history interviews, I broadly outlined the nature of my study in a letter to participants. I sent the information sheets and forms to each person with the dates we had agreed prior to the date of our recording session, along with the interview outline. When we met, I ensured that participants understood the nature of the consent; that the purpose of the interview was twofold: to contribute to my doctoral research and to create original oral history recordings which would be made publicly available for archival purposes and held in the National Library of New Zealand. Explanation of the fact that they would have the opportunity to see this transcript prior to my including the information in my study, and prior to the oral history recording being lodged as a publicly available record was given twice to each interviewee: on the information sheet, and again orally when I met them face to face. After the interviews were completed and I had transcribed them, a copy of each transcript along with the information sheet and a copy of the signed consent form were sent back to each interviewee to keep. They were asked to closely read the transcript, given my contact details again, and asked to make contact before a specified date if they wished to make any changes to the consent for its use. I thanked them again for their contributions and updated interviewees on the progress of my broader study, as they had all been so enthusiastic and supportive of it.

The consent process worked very smoothly. Everyone I invited to take part did so, and no one altered their full consent for their materials to be included in my study and in the Archive. The original oral history recordings were submitted to the Archive for safekeeping in 2007, at which time they were embargoed until their formal acceptance. This formal acceptance, called accessioning, was completed in July 2009. Interviews with each participant were recorded over one or two three-hour

sessions, depending on the logistics of my being able to travel to spend time with them, and how much time it took to cover a useful amount of material. I conducted the interviews at a time and place convenient to the celebrants concerned, which for almost all was their home. An exception was a funeral celebrant; we conducted the interview at her place of employment, a funeral home.

As I have described, the process of creating oral histories was a satisfying one in terms of my relationships with celebrants. Meeting them and hearing them tell their own stories in their own words was fascinating. In some instances the stories celebrants told seemed to have a sacred dimension. Jean Hera also described a sacred dimension to her women's storytelling of after-death practices and beliefs which involved 'the interrelatedness of our cultural heritage and popular symbolism, our understandings of the past and our visions for the future along with the deep, spiritual feelings and thoughts we may have when we try to make sense of our own lives in the midst of others in relation to the earth, world, and universe that we are part of' (Hera, 1995: 93-94). In the manner described by Graham, I utilised 'open-ended and broadly encompassing questions' to encourage participants to 'take over the interview as their own' (Graham in Hera 1995: 95). As Hera had done, I sought celebrants as 'active subjects rather than objects of research and knowledge' allowing them to be storytellers using their 'own language and style of communication' (Hera 1995: 95).

During these interviews participants narrated their relationships with clients, their processes of working with clients, and their descriptions of the ritual performances they facilitate. Each was set up with a broad outline of topics for discussion, based on themes I identified at the outset of the study:

To understand the people who work as celebrants:

- explore what led them to define themselves as celebrants;
- describe how they came to be working, and why they continued to work, as celebrants;
- explore processes by which they prepared /learned /trained to be a celebrant;
- describe how celebrancy fitted with, or remained separate from, other aspects of their work or life; and

- identify who celebrants regarded as pioneers, leaders, and innovators and why.

To record oral histories with current and past celebrants:

- record interviews with practising celebrants and pioneers and place these in the Oral History Centre at the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand

To discover the rituals and ceremonies conducted by celebrants:

- describe and understand the range of what celebrants 'do' for their clients and the rituals and ceremonies they practise;
- explain the roles celebrants take, including understanding how they contrasted and compared themselves to others who carried out similar ceremonial functions;
- explore what is unique or different about celebrants compared with traditional ritual-makers; and
- explore whether they deliberately set out to change rituals or create new ones, and understand the drivers of innovation and change.

To examine the meanings and significance celebrants attributed to their work and rituals:

- describe people's motivations for being involved in celebrancy; and
- explore what celebrants tried to achieve for themselves and their clients.

To understand celebrants' perspectives on spirituality:

- reflect on how clients' spiritual beliefs and values were translated into rituals;
- explore ways in which the beliefs and values of celebrants were relevant to the rituals they conduct;
- understand the extent to which the work of celebrants was driven by what clients desire and demand, and how this fitted with celebrants' own motivations and beliefs around their work;
- understand whether celebrants needed to know about clients' beliefs and values in order to design or conduct rituals for them, and if so, how did they go about obtaining and incorporating this knowledge;
- identify people, philosophies and experiences which celebrants describe as influencing their work and the beliefs and values underlying their work; and

- reflect on whether celebrants think their own spiritual beliefs are having a role in changing patterns of belief in New Zealand society more broadly.

To explore the cultural context of the civil celebrancy in New Zealand:

- reflect on what the nature of the rituals conducted by celebrants means for what we understand about the values and beliefs of New Zealanders; and
- describe how the (changing) nature of the rituals conducted by celebrants related to changes going on in New Zealand society, and other western societies where relevant.

### **Critical analysis of oral accounts**

What are the conventions of ethnography and oral history and how have these influenced my study? A common characteristic of both ethnography and oral history is the value they ascribe to documenting and preserving the voices, lives, and cultures of people who might otherwise not be represented in more conventional historical documents, studies, and memoirs (Di Leonardo 1987: 3-4). To do this, researchers working in both disciplinary fields gather data from oral sources by engaging in close face-to-face encounters and interviews with numbers of people. From this common base, conventions for anthropology and oral history diverge in several ways, and these ways were usefully explored from an anthropologist's perspective by Micaela di Leonardo in a review of oral history as an ethnographic encounter (Di Leonardo 1987: 4-7). I set out these differences here, and discuss how they have influenced this study in which I employed oral histories within a participant observation methodology.

The first broad area of difference between anthropology and oral history is that oral history interviews are typically dyadic encounters whereas anthropologists usually consider individual life histories in a context of ethnographic encounters involving large numbers of people. Di Leonardo also thought that this individual/group distinction was reversed when noting that anthropology is founded on the notion of the heroic individual ethnographer in contrast with the tradition of oral historians retaining relative anonymity within projects which are, instead, focused on creating oral archives of participants. In this study, dyadic oral history interviews were an

important part of the ethnographic fieldwork. In other settings within the field my encounters were with larger numbers of celebrants at times, in small and large groups, in formal and informal settings. Overall, the study relies more strongly on how ritual-makers talked about their ritual-making than it does on how I observed and interpret them ritualising.

Secondly, Di Leonardo considered ethnographic fieldwork essentially as an act through which anthropologists define themselves, while oral history interviewing is regarded more as a means of information gathering. I do not disagree with this. Noting the difference in emphasis does not mean that the two perspectives are mutually exclusive, though. My study is conceptualised within an anthropological framework and it incorporates oral histories. Now, twenty four years after Di Leonardo pointed out differences between ethnography and oral history, recording oral histories is regarded as an established ethnographic research approach (Fetterman 1998, Thompson 2000:87). Another distinction which I do not think is a binding convention now, more than two decades on, is Di Leonardo's view that ethnographies tended to be cross-cultural whereas oral historians researched intra-culturally. That said, my use of oral histories in this study where I am an insider in the community means I am conforming to the historical convention of the oral historians researching within their own culture. Additionally, the relative emphasis oral historians place on understanding the past was presented as a point of difference from anthropologists who in Di Leonardo's view, tended to research the present. Once again, my interpretation of this point is not that the author meant to suggest that the two foci - past and present - were necessarily mutually exclusive. Certainly in this study, being the first of its kind in New Zealand focusing on independent celebrants as ritual makers, I set out to explore the topic broadly and I did not feel constrained by past conventions of either anthropology or any other discipline, and I delved in to historical aspects, how celebrants operate today, and examined changes which have occurred from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries.

Di Leonardo regarded the key difference in conventions between anthropology and oral history as the varying emphases practitioners place on modes of data collection, with anthropologists typically combining narrative and behavioural evidence (observation), and oral historians focusing on narratives and related artefacts. In my

study I placed a strong emphasis on the importance of information gathered through the oral histories method. These oral histories were nonetheless only one part of my participant observation method, and these various sources together contributed to my overall understanding of this group of ritual-makers. Di Leonardo also described an ethnographic tradition of sheltering the privacy of informants and she distinguishes this from oral historians' typical approach which is to make oral historical materials available as public records. She pointed out, 24 years ago, that there were also anthropological studies which included life histories and so were counter to this general rule, where the participants' names and backgrounds are not hidden from readers. Participants in this study were identified by their real names and some detail was included about their experience and the rituals they were involved in. Recordings with them were placed in a public archive during the period of the study and became immediately accessible to the public. This feature of the study has undoubtedly affected the ways in which celebrants have contributed in their oral history interviews. Naturally, celebrants will have wanted to present themselves in the best possible light, both from the perspective that they were being researched, which inherently involves the researcher making judgments, and also because celebrants were aware that the recordings, accessible in the archives, might potentially be scrutinised by others as well.

Di Leonardo concluded that as well as the differences faced by ethnographers and oral historians, they shared three major problems in common: how to approach fieldwork so as to ameliorate power differentials between researchers and participants, how to be self-conscious about how researchers affect the information given to them, and how to construct texts so as to indicate as honestly as possible the specific personal collaborations that produced the narratives researchers present (di Leonardo, 1987 18-19). The oral history interview is, as Vincent Crapanzo suggests, 'a text, not social reality and this text is itself the product of a complex collaboration' (Crapanzo, 1984: 359). Interpreting oral histories involves the researcher being reflexive, in the same ways that they must be in all social science research, consciously analysing the purpose of the research, the politics and subjectivity of the researcher, the inter-subjectivity of the interview, and the effects these have on the text produced. Each oral history interview is a 'response to a particular person and set of questions, as well as to the narrator's inner need to make sense of experience.

What is said also draws upon the narrator's linguistic conventions and cultural assumptions and hence is an expression of identity, consciousness, and culture' (Shopes, 2002: 7).

Who was talking in the oral history interviews gathered in this research? What makes up the social identities of the celebrants participating? There are several aspects to operating as a celebrant which will have impacted on how celebrants have portrayed themselves to me as an ethnographer in this study. Celebrants operate in a relationship of trust with their clients. The public expect and rely upon them to be honest, trustworthy, and competent in ritual-making in order for them to fulfil their legal and social functions as celebrants. The role of a celebrant is a public one, they are constantly visible to the clients and groups of people who gather for the ceremonies they facilitate. They are accountable to the government agency for their actions, to their professional peers through membership of professional associations, and to their clients. Expectations are for them to be focused on delivering what their clients want and doing this in a careful and competent manner. They are also reliant on having a favourable reputation on such matters, as this impacts on their ability to attract clients on an ongoing basis. (Celebrants are not guaranteed work by virtue of being registered or available.) All of these factors combined mean that celebrants have a vested interest, whilst taking part in oral history recordings, to want to appear serious, thoughtful, caring, and skilled in relation to their celebrant selves.

Theoretically, they may have felt a need to 'build up' their work to protect it from being something anyone might read about and feel they could do, too, to convey it as more substantial and so more difficult for new people to take up. In addition to this, some of the personal information they come to hold about their clients from working with them in creating ceremonies can be sensitive, and is confidential between them and their clients, and I needed celebrants to be mindful of this throughout our recording sessions to ensure that they respected their clients' privacy.

Who am I as a researcher and as an interviewer? What are my own personal views and politics? What is my motivation to do this research? What do I care about, and believe in? How am I perceived by the participants? How do I deliberately (and unconsciously) come across in the interviews and other encounters? Participants were all aware that I was a marriage and civil union celebrant myself, as well as a

student researcher on this project. Most also knew that the way I made my living is as a professional researcher in applied health and social services research. Relative to many of the celebrants I was young (in my thirties) and 'new' to celebrant work (I commenced in 2001), so I might have been regarded as inexperienced by some, a naive beginner, perhaps. Another component of my celebrant person relates to me having trained in Celebrant Studies prior to becoming a celebrant, which the majority of celebrants had not. This may have meant I was regarded warily by some celebrants who might have felt vulnerable because there was a new, curious, qualified celebrant enthusiastic and full of questions, who was in a position to be potentially critical of them and their ritual-making in my research. Mainly, though, as I have mentioned, being a celebrant myself was helpful in several ways; I was accepted as interested and favourably inclined towards the efforts of celebrants, enthusiastic about the material I was gathering. Through doing this study I have become aware of how, as a celebrant myself, there is the potential for me to have unconsciously colluded with my participants through my questioning, through avoiding generating critical dialogue, and in the wider discourse for me to have assisted my research participants to show themselves in the research at their best. Reflecting back on the study, I have come to appreciate, better, the importance of being aware of the potential for this dynamic and the need to have strategies to mitigate it.

At the outset of the study there was nothing published in New Zealand about this group of ritual-makers and I embarked on this study as an insider. I therefore had the luxury, to an extent, of choosing which areas to emphasise. Commenting on the interpretive complexities of oral history interviews, Shopes stated, 'there is no doubt that the single most important factor in the constitution of an interview is the questions posed by the interviewer' (2002:8). My questions provided the intellectual framework for the interview and give it direction and shape. They are inevitably derived from a set of assumptions about what is important and there is a fine line between empathy and collusion. I addressed the same broad set of topics with each participant, to the extent that this was relevant to their engagement with celebrancy. Balanced with these topics, there was space in the interviews for celebrants to raise additional areas which they felt were important to them, and throughout the interview I followed up on the responses provided by participants in order to deepen and

extend on what they had said where I felt there was more to explore and explain than had been first given. Over the period of study my own knowledge of areas which are important and contentious in anthropology has grown. With this hindsight, I could now fine-tune the topic areas to more deliberately lead participants to talk more about these areas, such as appropriation, and I could have emphasised this more in my thesis.

In interpreting the oral history material, I did not take it at face value, however. In chapter six, for example, I build on the issue some celebrants described of feeling a calling to their work. Examining the consequences of personalisation in ritual which celebrants described as a fundamental characteristic of their work, I augment this oral history material with information shared in a group development session where celebrants talked about tensions and difficulties which can sometimes arise. In chapter seven I expand on the practices of eclecticism described by many celebrants and consider them from the angle of appropriation, and the effects of this.

The oral history method was a highlight for me personally, and as discussed earlier, I included it precisely because it was a way of attributing clearer ownership of the contributions of particular celebrants and visibility for them and their work within the context of my thesis. On these matters I am satisfied with how it worked. However information from many other sources contributed to my understanding, such as my thoughts and collated notes from one-on-one conversations and group discussions, interviews, recordings of conference speeches, emailed information, full copies of some ceremonies, partial descriptions of other ceremonies, and also different information from the same research participant but gathered at a separate time from the recordings. Some of my most fruitful learning came from conversations and discussions outside of the oral history recording processes, with the same celebrants as whom I was doing recordings with, and with celebrant friends and informal discussions such as at local CANZ branch get-togethers. Overall, I was left with a sense of the oral histories being slightly less effective as an ethnographic information gathering tool than I had expected they would be. However, this was not problematic from an anthropological point of view since the oral history recordings were only one of several sources of material included in my analysis.

During the interviews I followed the interview guide, whilst also went with the flow of conversation with each individual celebrant so that they could introduce other relevant material. I intervened minimally, because this is what I understood oral histories ought to be like. In certain interviews, such as ones where I knew the celebrant prior to the study, I was frustrated with the expectation that I ‘stay out’ of the interview as much as possible to allow the participant’s voice and views to dominate. Sometimes this felt too unnatural. I felt the participants were expecting me to contribute more to the conversation, and I thought that in doing so I would be better able to stimulate them to explain further what they were raising. By engaging in a real way, feeding back how I was interpreting what they were saying and checking this, contributing my own experiences and how well they had worked, sharing in what felt like a more ‘natural’ conversation, I could engage more comfortably and also I could keep the conversation going longer as it was, at least in my opinion, more balanced, stimulating, and mutually satisfying. In several of these interviews where I abandoned my self-conscious oral history interviewing style, I felt I was able to get better information. I could get beneath the first answers and grapple with more of the complexity which sometimes sat behind a particular answer. Overall, I felt my best understanding and interpretation came from natural conversations I had with people, rather than when I was interviewing and some of the best conversations were when the tape recorder was off.

By setting up the study, and particularly by gathering knowledge from other celebrants, especially those from professional organisations I do not belong to, I have reached my current ‘in between’ place. This puts me in a unique position in relation to other celebrants. I sense that some celebrants are curious, even wary, as to how I ‘use’ the material gathered for the study, knowing the vulnerability that is associated with being a research participant. There have been expectations for me to get involved in issues which are important to various communities within the celebrant profession, and I have been asked to advocate for particular perspectives based on my researcher status. To date I have not taken on these roles, mainly because my priority has been working towards completion of the writing. I have made an effort to keep celebrants up to date on my progress towards completion, via the CANZ and Celebrants Guild newsletters in which the initial publicity featured, through conference papers, and also informally. This thesis is one story, my interpretation,

narrated within the parameters of an anthropological thesis. I do not claim it to be the definitive ‘truth’ about how celebrants see themselves or are seen by others. In my thesis, to convey the essence of the ways in which celebrants told their stories to me, I have included excerpts from a selection of celebrants’ narratives around their identities and ways of working. Each celebrant is a talented storyteller in their own right, and the energy and generosity they have displayed for this research has been tremendously motivating.

### ***3 Ritual theory***

Celebrants create and facilitate a range of rituals, most commonly rites of passage such as namings, weddings and commitments, and funerals. In this chapter I review key anthropological theories on ritual and the people who perform ritual, and I discuss the context this body of theory provides for my study of celebrants and the meaning and significance of their work to New Zealand culture and spirituality. I outline theoretical concepts of ritual and its functions with a particular focus on rites of passage. The roles and influences of the ritual-makers who performed rite of passage ceremonies in the past are compared with those of one type of ritual-makers (celebrants) today. I look then at ritual change, how and why new rites of passage come about and traditional ones change, and the role of ritualists in these processes of creation and adaptation. My study shows that independent celebrants as ritual makers are actively engaged in changing ritual traditions. Their role is no longer one of performing and perpetuating religious traditions or ritual forms. It is to create rituals that satisfy the demands and honour the diversity of their clients' personal spiritualities, to prioritise individuals' values and preferences. Furthermore, these ritual-makers are further blurring, or destabilising, the theoretical distinctions between what is secular, spiritual, and religious. The nature of the rites of passage they trade in is first and foremost secular. They are also richly spiritual, resonating with the diverse personal spiritualities of clients.

Ritual has been extensively researched from a range of spiritual, religious, secular, practice-based, and theoretical perspectives. Anthropological observation and theory-building on ritual began as a means to understand the myths and religions the rituals represented. Over time the emphasis changed to seeing ritual as a window on culture, contributing to the development of theories of culture and society. In the latter part of the 20th century the academic field of ritual studies became more interdisciplinary, involving perspectives from anthropology, religious studies, literary criticism, performance theory, communication studies, psychology, and ecology. More recently ritual practice itself has become a focus of anthropological study for what it intrinsically represents or achieves. Through the study of ritual we are able to look at how we organise our world, illuminating values, beliefs, social structures and

processes of our communities and societies. Ritual is a dynamic form of action or communication in which people take part or respond to; it brings structure and meaning to people's lives, individually and collectively. As well as reflecting cultural values, ritual is one way in which we generate, reformulate, and challenge cultural values (Brown, 2003). Definitions of ritual are numerous. They include, and variously emphasise, combinations of the elements of process, enactment, transformation, performance, and expression. Definitions tend to emphasise the formal prescriptive aspect of ritual and frequently link ritual action with beliefs. These elements are explored in the overview of key theoretical approaches to ritual which follows. This overview is presented in chronological order.

Early theoretical perspectives were concerned with the origins and essential nature of ritual, with ritual as part of religion in terms of expressing the values of death and rebirth (Bell, 1997). In the late 19th century anthropological perspectives began to emerge. Two approaches – intellectualist and symbolist – were put forward and debated at this time. The intellectualist approach emphasised how ritual's repetition and routine helped maintain order by showing the way things were meant to be done – hence the need for careful prescription. The ritual practices of religion were seen as deliberate philosophical explanations about fundamental ideas about the universe, a view expressed by Edward Tylor (1871). Intellectualist theory focused on social cohesion and social control as dynamics of society that underlie religion and ritual. Ritual was seen as expressing religious ideas about sacred beings and powers, and as re-enacting and explaining beliefs and myths, such as how the world, gods, and humans came into being. Ritual was regarded as a means of controlling people's beliefs through enacting primal myths, and through this enactment bringing their understanding about the past into the present (Eliade, 1963). Ritual's role was held to extend to bringing daily life into line with authoritative beliefs, values, and courses of action, especially those provided by religion, during times of crisis or other disruptions.

The symbolist approach proposed a different view of the nature of ritual, emphasising its expressive and communicative functions in the mirroring of culture. The form of, and beliefs expressed through, ritual were regarded as a symbolic language. They expressed meanings about the nature of the world through metaphors

and analogies and making statements about the social order of the societies they were performed in (Durkheim, 1965[1915]). Whilst the symbolist view came to dominate anthropological perspectives, most ritual theory also incorporated an explanatory (intellectualist) component too (Bowie, 2006: 144). Studies of ritual which contributed to the symbolist and intellectualist theoretical approaches were based on observational studies of religious-based, indigenous societies. These early approaches defined ritual from the perspective that it could be separated out from other aspects of daily social and cultural life, as if it were an autonomous activity with ‘universal, timeless, and set features and roles in religion, society, and culture’ (Alexander, 1997: 151).

Now the study of ritual is based on an assumption that ritual is part of people’s experience of social and cultural life. Ritual’s qualities include that it is dynamic, flexible, and open-ended according to the ‘flux of daily social and cultural life and human experience’ (Alexander, 1997: 151). The works of anthropologists Clifford Geertz (1973) and Victor Turner (1967; 1974, 1977, 1995) provided the foundation for our current understanding of ritual. They consolidated the symbolist approach to how ritual functions in society, and broadened the focus to look at how ritual practice could inform an understanding of culture and cultural change. As well as mirroring existing social arrangements and social meanings, Geertz (1973) showed how ritual can create and shape the ideas and defining features of a culture. Ritual came to be understood as assisting the social organisation and dynamics of human societies, for bringing individuals into their communities and establishing them as social entities.

Victor Turner (1974) showed how ritual, through its capacity to create ideas and new social arrangements, can bring about social change, generating and re-generating society and culture. As mentioned, ritual had previously been understood as operating to uphold and restore social order by reinvigorating or imposing established roles, duties, and hierarchies. Prior to Turner, ritual theorists had emphasised ritual’s role in cultural continuity, reinforcing social order. Turner’s view was different. He emphasised the potential for social change through ritual, and he saw this possibility through ritual’s anti-structural nature (Turner, 1995). This ‘anti-structural’ nature was explained by the ‘liminal’ and ‘communitarian’ features of ritual. Liminal refers to the way rituals involve transition, during which there is a

mid-point, an 'in between' time when ritual suspends the ordinary ways of doing things (the social order and duties). During this time alternative context occurs, characterised by more spontaneous, immediate, direct, and open human encounters. Turner saw ritual as a response to, and contrast with, the limitations of the existing social structures of human community. In this way ritual has the potential to be transformative in that it allows people to step back from everyday social structure and reflect on, and experiment with, alternative social arrangements, ones that promote better community (Turner, 1995). By affirming community and unity, Turner saw that ritual could both contrast with, and mediate, the demands of both *communitas* and formalised social order, hierarchy, and tradition (Bell, 1992: 20-21). Through ritual, everyday norms could be confronted and challenged, and alternatives could be enacted, and so social changes could occur.

Newer studies look closely at the particulars of ritual in specific contexts. They are also grounded in understanding the significance and meaning of ritual from participants' points of view, a key concept in ritual theory introduced by Clifford Geertz (1973). Examples of studies which incorporate the voices and interpretations of ritual participants include Horrocks' (1973) participant observation of wedding rituals in Auckland, Rountree's (1993) ethnography on feminist ritual-makers in New Zealand, Salomonsen's (2002) ethnography of feminist witchcraft and (2003) exploration of ritual invention in contemporary culture, Sered's (2005) study investigating ritual in the lives of elderly Jews in California, Collins' (2005) interpretation of British Quaker worship rituals, and Sanson's (2009) research on neo-shamanism in New Zealand.

## **Rites of passage**

Change is inherent in human lives, and interpreting the ritual events and communal marking of the social changes people experience as they progress through life is a focus of anthropological study (Davies, 1994). All societies ritualise important life transitions. The term 'rites of passage' emerged in social anthropology early in the 20th century to describe the ritual process accompanying the movement of people from one social status to another. The landmark theorist on rites of passage is Arnold

van Gennep (1960) and his work on the rituals which accompany changes of place, state, social position, and age are outlined next.

Arnold van Gennep showed rites of passage as a specific ritual process of transformation to facilitate permanent transition from one state to another. He observed rites of passage as organised events in which society took individuals by the hand and led them from one social status to another (van Gennep, 1960), conducting them across a threshold and holding them for a moment in a position when they held neither one status nor another. Van Gennep used a comparative method to interpret changes of status in human society. He worked from information provided by others to look at rituals from pre-literate societies in different parts of the world alongside sacred writings from Christian, Jewish, and Hindu religions. He found these rites of passage across many cultures, and identified a typical threefold structure to them, which still features strongly in much of the current ritual theory and practice.

Van Gennep described the ritual process as being made up of three rites: 'rites of separation' (symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group from a place in the social structure or set of cultural conditions), 'rites of transition' or 'liminality' (a period apart from normal status, the threshold through which the person passes), and 'rites of incorporation' or 'reintegration' (when people are returned to their society, transformed by their new status). According to van Gennep, one of these three components would be emphasised in any one rite, depending on its purpose.

Victor Turner furthered the study of the middle phase of this ritual process (Turner, 1995). He developed the idea of liminality, a metaphor for expressing the ambiguity of the seclusion period of a rite of passage. In the liminal phase people could be 'betwixt and between' and there were particular qualities to the relationships people had with each other during periods of change in social status. He suggested that in liminal moments or times, people experienced a special type of social relationship characterised by an intense awareness of being bound together in a community, an intimate shared experience which he called 'communitas'. Turner explained communitas as being the liminality, marginality, inferiority, comradeship, and

equality among the liminal personae (Turner, 1969: 95). A bond is created between liminal beings because of their marginal position in comparison with the rest of society. Liminality is often associated with the symbols of death, invisibility, darkness, and being in the womb, symbols that also evoke the possibility of a subsequent rebirth. Turner thought that there were some similarities between the tribal, preliterate peoples traditionally studied by anthropologists and modern urban societies, and therefore aspects of theory developed from studies in the former could be compared, with modification, to the latter.

How well does van Gennep's concept of 'rites of passage', as a means of understanding social changes experienced by members of a society as they progressed through life, apply to complex, modern societies, given that it was first developed in the study of pre-literate and tribal societies before becoming widely used in other social contexts? Discussing their collection of descriptions of typical religious rites of passage as they are enacted in various modern religious and cultural contexts (e.g. British Christian marriage, Indian Hindu marriage, Japanese Shinto and Christian marriages), Holm and Bowker (1994) comment on the need to realise that not all religions emphasise the same rites of passage. Particular cultures use different religious traditions for different purposes, rites of passage are often complicated with a variety of emphases within them, and different components (separation, liminality, and reintegration) can be emphasised depending on the overall purpose of the ritual (Holm & Bowker, 1994:1-9). The transference of liminality to modern societies is another aspect of rite of passage theory which has been modified. Turner extended the concept of liminality to develop the term 'liminoid'. Liminoid described periods in modern society which, whilst outside the bounds of formal ritual, were times when the ordinary system of organised activity was put aside to enable people to share in a sense of the common oneness of human existence (Turner, 1977). Some examples of liminoid activity include music, theatre, film, art, poetry, and pilgrimage where these are understood as possessing transformative potential.

Since Turner's (1969) study other theorists have shown the association between liminality and *communitas*. However, whilst it is now accepted that liminality does seem to involve a suspension of ordinary social reality, what replaces that ordinary

social reality differs depending on the context of the ritual (Bowen, 2002). The three-phase ritual process devised by van Gennep remains prominent in ritual theory and in popular understandings of ritual process. It has been shown to apply more to male initiation rites, though, from which it was originally derived. An example of an alternative proposed as being more relevant to women's (initiation) ritual is based around symbols of going inside: enclosure, metamorphosis/magnification, then emergence (Lincoln, 1991). Lincoln's work is an example of important feminist scholarship which highlighted the political dimensions of ritual. Several extensions on the three-stage process of separation, liminality, and incorporation have emerged since van Gennep's work in the 1960s, most of which incorporate (although sometimes rename) the three phases he first identified. Overall, however, the three-stage process has remained fundamental to rite of passage theory.

Ronald Grimes (1995; 2000; 2006) has studied ritual from a multidisciplinary, rather than solely anthropological, perspective. He has examined in detail rites of passage in contemporary western societies and provided many richly detailed narratives of people describing rituals they had been involved in around birth, initiation into adulthood, legal marriages and other forms of commitment, dying and death. Examining rites of passage in contemporary western societies, he looked at the power of both traditional and invented rites to facilitate or obstruct difficult passages in the course of a human life, distinguishing, importantly, between the 'passages' people make and the rites as something they deliberately choose to enact around those passages. He described rites of passage simply as a way of ensuring that we 'attend to such events fully, which is to say, spiritually, psychologically, and socially' (Grimes, 2000:5). Grimes' description of the effects of ritual was consistent with that established by Turner and van Gennep: that rituals transform both the individuals who undergo them and the communities that design and perpetuate them. Grimes referred to rites of passage as choreographed, 'stylized and condensed actions intended to acknowledge or effect a transformation. A transformation is not just any sort of change but a momentous metamorphosis, a moment after which one is never again the same' (Grimes, 2000:6). In Grimes' view, whilst rites disappear in one sense after the moments of their enactment, they are effective if they 'carry' people to a new place in a permanent way. He referred to effective rites as ones where traces remain after the ritual enactment, in individual cognitive and emotional

senses as well as in a collective sense ‘in the heart, in the memory, in the mind, in the texts, in photographs, in descriptions, in social values, and in the marrow, the source of our lifeblood’ (Grimes, 2000: 6-7).

### **Ritual in contemporary contexts**

Turner’s work had a considerable formative influence in the development of the field of ritual studies (Grimes, 1995: xvii). A number of theorists have been influential in adding to Turner’s foundations of the understanding of ritual, including Moore and Myerhoff, Tambiah, Rappaport, and Schechner, which are discussed next. From the 1960s ritual studies extended to the exploration of ritual in non-religious settings, and theories were grounded in the perceptions and experiences of ritual participants. Notions of ritual as a distinct phenomenon with a fixed set of criteria by which it could be identified and defined were superseded by the notion of ritual as a quality, or characteristic, or mode of people’s interaction and communication. The difference between ritual and non-ritual has therefore come to be regarded as relative rather than absolute. The cultural constructedness of ritual has also been acknowledged. Two strong theoretical themes introduced in the latter part of the 20th century are around ritual as a form of cultural communication, and ritual as performance.

Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (1977) concentrated their work on ritual in non-religious settings, studying ritual separately from the belief systems enacted through it. They referred to important similarities between religious and secular ritual, seeing both as purposeful, deliberate attempts to bring about particular effects or consequences for the people participating (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977: 15). They concentrated on ways in which ceremony and ritual were used in the secular affairs of life in urban, mobile, 20th-century western societies to lend authority and legitimacy to people, organisations, moral values, and views of the world. Moore and Myerhoff saw ritual as being applicable to conveying almost any aspect of social life, behaviour, or ideology. This ritual form was regarded as giving meaning to its contents, having a tradition-like effect (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977: 8). They were very interested in the functional component of ritual. They felt ceremonies were staged with certain intentions, that they were deliberate processes aimed to make and mark shifts in situations. According to Myerhoff, it was ritual’s function as a ‘frame’ that

was most important. She saw the main purpose of ritual as being to stop, select, and deliberately artificially demarcate 'a bit of behaviour, or interaction, an aspect of social life, a moment in time' (Myerhoff, 1977: 200). She likened ritual's framing feature to Durkheim's (1915) concept of the sacred as the 'set apart', but set apart in relative terms, rather than sacred ritual as being a different kind of thing altogether.

Ritual was described by Moore and Myerhoff as a form or medium with formal properties: repetition (of occasion, content, or form), stylisation (or special behaviour and the use of actions and symbols in ways that set them apart from ordinary uses), ordering (prescribed structure), evocative presentational style and staging (including use of symbols in particular ways and sensory stimuli), acting (rather than spontaneous behaviour), and the collective dimension of ritual (the social message contained in the very occurrence of the ritual). Through these properties ritual was seen as being able to perform as a 'traditionalizing instrument', conveying messages in an 'authenticating and arresting manner' (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977: 7-8). Moore and Myerhoff also referred to the active process of 'ritualization', by which people 'structure and present particular interpretations of social reality in a way which endows them with legitimacy' (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977: 3-4). They were interested in who engaged in ritual, how they did so, and their reasons for taking part, as well as the ritual forms people chose. They viewed ritual as a phenomenon in its own right and examined what secular rituals are constructed from as well as the act of ritualising.

Moore and Myerhoff's works brought a critical component into the theory by identifying that multiple, contradictory, and contested meanings can be attributed to the ritual form and are characteristic of it. Also, they acknowledged that the consequences of ritual can be unplanned. Their work opened up valuable theoretical consideration of the roles and motivations of the ritual-makers who use ritual with specific intentions in mind and create and change ritual towards achieving these purposes. Their analyses also acknowledged how there were many different possible interpretations of ritual depending on from whose perspective it was being viewed.

Theoretically, the work of Stanley Tambiah (1981) is largely consistent with Moore and Myerhoff's in that he regarded ritual as a form of communication which can be

enacted in relation to anything viewed sacred. His view, too, was that distinctions between ritualistic and non-ritualistic action, and between religious and non-religious ritual, are not absolute. Tambiah described ritual as being a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication, as collective or communal enactment devoted to the achievement of a particular objective, and as involving an awareness that the event is differentiated from ordinary everyday events (Tambiah, 1981: 119-124). Drawing from communications theory, he saw ritual as patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, whose content and arrangement was characterised in varying degrees by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition) (Tambiah, 1981: 119). Conventionality referred to the way in which ritual articulates and presents emotions and feelings in a symbolic or controlled manner, and not as spontaneous, private emotions of particular individuals. Stereotypy was learned, meaningful conventional behaviour. Fusion intensified meaning by mixing and blurring the parts of the ritual into one cumulative experience for participants. Redundancy was repetitions and other patterning devices such as parallelism which are employed in ritual to stimulate a sense of subtle creative variation and attentive expectation (Tambiah, 1981: 122-131). Tambiah saw ritual as performance in several senses. He saw it as a 'staged performance that uses multiple media by which participants experience the event intensively' (1981:119). He also saw the ritual medium as an 'instrument of passage', a 'triggering mechanism' to support and focus participants and transport them in their separation from ordinary daily life (Tambiah, 1981: 140-142). This perspective focuses not just in the constituent 'parts' of ritual, but in the convergence and interplay of these parts of the form. Ritual, Tambiah felt, needed also to be understood as a total, single, experience of 'dramatic actualization', of 'heightened and intensified and fused communication' (1981: 140).

Roy Rappaport's approach was similar to those of Moore and Myerhoff and Tambiah in that it focused on ritual format as well as function. However, in extending the possible functions (existential, psychological, and social) to include ecology, and showing how religious ritual helps people adapt to the physical world, Rappaport gave ritual a new perspective. He identified a set of distinctive features for determining what religious ritual is and how it is uniquely efficacious. These features were: formality (including stylisation and repetition), invariance of liturgical form

which generates sanctity (the quality of unquestionable truthfulness), and certainty of meaning (Rappaport, 1979).

In this manner of isolating the overall structure and functional characteristics of ritual, Grimes (1990) identified several ritual modes which he saw as varying from ritual to ritual depending on the desired function of ritual in a particular context: ritualisation, decorum, ceremony, magic, liturgy, and celebration, which he explained as being ‘embodied attitudes’, qualities or dimensions that can be ascribed to actions and which identify those actions (Grimes, 1990). The purpose of identifying modes, for Grimes, was to be able to acknowledge the breadth of what different rituals comprised and also that their very nature could vary depending on the interests and intentions of those who were ritual-making (1995).

Further developing Turner’s theory of ritual as drama, Richard Schechner examined closely the performative, dramatic aspects of ritual (1973). Schechner regarded ritual as one type of communicative behaviour and identified similarities between performance which takes place in theatres and ritual performance: ‘in all entertainment there is some efficacy and in all ritual there is some theatre’ (1973:152). Both involve the special ordering of time and are performed in special places specifically set aside for the purpose. Schechner saw ritual as sharing many of the fundamental characteristics of drama, play, and theatre, concentrating on the transformation of people and crisis or conflict resolution. He placed these characteristics on a spectrum to show a range of least to greatest differences between theatrical and ritual performance, finding that ritual performance had more emphasis on purpose, whereas theatrical performance was more orientated towards entertainment and fun. Considering ritual in terms of performance theory had the effect of broadening, even further, how ritual was understood in an anthropological sense. In discussing the ritual process as performance, Schechner referred to how ritual studies had turned from ‘looking at the “finished product” toward examining the “whole performance sequence”’: training workshop, rehearsal, warm-up, performance, cool-down, and aftermath’ (Schechner, 1973: 324). Schechner referred to this as exploration of ‘performance magnitude’ and the interconnectedness of performances – including rituals – across ‘cultural boundaries and penetrations to the deepest strata of historical, personal, and neurological experience’ (Schechner, 1973:

326). Bruce Kapferer (2004) found that a dominant notion of performance in ritual analysis could be problematic as it could lead to overemphasis on what ritual overtly presents, the drama of the 'on stage' theatrical performance, whilst underemphasising the experience and meaning of ritual for the people for whom it was most potent or forceful. He felt taking a 'back of house' perspective which looked closely at the dynamics of how people construct their rituals would be more appropriate (2004: 20-21).

By the end of the 20th century ritual had come to be regarded as a form of cultural communication that transmitted the cognitive categories and dispositions that provide people with important aspects of their sense of reality (Bell, 1997: 2). Bell comprehensively documents several key schools of thought concerned with the history of defining and analysing ritual, asserting that whilst no one theoretical school stands out as 'the winner', several provide useful tools for analysis and reflection. Specifically, she refers to ritual as expressive of paradigmatic values concerning death and rebirth; ritual as a mechanism for bringing individuals into the community and establishing a social entity; and ritual as a process which can effect social transformation, for catharsis, for embodying symbolic values, for defining the nature of what is real, and for struggling for control of the sign (Bell, 1997: 89).

Twenty-first century ritual theory centres on the experiences and meanings individuals connect to it and the ways in which people who are active agents consciously utilise ritual as a particular form of interaction and cultural expression. Grimes defined ritual as a process, a human activity, and one which he describes as 'spiritual technology' that has survival value for people as well as beneficial ecological consequences (Grimes, 2000). A perspective of ritual as a fixed thing has been superseded by the view of ritual as a constantly changing and renewing process of 'embodied and communal enactment' (Grimes, 2000:5). Seligman, Weller, Puet, and Simon described this change in the contemporary appreciation of ritual as one which emphasises ritual as 'different forms of self-expression and of individual authenticity' (2008: 10). Kapferer (2004) argues that it is necessary to conceive of ritual as virtuality and as a means by which people enter into the dynamics of everyday life in order to understand its force and potency, and how people use it to explicitly intervene and transform situations. Kapferer's specific use of the term

‘virtuality’ is as a ‘self-contained imaginal space’. Virtuality is ‘real’, a fully lived existential reality (in contrast to cyber-reality, another type of virtual reality) but it is contrasted with ‘actuality’, which is said to be the chaos of ordinary lived processes, the continuously forming, merging, and flowing ordinary everyday realities in which people live. Through the virtuality of ritual, in Kapferer’s view, people are able to slow down the tempo of everyday life and adjust, restore, or introduce new elements, thereby readjusting the dynamics of ordinary lived processes (2004: 16-18).

Referring to how ritual is understood in western societies in the latter part of the twentieth century, academically and in the public arena, Grimes describes it as ‘having the power to temporarily dissolve social hierarchies, remake personal identities engender cultural creativity’, and, more recently at the beginning of the new millennium, as ‘a boundary issue’ by which people can either protect and preserve, or bridge, cognitive and cultural domains (Grimes, 2006: 12).

Drawing together the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, ritual has remained important throughout time, across different and diverse cultures and societies.

Anthropological theorising around ritual has altered from searching for a universal theory of ritual to acceptance of personal, culturally specific meanings. Ritual is understood to be expressive of beliefs and values around important life transitions; as symbolic of our communities and cultures; as transformative; as creating community; framing, marking and traditionalising aspects of our social lives which are important to us. Ritual is the dramatic, expressive, embodied performance of sacred moments and transitions. Of most specific relevance to my analysis of contemporary ritual-making in New Zealand by independent celebrants are the theories derived from and applicable to secular rites and ceremonies, those which consider ritual form, structure, and performance holistically, as well as those which stress interconnectedness across personal, cultural, and historical boundaries. Notions of intentionality and power, as well as being central to the ethnographic method, are central to contemporary ritual theory. Relating intentionality and power to ritual-makers and their clients has only recently begun to be explored. This study builds in these areas by looking at what expectations ritual-makers and their clients bring to the creation and performance of ritual, the nature of their relationships, and whose values, beliefs, and ways of working exert influence over how rituals change. Next I consider how ritual-makers feature in ritual theory.

## **Ritual-makers**

It is relatively recently that ritual theory has encompassed ritual-makers or ritualists (those who participate in ritual) at all. Traditionally, emphasis was mainly on the technology of the ritual they were involved in, although Turner's 'Muchona the Hornet' in his study of Ndembu ritual (1967: 131-150) is a notably rich illustration of an anthropologist interpreting aspects of ritual symbolism, beliefs, and social contexts of a society from the ritual specialist's perspective whilst also paying considerable attention to the ritual specialist, who they are and how they came to work in the ways they do.

Anthropological descriptions of the roles and influences of ritualists were often based on observation of ritualists in non-western societies, often tribal cultures comprising a single ethnic group, where religion and social life were closely intertwined, and where the focus on ritual was strongly centred on reinforcing social structures. Aspects of cultures including rituals can be universal, and cross-cultural comparison of ritual reveals many conceptual commonalities. In ritual theory many enduring elements from classic works such as Turner's (1967; 1977; 1995) and van Gennep's (1960) are very relevant to contemporary western ritual, and these are explained later. However, there are fundamental features of some traditional settings which are quite different from contemporary, western settings. In traditional contexts there tended to be a shared religion to which everyone adhered, traditional ritual-makers work on behalf of the entire community or society, not particular individuals within it, and traditional ritual-makers hold exclusive expertise on the rites of their own religion and culture. In many of these contexts the ritualists who performed rites of passage possessed specialist knowledge and authority in ritual-making which the ritual participants did not necessarily have. This meant there was an emphasis on the tradition and repetition of ritual, and ritualists were observed conducting rites which had been performed many times before. Some ritualists were considered as having magical powers or connections with the supernatural, for example, in the case of shamans (Harner, 1990), a characteristic which is quite different from public ideas about contemporary western celebrants and their secular role in New Zealand society today. This is an important distinction between some traditional ritual studies and mine.

Moreover, the fit between the roles of the ritual-makers and ritualists in the literature described here and the roles of contemporary celebrants is not straightforward. The term 'ritual-makers' is sometimes used to refer to participatory ritual-making, such as pagan and feminist ritual-making, where the members of a group take turns at organising rituals in which all group members take part. Where someone takes a role facilitating a ritual for others, a variety of labels are mentioned including 'ritualists', 'ritual practitioners', and 'ritual specialists'. The terms 'ritualist' and 'ritual specialist' are sometimes used in reference to religious contexts for the authority figure, the religious practitioner who is an expert in ritual as opposed to the people who receive or take part in the ritual. Traditionally, these ritualists were religious leaders in their communities, or representatives of institutionalised religions. Their competence in ritual was instrumental in their larger role of conveying religious beliefs and providing pastoral care for their communities of faith. Catherine Bell refers to 'ritualists' as 'the people who take professional responsibility for organizing, performing, and even creating rites' and also to 'ritual experts', people involved with 'devising and decreeing rites' (Bell, 1997:223). Grimes also uses term 'ritualists' to refer to people who 'enact the rituals'(1990:9). Elizabeth Collins suggests there is a need to differentiate between 'ritual authors', 'ritual sponsors', 'ritual specialists', those who participate as an audience, and those who study the ritual and interpret its meaning to others (1998:4-5). I concur that there is a need for careful consideration of the nature and the detail of the differences between these roles in dynamic contemporary ritual-making contexts.

None of the terms in the literature are directly transferable to independent celebrants in a contemporary New Zealand context. 'Ritual-makers' and 'ritualists' provide the closest match to my understanding of celebrants and their work, but neither is completely suitable without elaboration of their particular roles and ways of working. Ritual-makers are often referred to as sharing in the making and performance of ritual in quite an equitable way. They are a group of people who all create and all take part in rituals, perhaps with someone taking a lead. As the term 'ritualists' can refer to the people taking part in ritual, ambiguities could arise if the meaning were changed in this research so that it referred exclusively to those creating and facilitating ritual for clients as independent celebrants do. 'Ritual experts' or 'ritual specialists' are potentially useful terms in that they highlight the element of

competency held by this group, although arguably ‘expert’ and ‘specialist’ imply a type of authority which celebrants do not have or claim to have (except for the legal authority they have to marry and create civil unions). The term ‘ritual-maker’ is the one which aligns more closely with the role of independent celebrants than the others in the literature and this is the term I shall use, along with ‘celebrant’, throughout the thesis. In using the term ritual-makers to describe independent celebrants, I refer to the multiple roles celebrants typically fulfil, creating, adapting, organising, facilitating, and performing rituals for clients.

Ritual is dynamic, and increasingly studies are focusing on how ritual changes. Insights from processes for liturgical change show how ritual is continually being altered from within religious institutions seeking to remain relevant to the changing issues and lives of the people who belong to them. With contemporary secular ritual, people’s choices are broader, with regard to selecting which rituals they take part in, if any, and how those rituals are constituted. In doing so people draw from different belief systems, although not necessarily in a coherent way (Kohn, 2003), ‘shopping’ to use Grimes’ (1990) term, for individualised, eclectic forms of ritual and spiritual expression from many cultures and systems of belief. Studies set in modern, secular society in particular have focused on aspects of ritual change such as the uprooting of precedent and tradition, re-interpretation, and reformulation of ritual (Alexander, 1997). These studies extend to how people construct and change ritual, although this has not featured prominently. Bell argued that the invisibility of a ritual’s origins and its inventors was intrinsic to what ritual is all about and that ‘the ability of ritual to give the impression of being old and unchanging helps to protect it from alterations both frivolous and serious’ (Bell, 1997: 211). This is a similar concept to that of the traditionalising effect of ritual (Myerhoff 1977: 8). How individual ritual-makers change ritual and why they do so is an area of ritual theory where this study provides a contemporary perspective.

Susan Sered examined ritual expertise and ritual change in the modern world including the gendered nature of relationships, roles, ritual traditions and changes and noted that it was ‘commonly accepted that rituals change people, but the contrary movement has rarely been considered’ (2005: 202). Bell observed that there was a ‘prevalent style of self-conscious ritual entrepreneurship in the modern world’ and

many types of 'ritual improvisation' were gaining 'growing social legitimacy' (1997: 224). She also commented on the 'unprecedented visibility of the very dynamics of ritual invention', by which she was referring to the ways in which people were quite aware that in planning their own rituals and reflecting and analysing the dynamics and effects of these rituals they are 'constructing their own worlds', 'moral precepts they should live by', and the 'devotional images in which they decide to believe' (Bell, 1997: 225).

Bell's work provokes consideration of a range of factors which can influence ritual change and a variety of ways in which that happens. Bell comments on how 'even one of the most stable ritual traditions in the world [the Christian liturgy] has been subject to a constant diet of dramatic upheavals and gradual modifications (Bell, 1997: 223). For example, Cook and Walter show personalisation in English Christian funeral ceremonies by contrasting traditional religious funerals (The Order for the Burial of the Dead, 1662, *Book of Common Prayer*) with an updated version (Church of England, 2000, *Common Worship*) (2005: 265-391). Ritual transfer pays particular attention to contextual factors such as socio-cultural and politico-economic determinants of ritual across different societies, such as the 19th-century transplanting of Christianity to New Zealand with the arrival of British settlers discussed in Chapter Four. Ritual design relates to intentional changes in ritual, and covers a spectrum ranging from 'patchwork' processes within traditional rituals, to the invention of completely new rituals and is most relevant to my focus in this study. New rites of passage are created and traditional ones alter over time. Studies have enquired into the processes and determinants of which elements change and which stay the same, how far rituals can stretch, whether there are critical aspects which are less flexible to change, and perceptions of meaning and efficacy in relation to emerging and changing rites. Sered's examples of ritual change where women have developed new religious rituals shows they used flexibility and innovation in dealing with new situations whilst maintaining a tenacious concern for traditions they held sacred (Sered, 2005: 213).

One of the examples of ritual change Sered (2005) discusses is Myerhoff's study that investigated ritual in the lives of elderly Jews at Senior Citizens' Day Centre in California (Myerhoff, 1979). In that study Myerhoff found that people combined

traditional elements with modern innovations in order to form new rituals. The ritual involved was a graduation *siyum* held at the end of a course in Yiddish history which had traditionally been a ceremony men (but not women) took part in. The senior citizens in Myerhoff's study devised a ritual which established continuity between the past and the present by combining traditional Eastern European as well as modern American graduation elements. They did so in a way which, Myerhoff observed, was 'successfully linking two distinct realms of meaning and experience into a strong ritual drama'. The 'new' ritual 'transcended contradictions, fused disparate elements, glossed conflicts, and provided a sense of unity' (Myerhoff, 1979: 104-105). Invented traditions are a typical instance of people responding to a novel situation through creating a ritual that refers to old situations (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983: 1-14).

Grimes referred to ritualists 'picking and choosing rites to suit [their] own purposes' (1990:19). In a book about contemporary rites of passage and the reinvention of ritual in western societies, Grimes examined 'troubled and invented' rites and why people changed rites, including why they no longer practised rites that used to be important to them. His view was that all rites were 'flowing processes, not just rigid structures or momentary events' (Grimes, 2000:12). His work comprises numerous rich, descriptive narratives set in contemporary contexts, of individuals recalling the experiences of designing their rituals and performing them, and reflections on the meanings the memories of the rituals held for them afterwards. This raised for me the need to consider the temporal element to ritual research and interpretation. How people experience and perceive ritual can change over time: how an individual (client or celebrant), family, or community view a ritual prior to, or soon after its enactment can vary and this may continue to change in terms of the memories it leaves and the function these memories fulfil as time passes from the ritual moment.

In a small study of ritual invention, Jone Salomonsen described how from the 1970s to the turn of the century there had been a move towards 'cultural and spiritual creativity; the re-claiming or re-inventing of functioning rites of passage' (2003:15). She described ritual invention as 'creat[ing] intellectually and spiritually meaningful forms of living and symbolizing for people who admit to inhabiting non-traditional, modern worlds' (Salomonsen, 2003: 23). Her study examined the implied ethno-

methodologies of two recently invented pagan and Christian cases of ritual invention in contemporary American culture and found similar patterns across the two very different rites of initiation to adulthood. By ethno-methodology, Salomonsen meant ‘the reflective processes and implementing acts by which a new cultural phenomenon such as ritual invention takes place, including how people discover that something in their life is ‘lacking’, how they prescribe the necessary ‘medicine’ for its healing, what sources they consult to enable themselves to perform the work, how they explain and facilitate the structures and contents of the new ritualizing practices actually generated, and finally how they authorize the inventions made as producing new, competent, and embodied ways of knowing’ (2003:15). The patterns observed across the two processes of ritual invention in Salomonsen’s study involved the active search for the ‘building blocks for the construction of a new rite, a deep conviction that new knowledge about self, community and spirituality is most favourably facilitated through experiential, ritualized learning’ (2003:22). Obligations around the performance of ‘trans-historical, decontextualised, static rites’ were dismissed and replaced with processes by which the situations were assessed and the rites formulated on ‘what needs to be done in order to minister to each other properly’ (Salomonsen, 2003:22). In this same way, when the celebrants in my study create and adapt ritual for clients, they do so without an *a priori* view of how the ritual must adhere to or differ from its traditional form. Instead they assess the situation and the needs and desires of their clients, and devise or adapt the ritual accordingly. I examine these processes in detail in Chapter Six on ritual-making and Chapter Eight on spirituality.

As I have found, Bell observed that ‘examination of the roles of the ritualists ... the people who take professional responsibility for organizing, performing, and even creating rites important to the religious life of a community’ is not common and ‘the roles of ritual experts in devising and decreeing rites seems, in fact, to be much more widespread, dynamic, and complicated than most current models of ritual would lead us to suppose’ (1997). One of the main reasons rituals change is because ‘the meanings of those rituals have shifted as people looked at them with different concerns and questions’ (Catherine Bell, 1997: 223). This study delves into the intentions and behaviours of how individual celebrants operate; how they go about creating and adapting ritual in the contemporary New Zealand context. Their reasons

for varying ritual include responding to what their various clients want, presenting options to their clients on what they think those particular clients might find appropriate and meaningful, and their confidence and skill in ritual-making acquired formally in training, and over time, through experience. Ritual-makers in this study displayed a range of attitudes towards cultural borrowing and there was no clear, shared perspective. Some of them openly used ritual traditions from other cultural and religious traditions as they saw fit, perceiving that all individuals anywhere were free to decide for themselves their own spirituality which extended to freedom to use any spiritual traditions they desired, thereby ignoring issues of cultural ownership and displaying disregard for the claim that other people's culturally embedded and culturally-specific rituals should not be misappropriated. Many celebrants did not conceive of their practice as equating to appropriation. They did not see that in using ritual traditions in the ways they do that they were taking something without requisite permission. Indeed it did not seem to occur to them that permission might be required. Their focus was on satisfying their clients and these clients' needs were given precedence over what seemed to them more distant, unspecific implications for the people and cultures from which ritual elements were taken. A number of celebrants emphasised the importance of bringing their own ethical frameworks into their decision-making about ritual creation and the selection of ritual elements and traditions suited to the needs of the individuals, couples, and communities they worked for directly, which included consideration of how people from other cultural and spiritual settings viewed ritual appropriation.

When I began this research in 2005 there was a limited number of published sources about New Zealand independent celebrants as ritual-makers. One of these, Marian Barnes' autobiography, reflected on her pioneering work as a secular funeral celebrant in Auckland (Barnes, 1991). Academically, there were a number of ritual-focused New Zealand studies, such as wedding rituals (Horrocks 1973), Anglican funeral services (Nixon, 1992), women's after-death practices (Hera, 1995), and Hewlett's history thesis on funerary rites (2001) which considered formats, music, religious content, and readings in civil funerals in the Bay of Plenty in the 1980s and 1990s. There was also the substantial ethnographic work feminist ritual-makers (Rountree, 1993, 2004).

Once I was a considerable way through reviewing literature and gathering data for this study, I became aware of Watson's sociology thesis on funeral directing (2005), which contained some celebrants' perspectives on their work, and Schäfer's ethnographic study on New Zealand funeral directors (2005). Schäfer argued for the influence of funeral celebrants on the personalisation of funerals, as an extension of the funeral directors' pastoral role (Schäfer, 2005: 203-207). Schäfer examined a sub-group of independent celebrants (secular funeral celebrants). These ritual-makers were shown to promote and construct individualised, life-centred funerals, but also, in their pastoral role as agents of funeral directors, they are playing an important role in articulating bio-power within New Zealand society (Schäfer 2005: Chapter One). Schäfer's thesis built on his earlier dissertation on secular funeral celebrants (1998). The first publication arising from Sanson's research on neo-shamanic ritual makers in New Zealand also became available (2009).

In this chapter I have reviewed key theory on ritual with an emphasis on considering the extent to which ritual-makers and their ways of working have been explored to date. The roles and influences of ritual-makers in traditional settings have been shown to contrast with those of some groups of ritual-makers working in contemporary, western contexts in some significant ways. Also, I have reviewed selected theory on ritual change as it pertains to the roles and influences independent ritual-makers have on processes of ritual adaptation and innovation. The contribution of this ethnography to ritual theory is in its examination of a unique group of relatively new contemporary ritual-makers, with the gaze turned to them as well as the rituals they create and perform. It looks closely at the processes of ritual-making and ritual change in a contemporary context. Uniquely, this study looks at a range of contemporary, celebrant-led rites of passage in New Zealand in their spiritual and cultural context. These contemporary, celebrant-led rites of passage strongly reflect the importance of individualism, in that the relationship between the ritual-maker and participants, the dynamic ritual-making processes, and the rituals themselves are oriented towards what is important and meaningful for the individual clients and communities with whom the ritual-maker is directly concerned. These individuals and groups who are celebrants' clients actively utilise ritual as a form of interpersonal interaction and cultural expression and they seek ritual-makers to facilitate this.

Key features of contemporary ritual-making evident in anthropological literature which are most relevant to this study are: a context of spiritual and cultural creativity whereby individuals take part in ritual which aligns with their intellectual and spiritual beliefs, values, and styles; people having choice over whether to ritualise and being able to select ritual-makers and rituals to suit their purposes; and evidence of people both being willing to create and adapt ritual and also having a concern for retaining traditions where these are personally relevant and important. The ethical context within which ritual-makers and their clients work together is highly individualistic, one in which the needs of the immediate client tend to be prioritised over the larger family, community, or society's expectations or traditions.

## ***4 The socio-cultural context of ritual and belief in New Zealand***

This chapter introduces key historical and socio-cultural themes which have influenced the emergence and current popularity of contemporary celebrant-led ritual. It looks at the changing and diversifying cultural and spiritual world-views of New Zealanders which lead them to seek out equally diverse civil celebrants to facilitate rituals and ceremonies. The questions it addresses are: What is important to New Zealanders? What do we value and believe in? What are the social and cultural processes which most impact on how we live our lives? How do we mark the rites of passages? With such a wide scope, this chapter is necessarily broad in its attention to each theme. My purpose is to set the scene for this study which explores celebrancy from the perspective of independent celebrants.

### **Bicultural New Zealand**

The expression ‘bicultural’ in the New Zealand context embraces a range of meanings with social, political, economic, and cultural implications, and in this study my concern was how the culture of Māori and that of Pakeha interact in a ritual sense, after more than 150 years of co-existence. The differences between Māori and Pakeha cultures are considerable, and sometimes regarded as ‘separate and antithetical’ (Peters, 2001: 27). Māori have been described as belonging to ‘the tradition-oriented world of tribalism, with its emphasis on kinship, respect for ancestors, spirituality and millennial connectedness with the natural world’ and Pakeha as ‘bearers of modernity, the Westminster system of government, scientific positivism, the capitalist mode of production and the monotheism of Christianity’ (Ranginui Walker, 1999: 187-188). Distinguishing Māori from non-Māori culture is important, in order to build people’s understandings of each other and, importantly, to encourage respect for Māori culture in the context of larger social and political processes of acknowledging and redressing the experience of Māori colonised by the British in the 19th century. It is also crucial to understanding the interrelationships between Māori and other cultural groups in New Zealand. Other processes such as cross-cultural exchange and the blending of cultural traditions and values are also

relevant. Noting Māori funerary practices as having had an important influence on Pakeha culture in New Zealand (Hera, 1995, Calder 1998 in Schafer 2005), in commencing this study I was curious as to whether Māori spiritual beliefs and ritual practices blended with, or related in other ways to, other rites of passage celebrated by New Zealanders of European and other cultural descents from the perspective of how (mainly non Māori) celebrants work and the rituals they perform. Before discussing this, a brief history of bicultural issues relating specifically to rites of passage follows.

Prior to the European settlement of New Zealand, the dominant cosmology of Māori held that there was an intimate connection between the spiritual world and the natural world and that supernatural forces and gods gave shape to people's lives.<sup>19</sup>

Traditional Māori ritual practices and rites of passage reflected this holistic, land-based, polytheistic spirituality. An early anthropological account of Māori rites of passage by Elsdon Best (1924) is based on observations of the Tuhoe tribe.<sup>20</sup>

Customs and ritual pertaining to birth, marriage, and tangihanga (death and burial rites) were described, and it was noted that ritual performances pertained only to those who were 'higher class'. Among the 'common' people, according to Best, very little ceremony was observed: the more important the family, the more elaborate were the ceremonial aspects of the rites of passage. In the early 19th century, European (mainly British) missionaries came to New Zealand with the explicit aims

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<sup>19</sup> Māori culture, with tribal variations in beliefs and practices, is rich in spiritual traditions, myth, and ritual. According to Māori spirituality people are of supernatural descent, and supernatural forces and gods intervene and influence people's earthly lives. Whakapapa (genealogy and relationships) are fundamentally important, people's identities and ways of living in the present are continually linked back to and drawn from an understanding of their family and tribal (iwi) and sub-tribal (hapu) connectedness as well as their links with both place and founding ancestors. People's self-identity, their relationships with one another, and their tribal affiliations were expressed orally in their whakapapa. People saw themselves as connected to the natural and spiritual world. Certain individuals were tohunga (priests), who were regarded as spiritual leaders, healers, teachers, and guardians of traditional knowledge and the use of natural resources. Examples of detailed anthropological and religious studies on Māori spirituality and ritual include: *Māori Religion and Mythology* (Best, 1924), *Hui – A Study of Māori Gatherings* (Salmond, 1975), *Exploring Māori Values* (Patterson, 1992), *Christianity, Māori Churches* (Henare, 1996), *Aotearoa's Spiritual Heritage* (Tawhai, 1996), *Te Ukaipo – Te Taiao: the Mother, the Nurturer- Nature* (Yates-Smith, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> The work of Best and other anthropologists of the early 20th century who researched Māori culture has been described as a remarkable achievement but also criticised as being limited in its 'provision of detail and its handling of variation, process and change' (Metge, 1995).

of converting Māori to Christianity.<sup>21</sup> The missionaries' aims were to assimilate Māori, to convince them to replace their native ways with what were perceived by the British to be more civilised Western ways and Christian beliefs which they viewed as inseparable (Walker 1990: 85). Missionaries opposed traditional Māori spiritual beliefs and cultural practices (including marriage customs), destroyed sacred symbols, and condemned tohunga (priests), regarding them as pagan and/or Satanic (Ballara, 1986: 11; R Walker, 1990: 85-86). In the early years of European settlement, through the processes of colonisation and missionisation, many Māori were converted to Christianity (Mead, 1997: 160). Conversion, however, did not necessarily mean Māori relinquished their own spiritual beliefs. They accepted into their world-view elements of Christianity by a process of syncretism, where traditional beliefs and practices were modified in response to Christian missionary activity. Many Māori joined mainstream Christian churches, each of which has its own complex history of continuing dynamic interaction as Māori re-interpreted the Christian gospel in the light of fundamental Māori values and cultural expressions of Christianity (Henare, 1996: 126). Christianity remains strong amongst Māori today, and the long history of Māori and Christianity which started in the 19th century continues (Henare, 1996). In the 2006 census, 57.2 per cent of Māori who answered the religious affiliation question identified with a Christian (including Māori Christian) religion (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b).

Indeed, Māori Christian churches emerged from Māori religious movements which grew up around charismatic prophets (Hill, 1994: 295-298). Settler government aims of assimilation, together with the demise of many Māori customs and practice, led to some Māori Christians identifying with Māori prophets who emerged. Māori prophets in the 19th century included Te Whiti-o-Rongomai, who was one of the leaders of the Parihaka movement; Te Kooti Rikirangi, who inspired others to follow the Ringatū faith, and then in the mid 20th century, Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana, founder of the Ratana movement (Davidson & Lineham, 1989: 155-158; Elsmore, 1999). Increasingly large groupings of Māori participated in these movements, two

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<sup>21</sup> In 1814 the first Anglican mission was established in New Zealand, in the Bay of Islands. A steadily increasing Christian missionary presence was central to European settlement here. As in other European colonial, capitalist societies, missionisation and colonisation were intimately intertwined in New Zealand. Further missions opened over a 40-year period, many of them Anglican (CMS), but there were also Wesleyan (Methodist) missions from 1822 and Roman Catholic missions from 1838.

of which became independent Māori churches, the Ratana and Ringatū churches. For some Māori the destructive effects of colonial capitalism, cultural oppression, large-scale confiscation of Māori land, and war injuries resulting from the land wars in the late 19th century led to widespread distrust and alienation from Christianity. Yet despite the effects of colonisation and missionisation, Māori spiritualities and culture survived, and processes of retrieval and revival of Māori spiritual concepts begun in the 1970s and 1980s continue to strengthen. The resurgence of te reo (Māori language), tikanga (customs and values) and tribal identity, the settlement of some land claims under the Treaty of Waitangi, parallel developments of all of the communication networks and connections among individuals and iwi, and flexibility and adaptation to changing circumstances are factors, some of which have contributed to how Māori customs, beliefs, and practice, including tangihanga, have ‘survived the impact of Western civilization’ (Ngata, 2005: 40).<sup>22</sup> In the 2006 census, 11.1 per cent of people of Māori ethnicity who answered the religious affiliation question identified with a Māori Christian religion, such as Ratana and Ringatū (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b).

The result of summarising massive social changes in this way is obviously to miss out on the complexities, variations, and innovations which arise from them. As well as recognising the successful (from a European perspective) processes of colonisation and missionisation and the enthusiastic uptake of Christianity, other processes, such as cross-cultural exchange and the blending of Māori and Pakeha culture, spirituality, and traditions were taking place within the broader context. From the late 18th century encounters between Māori and European explorers, whalers, sealers, and traders, cross-cultural exchanges occurred, as ‘curiosity led to inquiry, and relationships were forged across cultural boundaries’ (Salmond, 2003: xxi), albeit not primarily spirituality-focused cultural exchanges in those earliest times. Cultural exchanges are two-way processes and yet there is little documented on how Māori indigenous culture and spirituality influenced Pakeha spirituality and

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<sup>22</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi is an agreement between the British Crown and many Māori and was first signed at Waitangi on 6 February 1840. The Treaty consists of three articles relating to Māori giving sovereignty over the land and all the peoples in it to the Queen, and to Māori chieftainship over the lands and exclusive and undisturbed possession of their lands, forests, fisheries, and other properties. Māori were given the same rights as those accorded to British subjects. There is no one agreed interpretation of the Treaty and its interpretation remains contested in contemporary New Zealand society.

culture from the first contact and throughout the colonial period. It was not until the late 20th century that these issues began being explored in postcolonial critical analyses of cross-cultural processes and exchanges between Māori and Pakeha, for example Anne Salmond's (1991) and Joan Metge's (1995) books. There are variations within Māori cultural practices, such as tribal differences reflecting different histories of peoples in different regions. Also, like all cultural practices, Māori traditions are not static. For example, Paparangi Reid points out that tangihanga are complex and diverse and there is not 'a static ideal'. Historical perspectives can contribute to understanding contemporary situations, but do not necessarily offer a complete explanation. Society continues to change with time, through interrelationships between people from different cultural backgrounds and the complexities and particular characteristics of local contexts. In instances where it is appropriate, Māori may change kawa (protocol) and tikanga (customs) around tangihanga, so that the rites reflect beliefs which are traditional, as well as 'meaningful and healthy' (Reid, 2005: 45-47).

### **Pakeha Christianity, religious observance, and pluralism**

Alongside the missionary ambitions of the earliest European settlers whose explicit aims were to transplant Christianity here, the vast majority of those who migrated to New Zealand in the second half of the 19th century came to make a living from the land, working in agriculture and related industries (Lineham & Davidson, 1987). Many of the families who 'broke in' the land were poor and their lives were harsh and isolated. For them, the spiritual dimensions of the land were therefore of much lower priority than the struggle to make a living from it. Settlers' capitalistic, unsentimental attitudes to the land contrasted with the holistic, spiritual perspectives which were so strong in Māori culture. Over 90 per cent of 19th-century settlers in New Zealand were Christian, most coming from England, Scotland, and Ireland. In the process of settling here, they departed from some of the social and cultural traditions and rituals of 'home'. At the time, religion was strongly influential in rites of passage and daily routines, and Christianity impacted on settlers' lives in numerous ways. Around 30 to 40 per cent attended church, lower than in the countries of origin for the same time. Most New Zealanders, whether or not they attended church, marked rites of passage with Christian ceremonies (christenings,

marriages, funerals), recognised or participated in church festivals, educated their children in Christianity, regarded Sunday as a day of rest, attributed God with the control of the natural world and power over life and death, and believed in heaven (Clarke, 2005: 103-131) Although undeniably central in its influence on Pakeha culture, Christianity developed characteristics that distinguished it from Christianity in the countries settlers came from. New Zealand developed into a more secular society with more diversity of religion than was found in British and other European societies (Beckford & Luckmann, 1991). From the early 19th century, there were higher rates of religious nominalism (where people state their adherence to a religion or denomination without regularly attending a place of worship) in New Zealand compared with Britain. A quarter of the population attended church, a much lower rate than in England at the same time, where it was estimated half the population attended (Hill & Zwaga, 1989: 65). Several possible explanations for this have been put forward. Firstly, the mix of settlers included a high proportion of people from the labouring classes. In their countries of origin, church attendance of these groups was lower than that of the upper classes, and this pattern of commitment translated into lower numbers of churchgoers in New Zealand settler society. Some migrants sought to actively leave religion behind them, along with the social problems: 'overpopulation, poverty, hunger, an inability to break out of class systems, and religious controversy or outright persecution' (King, 2003:170). They had emigrated to seek new lives, better opportunities.

The processes of migration and resettlement also weakened the practice of churchgoing by detaching it from a familiar lifestyle (Beckford & Luckmann, 1991: 65-66). The long sea voyage disrupted regular religious disciplines and changed the social dynamics between migrants of different classes. As a result, some changed their patterns of religious adherence. On arrival, settlers expecting some church-based support to help them find their feet in the new land might well have found that these were not yet in place, and that they themselves were expected to contribute to the building the churches, church communities, and support structures (Lineham & Davidson, 1987). There was also less social pressure to attend church regularly in early settler communities (Beckford & Luckmann, 1991). Acceptance of a secular stance on the part of the state is evident from as long ago as the mid 19th century (Hill, 1994: 295). There is also a longstanding cultural acceptance of pluralism.

Whilst there was greater social homogeneity in New Zealand than in Britain in the 19th century with the middle and upper classes notably underrepresented among migrants to New Zealand (Beckford & Luckmann, 1991: 65), there was also considerable cultural complexity with ethnically and religiously diverse communities. Alison Clarke's (2007) history of 19th-century holidays in New Zealand explores this complexity and diversity, describing how settlers from disparate European local, regional, and national cultural and religious backgrounds came together in settler communities here which contributed to the acceptance of pluralism. Between 40 and 50 per cent of 19th-century migrants were English born. Approximately 20 per cent came from Scotland and 18–19 per cent from Ireland. The next largest numbers were born in the Australian colonies, China, and Germany. (Clarke, 2007: 8). No one Christian denomination ever dominated culturally. In 1848 only 1.7 per cent of the Pakeha population gave no religion or were 'un-denominational' in the census (Lineham & Davidson, 1987:19). The main denominations recorded for New Zealanders of European descent in the 1848 census were: Anglican (49.31 per cent), Presbyterian (15.44 per cent), Catholic (14.37 per cent), Methodist (11.75 per cent), and Baptist (1.5 per cent).<sup>23</sup>

The ethnic and religious mix varied in different regions of New Zealand and these differences persisted decades after the original colonists arrived (Clarke, 2007: 12). Presbyterianism dominated in Otago and Southland where higher proportions of Scots settled, Methodism was strongest in Taranaki, Manawatu, and North Canterbury where large numbers of English labourers settled, Catholicism was strongest in Central Otago and the West Coast where more Irish settled (Clarke, 2007: 12-13). In most of the rest of the country, Anglicanism was dominant. Clarke shows how holiday practices, religious and secular, reflected both old-world transition and the new-world environment, as well as family and the broader community concerns (Clarke, 2007: 170). She examines how settlers from a diversity of cultural backgrounds were exposed to, experimented and participated in, adopted, and sometimes adapted each other's cultural traditions and rites of passage. She also explores how migrants from a variety of different cultures and Māori with regional

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<sup>23</sup> *Statistics of New Zealand for the Crown Colony Period 1840-1852*, n.d., pp14-16; *Statistics of New Zealand for 1861*, Nos. 13-14 in (Lineham & Davidson, 1987: ch 2)

and tribal variations in their cultural customs encountered each other and adapted. Numerous factors contributed to the complexity of 19th-century holiday traditions. Migrants brought a mix of customs from their former localities. Other changes occurred through settlers' experiences during long journeys at sea and through encountering and sometimes adopting unfamiliar holiday customs from European settlers of different regional and religious backgrounds.<sup>24</sup> There was thus a pluralism reflective of the acceptance that no one Christian denomination or set of customs was dominant (Hill & Zwaga, 1989: 67-68).<sup>25</sup> Throughout the century, emerging traditions comprised old and new elements, and these changed over time, according to the interpretations or preferences of different individuals involved in organising and participating in them, as the following examples of syncretism which occurred around holiday practices of Christmas and New Year illustrate. Practical considerations, too, affected what traditions emerged and what had to be adapted to Southern Hemisphere conditions, such as the season, the availability and affordability of food, decorations, and items for customary celebrations (Clarke, 2007: 167).

Christmas, for example, was an important holiday, religious celebration, and time for communal feasting for English and Irish families whereas New Year (Hogmanay) was the holiday traditionally celebrated by Scottish. At Christmas some migrants clung tenaciously to Northern Hemisphere traditions which could be retained in the Southern Hemisphere: '[r]oast beef and plum pudding would remain the most popular colonial Christmas dinner throughout the nineteenth century' (Clarke, 2007: 53). Sometimes, however, they had to find substitutes in their new environment, and

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<sup>24</sup> Lineham and Davidson describe how religious idealism was undermined on voyages of emigration to New Zealand. One example given is observations of Samuel Edgar, who later became a prominent minister in Auckland, observing how 'ship-board life broke down old patterns of piety and sectarian commitment. Cloistered together, the settlers quickly established communal relationships on an essentially secular basis. It was a secular comradeship; where no-one saw himself or herself as separate from other settlers. Such was the character of the new communities as they were established, although there were some regional variations' (1987: Chapter 2).

<sup>25</sup> There are competing views on the issue of how pluralistic New Zealand society was in the mid 19th century: e.g. Jackson (1983) argues in support of homogeneity, yet Geering (1985) asserts that New Zealand was more pluralistic than England. Reconciling these points of view, Hill and Zwaga (1989: 67-68) noted that from the outset, religious denominations competed on a more equal basis than they had done in Britain where the Church of England has dominated, e.g. the Methodists were relatively more central in New Zealand religious life than in England, and secondly, freedom of religion was stronger in New Zealand, and thirdly, at a very early stage the government took a firm secular constitutional position which reflected the competing claims of Christian denominations at that time.

so adapted traditions (Clarke, 2007: 166-167). Freshly harvested salad vegetables, potatoes, and green vegetables were available, as were strawberries and exotic tropical fruits imported from the Pacific Islands, to replace or accompany the traditional roast beef and plum pudding. 'The abundant Christmas dinner was a symbol of success' (Clarke, 2007: 55). Settlers adopted indigenous flora and fauna into holiday celebrations in their own evolving culture. Holly, ivy, and laurel – iconic Christmas plants that decorated churches and homes in Northern Hemisphere wintertime celebrations – were replaced with indigenous and other plants readily available in the New Zealand summer such as cabbage palms, flax, red pohutukawa flowers, and white lilies and roses.

Whereas Christmas would today be considered New Zealand's 'greatest holiday' (Clarke, 2007: 73), this was not so in the 19th century when New Year had that status, due to the influence of Scots not only in Otago but also in other communities where their enthusiasm for the New Year's Eve home or community gatherings and festivities (whisky drinking, first footing, fireworks, and bands) quickly gained appeal amongst most people who were exposed to them. 'The New Year holiday could be readily adopted by most New Zealanders because there was little in it to cause offence' (Clarke, 2007:73). English migrants of some denominations brought 'watch night' church services to New Zealand, and these serious rather than celebratory occasions were a vivid contrast with the popular Scottish New Year's Eve traditions. Outdoor recreation, gatherings for picnics, and participation in sport became popular for migrants from a range of ethnic backgrounds and religious persuasions. Caledonian games were also a highlight of the New Year's holiday in some areas. 'Self-consciously ethnic occasions', these were community picnics where there were opportunities to participate or watch Scottish Highland games, dancing, and pipe bands (Clarke, 2007: 113).

Interestingly, migrants experienced a degree of freedom in colonial life which allowed them to maintain a variety of holiday rituals for several decades until these traditions became more uniform towards the end of the 19th century (Clarke, 2007: 15). There are examples of Māori adopting and adapting holidays and making them their own (Clarke, 2007: 167). The English tradition of communal feasting at Christmas fitted well into Māori traditions of hospitality. Māori associated with

mission stations hosted Christmas festivities and hakari (feasts) and took part in Christian religious festivities. Easter, too, was celebrated by many Māori in religious worship and in social gatherings such as sports events, haka displays, and hangi on Easter holidays. European New Year's traditions, though, were not adopted by Māori in any notable way. Māori traditionally celebrated the New Year in winter (May–June), with the rising of the star cluster Matariki in the eastern dawn sky. This tradition 'came close to dying out, but Māori cultural renaissance has seen its revival' (Clarke, 2007:75), including discussion of whether Matariki should become part of the national holiday calendar.

Elsewhere Clarke (2005) uncovers accounts of 19th-century rites of passage of European settlers in Otago (where most were Presbyterian) based on qualitative sources with accompanying statistics where these are available. She describes rites of passage as primarily family occasions which took place in homes and sometimes in churches, based on cultural backgrounds and personal preferences. Christian baptism ceremonies (christenings) took place in homes or privately: for example, in churches after regular services. These family (rather than public) occasions were encouraged by most Christian churches, even for non-churchgoers. For parents, christenings were performed to provide spiritual protection for their children, to officially name the child, to welcome the child formally into their family and into the church, and to comply with the customs in their communities (Clarke, 2005: 119-121). Marriages and funerals were other important family occasions with a religious element. Nineteenth-century Pakeha wedding celebrations were typically small-scale family occasions with almost as many wedding ceremonies taking place in private houses as in churches (Porter, Macdonald, & Macdonald, 1996: 191). Venues for marriages and funerals depended on cultural backgrounds and personal preferences. For example, Scottish settlers, mainly Presbyterian, were married in their homes, whereas English (mainly Anglican) and Irish (mainly Catholic) were married in church. Most marriages were celebrated by clergy (Clarke, 2005: 123). The alternative was a civil marriage solemnised by a registrar. Four per cent of weddings in 1855 were solemnised by registrars; by 1880 this figure was 20 per cent (Clarke, 2005: 123). Most (80 per cent or more) of Otago funerals involved Christian ceremonies with clergy involvement (Clarke, 2005: 124).

The various Christian rites of passage of the 19th and first half of the 20th century have strongly influenced the ways in which contemporary civil ceremonies for these life transitions have been developed. Similarities in aspects of ritual format, content, and performance can be observed, although people now are not always aware of the origins and layers of meaning and symbolism of each of the elements of their contemporary ceremonies. Christianity remains a strong cultural force today (Morris, 1999: 15-20) and Christian values as well as Christian symbols permeate New Zealand society (Wood, 2005: 207). Whilst there has been a decrease in the overall proportion of the population who identify as religious, more than half of them (55.6 per cent) were, in 2006, affiliated with a Christian denomination (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b).

### **Counterculture, politics, and spirituality**

From the beginning of the 20th century up until the 1950s, New Zealand society was relatively stable (King, 2003: 363-389). Pakeha culture was dominant: the majority of people who lived here (95 per cent) were of European origin, mostly British. As a result, to a large extent the dominant cultural identification for Pakeha was essentially British. In the 1956 census more than 90 per cent of people identified themselves as religious, more than 80 per cent of them Christian. Clergy officiated at the major rites of passage celebrated by Pakeha (baptisms, marriages, and funerals), and the Church had an important place in the community's social functions and youth education. Māori culture was relatively separate from Pakeha culture, each with considerable internal cohesion and conformity. Pakeha colonisation of Māori continued, through, for instance, societal attitudes, laws, and the education system. Māori tangihanga continued to be marae-based, performed within traditional Māori spiritual and Christian frameworks.

The 1960s saw major social and cultural changes. Processes of secularisation became more obvious, whereby religious thinking, practice, and institutions were losing some of their social significance. There was a shift away from traditional Christianity-based beliefs and activities in New Zealand from the mid 1960s, more so for Pakeha than Māori. Mainstream Christian denominations (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic) showed an overall declining and ageing membership. At

this time the impact of secularisation in New Zealand society became ‘sharply apparent and the growth towards pluralism in ideas and lifestyles emerged as a dominant trend’ (Veitch, 1983:592). An anthropological account of Māori hui (a Māori ceremonial gathering or assembly which follows a formal structure and traditional etiquette) based on fieldwork in the early 1970s describes how British-style marriage ceremonies (and other gatherings) had been imported into the lives of Māori through contact with Pakeha, and had acquired a Māori interpretation over the years. Māori weddings at this time were held on marae or at nearby churches with ministers officiating (Salmond, 1975: 194-5). These weddings were preceded by traditional Māori rituals of encounter to mark the occasion as hui (Salmond, 1975:180).

As noted previously, secularisation had been apparent in New Zealand from the 19th century. In the 1880s it was associated with the decline in affiliation to institutional churches, but did not necessarily translate into a decline in people’s religious or spiritual commitment. It was also linked with an overall privatisation of religious belief as indicated by increasing proportions of people objecting to stating their religious affiliation on census forms (Lineham, 1983: p318). Between 1951 and 1981, the percentage of census respondents who identified as having some form of religious affiliation declined from around 92 per cent to around 70 per cent. In the same period the percentage who objected to stating their religion doubled from 7 per cent to 15 per cent. In 1981 more than 5 per cent of respondents stated that they had no religion, up from 0.6 per cent in 1951 (New Zealand Census of Population Dwellings, 1981). As well as an overall decline in the membership of the main Christian denominations, the 1960s and 1970s saw nominal membership of churches increase. In addition, disproportionately small numbers of young adults affiliated with these mainline denominations compared with the numbers of elderly people. At the same time, there was also a growing diversity of religious groups and a relative increase in membership of groups such as Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, as well as Christian churches with specific ethnic constituencies (e.g. Samoan Congregational Church) (Beckford & Luckmann, 1991:5, 71-80). The declining relevance of Christian beliefs in the lives of some New Zealanders meant that the way religious rites of passage had been historically delivered in religious institutional contexts also became less relevant for some people.

In the late 1960s the counterculture began to emerge. This broad social movement involved people challenging, re-evaluating, and formulating their own views and actions concerning aspects of their social lives. New Zealanders began to express their own versions of social movements which were developing in other western democracies (Lineham & Davidson, 1987). These included, amongst others: the civil rights, peace, gay rights, environmental, and feminist movements. The counterculture centred on challenging hegemony and seeking alternatives. It comprised three main orientations: actions directed at changing the mainstream, activities rejecting mainstream disciplines in favour of a hedonistic lifestyle, and a trend towards finding lifestyles to nurture 'the authentic self'. In addition, increasing numbers of people engaged in activities expressing individual, inner-focused, 'self-spiritualities' (Heelas, 1996: 50-51). They were more likely to subscribe to individualist beliefs, believing that authority lay within themselves, relying on their own experiences and intuitions to make choices and judgements instead of following traditional external, hierarchical, and institutionalised ways of believing, living, and ritualising. The counterculture era set the scene for the emergence of civil celebrancy.

The arguments of British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1990; 1991) are typically cited to explain the dramatic changes which have seen people in many modern western societies shift their orientations from connections with the past, from overarching systems of belief and practice, and from traditional authorities such as the Church to more individualised and active explorations of authoritative ontologies, identities, and communities of interest. Giddens' explanation was that in 'late modern' societies where grand explanatory schemes are contested and people are less able to hold on to set identities and fixed roles, people are constantly under pressure to engage in 'reflexive projects of self' (1991: 186).

As individualism became an even stronger cultural force, greater heterogeneity emerged in how people marked rites of passage in New Zealand society, and civil (independent) celebrants were at the forefront of these changing, diversifying ritual practices. The feminist movement and Māori political activities were prominent in New Zealand at this time (Lineham & Davidson, 1987). Reclaiming spiritualities were important in both areas. The Women's Spirituality Movement emerged towards

the end of the 1970s. This encompassed a range of spiritual and political activities from within major religions, non-Christian theistic, and 'all sorts of personal, non-institutional non-theistic spiritual orientations' (Benland, 1996: 242). Women were encouraged to choose their own personal beliefs and religious or spiritual practices, 'to adopt the religious treasures of every age, country, race, including the treasures of male spirituality' to 'feel free to add material from the human potential movement, New Age consciousness, psychology and other sciences, the arts, the environmental movement, political theories and goals' and to 'add their own life experiences and their own original thought and creativity' (Benland, 1996: 246). Women affiliated with neo-pagan (earth-based) and mainstream Christian spiritualities were two of the main groups active in exploring new ways of imagining the divine and devising rituals. Women's rituals were based around occasions where empowerment, political activism, and courage were needed; life-stage rituals such as childbirth, menopause, and first menstruation; crossroads such as divorce, new partners, new houses, new jobs; taking a new name; birthdays; healing and consolation rituals around sickness and death, anger and loss; seasons of the year; celebration of the earth and of the spirit (Benland, 1996: 244). Whilst a group focus of the Women's Spirituality Movement was predominant, for some New Zealand women, participation had a private focus. For example, some women's involvement in feminist witchcraft/Goddess spirituality ritual is described as 'a private part of life which gives structure and meaning to their world-view and provides a spiritual base or resource which assists them in their daily lives and individual political activity' (Rountree, 2004:48). For others, the rituals were associated with empowering other women, political activism, and social change (Alice, 1992).

It was also during the late 1970s that some women became involved in facilitating rituals and ceremonies for friends, communities, and clients and so were some of the pioneers in civil celebrant work. These particular celebrants brought an explicit feminist ethic to their work, offering alternative ceremonies incorporating feminist and other spiritualities. Stories of these women are in Celine Kearney's (1997) book of New Zealand women's spiritualities, for example, Mary (p.61), Ruth (p.127), and Juliet (p.147). Other civil celebrants came to the work from other backgrounds, and brought different values and ethics to their work, examples of which are discussed in Chapter Six.

Meanwhile, in the 1960s, processes of ethnic revival amongst colonised indigenous people had begun to gain momentum in New Zealand and several other settler societies such as Australia and Canada. In New Zealand there was a resurgence of Māori culture and Māori ‘reasserting their ethnic identity’ (Mead, 1997: 160). Through processes of urbanisation, many Māori living in cities had ceased to have active links with their iwi and hapu, and lost all live connection with the Māori language, the practice of Māori ritual, and the observance of tikanga Māori. In many areas Māori began to assert their political, economic, and cultural rights. The cultural resurgence which took place saw the beginnings of ongoing processes to address historical injustices associated with colonialism, as Māori communities were able to assert their cultural pride and gain greater representation and influence in institutions. Other changes included recognition of te reo Māori as an official New Zealand language, government departments acknowledging Māori clients and partners in new ways that conferred authority on Māori communities and their representatives, the state acknowledging Māori as tangata whenua (indigenous New Zealanders) and greater political, economic, and cultural recognition of rights associated with this indigeneity (Spoonley, 2009: chapter 1). Central to this cultural resurgence were processes of retrieval of key Māori spiritual concepts (Cadogan, 2004). Alongside the cultural resurgence, or at least following along from it, was ‘a growing interest in tangata whenua culture on the part of Pakeha’ (King, 2003: 484), as they were exposed to, and forced to respond to, Māori claiming their rights to a more integrated rather than assimilated relationship between Māori and Pakeha cultures.

In the later part of the 20th century came acknowledgement and deliberate Pakeha recognition, respect, and openness to learning from Māori (King, 1985), and acknowledgement of interactions with Māori in relation to ‘Kiwi’ spirituality (Bluck, 1998: 14). In at least one rite of passage, funerals, ‘Pakeha culture continues to borrow and to learn from Māori’ (King, 2003: 517). The result is that ‘a growing Pakeha awareness, experience of, and respect for the Māori way of death is working to influence our death practices’ (Hera, 1995: 141). In talking about the values and practices they bring to creating and performing ceremonies, a number of Pakeha celebrants described to me an awareness of, and respect for, the influence of Māori values and spirituality. One of the professional bodies, CANZ, has made some efforts

towards being a more bicultural organisation (through its representation at a governance level, bicultural policies, and training opportunities for non-Māori to learn more about contemporary Māori cultural and spiritual values and practices. These efforts have received enthusiastic support and participation from many celebrants and are criticised or ignored by others.

Some Pakeha celebrants predicted that Māori would seek celebrants to lead ceremonies, and find them via Māori celebrants connected with their communities and marae. This does occur. Rachael, a Māori independent marriage and funeral celebrant, explained that she felt it was important people have a choice of celebrant and that Māori needed Māori celebrants who ‘understand their own cultural protocols and values’. Part of her reason for becoming a celebrant was to ‘help her own people’ by doing weddings on the marae. She felt specific obligations to members of her whanau when requested to facilitate services for them, which sometimes involved a lot of preparation and sometimes required her to take on a non-traditional role. Services varied on different occasions: some were held on marae, others not. Anglican traditions, which remain central to Rachael’s Nga Tokowaru community, are comfortably combined with Māori traditions: ‘accommodating whoever comes along’ is something Rachael feels Māori do ‘very well’. Rachael pointed out how younger Māori are more secure about their cultural identity, whereas she comes from a generation that ‘didn’t know a hell of a lot about being Māori’. By no means are all ceremonies involving Māori led by Māori celebrants, however. Many non-Māori celebrants in this study, me included, have conducted marriage and civil union ceremonies where one or both of the couple are Māori. A discussion of aspects of cultural exchange is included in Chapter Seven.

### **The emergence of civil celebrants in New Zealand**

The relative homogeneity, stability, and conformity which had characterised Pakeha society culturally until early in the latter half of the 20th century was superseded rapidly by more multicultural and diverse values and practices from the 1970s onwards. Trends included Pakeha being less likely to celebrate the traditional life events such as the birth of a child and marriage in a formal or public way. Many of the seventies generation grew up with little experience of taking part in religious or

secular rites of passage. Informal or de-facto relationships became more common, and slowly more accepted. The numbers of couples marrying began to decline and this downward trend has mainly continued. Those who did marry tended to delay marriage until they were older, and increasing numbers of New Zealanders chose to remain single. The marriage rate in 2006 (13.5 per 1000) was less than a third of what it was at its peak in 1971 (45.5 per 1000) (Statistics New Zealand, 2006a). Where rites of passage were marked, more variety in the nature of these rituals and ceremonies began to emerge. For example, people were demanding individualised style and content to their rituals in their church wedding, as exemplified in a 1973 thesis on 'typical Pakeha weddings' (Horrocks, 1973). Horrocks noted that 'the uniqueness of each wedding that I attended was a particularly sobering fact of my research experience' (Horrocks, 1973: 89) and included detailed examples of 'weddings notable for their individuality'. Several factors impacted on the varied nature of wedding rituals from the 1970s onwards. Examples of individual preferences noted by Horrocks are the inclusion of poetry and other non-religious readings, popular music, and the bridal couple (rather than the clergy) 'setting the pace' for the occasion and breaking with conventions around the details of the giving away of the bride, where the wedding register is signed, and the order of persons entering and leaving the church. In the 1980s and 1990s, a trend of personalising not only the form but also the location of the wedding ceremony intensified (Coney, 1995: 90-91), and wedding styles diversified in reflection of the diversification of cultural groups of New Zealanders that was taking place at the same time (Coney, 1995: 87).

Churches recognised that the nature of some people's desired participation in religious institutions was changing, with a trend towards 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1994). Different religious institutions responded in different ways and over different time periods. Overall the trend was one of change as churches diversified their practices and repackaged their ways of engaging with congregations and communities: for example, through the use of multimedia and the arts, participation by congregations, child- and youth-focused services and activities, high-profile publicity campaigns, and websites. There were several reasons for the changes. Religious institutions were seeking to provide a better fit with their congregations' increasingly busy lifestyles. They were also responding to people's

desire for greater freedom and choice in expressing their spiritualities, and were attempting to engage with (and keep pace with) the changing and diversifying needs of their communities (Watkin, 2004). Civil celebrant-led rituals emerged from these same circumstances in the late 1970s.

Whilst societal expectations in western cultures such as New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom for people to formally mark rites of passage with religious meanings in traditional religious services had diminished, some people chose to continue to embrace the ritual format and apply this to their own life situations to express their own meanings about the significance of life events and transitions. A law change to the Marriage Act saw the first civil marriage celebrants appointed in New Zealand in 1977, many of whom were Justices of the Peace already. Non-religious funeral officiants began offering alternatives to religious funeral services from as early as 1979, in association with funeral-directing companies. The first secular funeral celebrant in New Zealand was Marian Barnes, whose motivation for becoming involved in the work then was to offer a non-religious funeral alternative (Barnes, 1991; Schäfer, 2005; Watson, 2005). People who were involved in ritual-making for local communities with whom they had close connections began to offer rituals and ceremonies to the wider public around the same time.

The rituals civil celebrants delivered served the values of an era characterised by individualism and pluralism, and addressed people's desires to articulate and celebrate personalised meanings of important life events and transitions. Celebrants created and performed client-centred services taking into consideration and generally including ideas, specific requests, and expectations for a degree of personalised content relating to the individuals for whom the ritual was being performed. In this era of relative religious and spiritual freedom, rituals inspired by a range of secular, artistic, philosophical, political, spiritual, and environmental themes began to emerge. There was, however, no formal organisation, training or induction for celebrants at this time, and no core resources or texts from which they all worked. Celebrants' motivations for involvement in ritual, and the ceremonies they created and facilitated for people in their communities, varied considerably, as did their clients. Some celebrants brought feminist approaches into their work; others brought strong human rights values. Many incorporated aspects of earth-based spiritualities,

holistic healing, and health philosophies (Barnes, 1987). Some celebrants were motivated to offer secular alternatives to particular rites of passage such as funerals, which were mainly being marked with religious ceremonies at that time (Barnes, 1991). Some celebrants adapted Christian services into secular rites of passage, retaining the overall format and removing or replacing overtly religious references. Some began to create and adapt rituals to mark life events and transitions which had not always previously been marked through ritual, such as ceremonies for divorce, gay commitment, house-moving, and career-changing.

In New Zealand a small number of individuals, such as Mary Hancock and the other pioneer celebrants, were quite influential in what became the norm in the mid 1990s for the most common of the civil ceremonies such as namings, commitments, marriages, and funerals. Some of these pioneers developed resources for celebrants, mentored others into the field, shared philosophies and resources, networked with other celebrants, instigated processes to create professional bodies and set up training courses. Later I discuss the experiences of Mary Hancock, Eddie McMenemy, Barrie Mason, and Rhys Bean, some of the Auckland and Wellington-based celebrants who began working as celebrants in the 1980s. When I began this research in 2005 there was a limited amount of published material on celebrants in the early days. The main ones were Marian Barnes' autobiographical book about her pioneering work as a secular funeral celebrant in Auckland (Barnes, 1991) and a selection of theses. Stephen Hewlett's history thesis *Funerary rites and their significance in the Western Bay of Plenty 1950-2000* (2001) focused on the Bay of Plenty and this gave me valuable detail about formats, music, religious content, and readings in civil funerals there in the 1980s and 1990s, Bronwyn Watson's sociology thesis on funeral directing *Acquainted with Grief: Emotion Management Among Death Workers* (2005) which contained some celebrants' perspectives on their work, and Cyril Schäfer's *Post-mortem personalisation: an ethnographic study of funeral directors in New Zealand* (2005). Schäfer's thesis built on his earlier dissertation entitled *The Secular Funeral Celebrant* (1998).

## **Postmodernity and New Zealand society**

The influences of the postmodern era on the ways ritual-makers work have been significant. It was during the postmodern era that celebrancy came to fruition in New Zealand. The first civil celebrants, including the celebrants who are now involved in celebrant training, developed their practices in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Postmodernism is associated with uncertainty, rapid change, and instability, a world where knowledge is constantly changing and meanings are recognised as being subjective and contested, rather than value-neutral. Even more than most sociological or philosophical terms, postmodernism resists being defined in a simple, clear, agreed fashion, because one of its fundamental underlying concepts is that knowledge is contested (Smart, 1992: 164). For the purposes of formal analysis, however, we do need to distil some of postmodernism's distinguishing ideas and concepts. Salzman commented that 'postmodernism's emphasis on subjectivity, dialogue, reflexivity, and moral commitment is a major departure from the scientific paradigm that dominated anthropology during much of its history' (Salzman, 2001: 125). Postmodernism is a loose umbrella term for a set of practices, a cultural discourse, an attitude, and a mode of analysis (Usher & Edwards, 1994: 7). It is associated with cultural and literary practices based around play, irony, pastiche, and excess, and philosophical theories involving themes of ambiguity, relativity, fragmentation, particularity, and discontinuity (Crotty, 1998). It is also useful to consider the related terms 'postmodernity' and 'postmodernisation' in understanding postmodernism.

Postmodernisation considers the way people's lives are shaped by the effects of information technologies, particularly global communications as well as media and cultural emphasis on consumption in contemporary western societies. In the tradition of Lyotard (1984), postmodernism is characterised by the breakdown of faith in science and rationality. There is no meta-narrative that can bring things together: no global, credible set of explanations or assumptions or meaning or purpose shared by everyone (Lechte, 2008: 299-300). The postmodern world is, paradoxically, both one of massification and of fragmentations. The mass society obliterates time-honoured distinctions, and without those distinctions we have no sense of how the whole might fit together (Crotty, 1998: 212). Postmodernity refers to a world where

people have to make their own way without fixed references and traditional anchoring points, a world of uncertainty, rapid change, and instability, where knowledge is constantly changing and meanings are recognised as being subjective and contested, rather than value-neutral.

There is a resonance between the distinguishing characteristics of postmodernism and how celebrants and their clients engage with ritual. In postmodernity there is a blurring of boundaries between high culture and popular culture, and an emphasis on ‘the tendencies in consumer culture which favour the aestheticisation of life ... with the goal of life an endless pursuit of new experiences, values, and vocabularies’ (Featherstone, 1991: 126). Similarly, contemporary, celebrant-led ritual invention is consumer-oriented, widespread, and popular (rather than exclusively elite or institutional). Postmodernism acknowledges changes in globalised communications and media which mean that people are engulfed with information. The unprecedented power of the media in shaping daily life is a defining characteristic in some interpretations of postmodernism (Seidman, 2008: 154). Acceleration, along with saturation, spatial inversion, and the ingestion of boundaries are postmodern dynamics associated with communication technologies (including the internet) identified as effecting a transformation of 21st-century everyday life. Modern everyday life was considered to be underpinned by the principle of continuity – every day was ‘anchored to unquestioned fixities of routine’ but the emerging culture is one of adaptability, where ‘production’, ‘displacement’, and ‘distortion’ prevail (McNaughton & Lam, 2006: 7-9). Words, images, and information are interpreted and experienced in multiple, subjective ways by postmodern consumers (Baudrillard, 1988 in Usher & Edwards, 1994:11). When engaging in inventing and performing ritual, celebrants accept it as expressive of partial, provisional, sometimes contradictory values and beliefs. Postmodernism includes ‘new forms of eclecticism, new combinations of genre and textured meaning ... intensified via technological manipulation’ (Wheale, 1995: 61).

Celebrant-led ritual can be seen to encapsulate many elements of the postmodern tradition, which are explored in this study, and include the consumer-oriented nature of the ritual-maker and ritual participant relationship, widespread and popular (rather than exclusively elite or institutional) ritual invention, impacts of globalisation, and

fragmentation of cultural customs and rituals associated with their eclectic reconstruction of these in pastiche forms in other cultural contexts. Access to information through media, marketing, and the internet make these processes easier. In reaction to processes of globalisation which threaten to dilute unique local cultural characteristics, there is a concurrent counter-trend towards a 'rediscovery of the local to match participation in globalisation processes' (Le Heron & Pawson, 1996:15). The postmodern themes of eclecticism, localism, retrieval and reclaiming of historic practices are not unique to celebrant-led ritual. Research on the impact of postmodern understanding and practice upon the field of liturgical studies identified postmodern characteristics in North American churches and worship which included: local communities drawing upon Christian history, contemporary culture, and local experience in eclectic and creative ways to provide for worship in informal and non-coercive settings, an interest in the retrieval of historic practice, and an appreciation of ritual and symbol (Schattauer, 2007: 129-132).

Celebrant-led rites of passage in contemporary New Zealand reflect a combination of people's freedom to create and adapt spiritual and ritual practices from their own and other cultures, the uncertain and changing boundaries of people's beliefs, their exploration, play, and deliberate staging of ritual as a form of personal expression, and local characteristics and traditions about what it is to be Pakeha and live in New Zealand in the 21st century. Processes of globalisation have profoundly changed the relationships between New Zealand and other cultures and these changes have altered ways in which rites of passage are celebrated in the latter part of the 20th century.<sup>26</sup> Globalisation has meant diverse, rapid, complex, and changing flows of knowledge, goods, people, and information on other cultures, customs and traditions. For New Zealand, 'globalisation has meant responding and reacting to the global, adjusting nationally and retaining and fostering elements of the local' (Le Heron & Pawson, 1996: 22). Through media and communication technologies, our exposure to, knowledge of, and access to information on a range of religions, traditions, and customs of other cultures has increased: 'books, journals, television documentaries,

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<sup>26</sup> Globalisation has meant that New Zealanders are increasingly linked to production, trade, and financial networks outside New Zealand and the accompanying two-way interactions mean New Zealand has forged more complex and diverse relationships with people in other parts of the world (Le Heron & Pawson, 1996: 22).

and the internet have increased knowledge of different spiritual practices' (York, 2001: 361). These, combined with a climate where expectations of individual choice and participation in all aspects of social and cultural life are heightened, people (including celebrants and their clients) can easily find and choose to connect with sources of information on ancient and diverse cultures, spiritualities, and rituals and incorporate these into ceremonies created and performed here.

Diversity within the population and diversity among individuals means added complexity in ritual. New Zealand society continues to diversify as our population increases through migration. From the 1980s onwards, New Zealand has experienced a rapidly growing and increasingly ethnically diverse population in terms of ancestry, nationality, social context and background, customs, religion, and language.<sup>27</sup> New Zealand is more culturally and socially diverse than many other industrialised countries (Boston, et al., 2006: pxiii). The pace of diversification has increased faster than ever before so that New Zealand has come to be defined as being 'super-diverse', a term which refers to the high proportion of overseas-born peoples who live here as a proportion of the total population, the fact that many of these people are recent immigrants, and the range of different ethnic groups represented (Vertovec, 2007). For ritual-makers working in multicultural contexts, diversity means that they need to be aware of issues that are likely to be shared across different cultural groups and also ones where differences occur. In relation to death rites, for example, universally relevant issues might include 'fear, loss, anxiety, desire for reconciliation, the need to give and receive love', but differences could be relevant according to 'particular meanings for individuals, shaped by our cultures, spiritualities, and religions' (Schwass, 2005: 7). Another issue ritual-makers may have to be aware of in multicultural contexts is need to 'incorporate the presence of people holding different beliefs to those expressed in the ceremony itself' (Cook & Walter, 2005: 366), which celebrants in this study experienced and I discuss in Chapters Six and Eight.

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<sup>27</sup> In 2007 there were just over four million people living in New Zealand. This is up from three million in 1973. And over half of this increase was in the decade 1996–2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). (Two million had been reached in 1952, one million in 1908.) (Didham & Bedford, 2004: p1).

In addition, ritual-makers are faced with a changing mix of rituals they could become involved in with the advent of new occasions which people feel are significant and which they choose to recognise through ritual. A new rite of passage in the contemporary New Zealand context is the civil union, legal recognition of commitment that is available to homosexual and heterosexual couples which came into effect following the Civil Union Act 2004. Around 800 celebrants are registered to perform civil unions. Other types of new events are ones where the event itself is not new, but the notion of involving a celebrant from outside of the family or group to perform a ritual for it may be new, such as birthdays, starting-school ceremonies, launching a new business, separation or divorce. New events also include life events which may have been dealt with privately rather than expressed ritually in previous generations, such as marking miscarriages and stillbirths. Additionally there are instances of where New Zealanders are 'retrieving and reclaiming rites of passage of our European ancestors' (Bluck, 1998: 9), adapting and performing these in a contemporary context.

Other processes and dynamics which impact on ritual in New Zealand are inter-cultural partnerships, changing ethnicities, and transnationalism. It is increasingly common for individuals who are forming partnerships to come from different cultures and places of origin, and to have different socio-economic statuses, religions, ethnicities, family values, and attitudes (Pryor, 2006: 22). People increasingly identify with more than one ethnicity and some people change the ethnicities they identify with over their lifetime. For example, one-third of Pacifica children born in New Zealand, whose parents immigrated here in the 1970s and 1980, are identified in census information as also Māori or Pakeha/European), and this phenomenon is increasing (Didham & Bedford, 2004: 2,11). In the 2006 census 10.4 per cent of people identified with more than one ethnic group. Some people who migrate to New Zealand develop and maintain social and familial links with communities of other ethnicities in New Zealand and internationally (Didham & Bedford, 2004: 2), for example Indian and Pacific Islands peoples. A count of the number of countries given by New Zealand residents as their birthplace comes to more than two hundred, and some people born in New Zealand live abroad for a time, maintaining links with families and communities here. The New Zealand diaspora (New Zealanders resident overseas) is around 800,000 (Spoonley &

Macpherson, 2004: 190). Hybrid identities and the complexities and mingling of various cultural and social dynamics can impact on the ways in which people in New Zealand mark rites of passage.

Religious affiliation has continued to decline, as has adherence to the formal rites associated with institutionalised religion. In 1976, 82.7 per cent of people in the census identified as having some form of religious affiliation, with 62.8 per cent being affiliated to one of the three largest Christian churches (Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic). Just over 4 per cent answered that they had no religion or they did not state their religion, and 14 per cent objected to answering the question. In the 2006 census 62 per cent identified as having some form of religious affiliation, 55 per cent identified as Christian or affiliated to a Christian church, 36 per cent were affiliated to one of the three largest churches, 38 per cent answered that they had no religion or they did not state their religion, and less than one per cent (0.6 per cent) objected to answering the question on religious affiliation. (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b). In the 1901 census 3 per cent of people gave no religious affiliation.

There is some evidence of growth in activities associated with spirituality in Britain (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005) and in Australia (Tacey, 2005). The 'subjective turn' is a defining cultural development of modern western culture (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005: 5) and spirituality is associated with people's sacralisation of their unique subjective lives. Meanings of spirituality are examined in Chapter Eight, and an important point is that spirituality is not separate from religion; rather there is a lot of crossover in how people use the terms and what it refers to. As in Britain and Australia, there has been growth in the sorts of activities associated with spirituality in New Zealand, many of which take place beyond traditional institutionalised religious settings. Indeed in New Zealand spirituality is expressed in 'a plethora of spiritual and social forms, ranging from the eco-faith of some to the mysticism of the world-wide web for others' (Morris, 1999:17). In one survey of New Zealanders' values, religion was shown to be one – but not the most important – social value. Spirituality emerged as higher in importance to more people than religion. However, family, friends, leisure, work, and culture were rated more highly than spirituality or religion (E. Rose, Huakau, Sweetsur, & Casswell, 2005: 6). Non-institutionalised religion 'flourishes readily' according to religious historian Peter Lineham

(2009:17). He linked this to the absence of the ‘traditional power and influence’ wielded by churches and cathedrals, commercial influences, and people’s hankering for ‘rituals that mark significance – birth, death and other milestones’ (Lineham, 2009: 17).

People’s spiritualities are not necessarily cohesive and static. Rachael Kohn contrasts ‘true believers’ (people of traditional religious faiths, who are ‘at home in ideological and theological constructions that are watertight’) with ‘new believers’, people who are ‘not certain of their boundaries and who are constantly exploring forms of spiritual and religious expression in genuine efforts to sanctify and give meaning to a changed world’. New believers ‘reshape received traditions and mint new spiritual practices’ (Kohn, 2003:7). This term ‘new believers’ was one which, at the outset of this study, I anticipated would be as relevant in New Zealand as it was in Australia; this proved to be correct, and in Chapter Eight I discuss how celebrants accept and work with clients’ complex, plural, and fluid spiritualities. Jan Pryor described New Zealand as having a ‘vibrant recent history of developing innovative and secular forms of ritual associated with events such as baby-naming ceremonies, weddings and other commitment ceremonies and funerals. There are secular celebrants for all of these events who combine, to varying degrees, formal or traditional elements with idiosyncratic aspects ... it reflects a strong and ongoing desire for ritual as a framework for holding the enduring meanings associated with life events’ (Pryor, 2006:19). Notably, ‘there is an increasing tendency to partially or sometimes totally replace the traditional content and structure with new elements that personalise the commemoration for the participants’ (Pryor, 2006: 17). Like Pryor, in this study I found a strong trend of advocacy for and innovation around the role of ritual in many areas of social and cultural life. For many, freedom from the expectations that rituals be held in traditional religious settings has not meant the end to the need for these rituals. Instead it has resulted in new, evolving ways of ritual-making. Celebrants are part of this trend to the extent that they display a willingness to create, explore, and reclaim a wide variety of rituals alongside, and on behalf of, their clients and communities.

With no publicly available, nationwide statistics on how many people take part in each of these various ceremonies and rites of passage, it is difficult to detect with any

accuracy cultural shifts and trends. Statistically we know that independent marriage celebrants officiate at nearly half (47%) of the 21,000 weddings annually (Department of Internal Affairs, 2005) and funeral celebrants officiate at around half of the 27,000 funerals annually.<sup>28</sup> Civil union celebrants officiate at each of the approximately 400 civil union ceremonies annually.<sup>29</sup> What we can observe in this study is the diversity of ritual forms, the richness of meanings, and the care with which some people choose to continue marking important life events and transitions through ritual expression. This perspective also shows that celebrant-led rites of passage in contemporary New Zealand reflect a combination of people's freedom to create and adapt spiritual and ritual practices from their own and other cultures, the uncertain and changing boundaries of people's beliefs, their exploration and deliberate staging of ritual as a form of personal expression, and 'local' characteristics and traditions about what it is to be Pakeha and live in New Zealand in the 21st century. In Chapter Six I explore the issue of what ceremonies celebrants perform and their motivations for doing so, and revisit this issue of the celebrants supporting and broadening the role of ritual in contemporary life for clients and communities who want them to do so.

## **Cultural trends impacting on New Zealanders' rituals today**

In this chapter I have explored key historical and socio-cultural themes which relate to the emergence and current popularity of celebrant-led ritual. Key themes and observable shifts over the second half of the 20th and early 21st century which are

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<sup>28</sup> Marriages: The most recent statistics showing the proportion of ceremonies are for 2003 and these show that independent marriage celebrants officiated 47 per cent of the 21,000 weddings annually, institutional (mainly religious) celebrants officiated at 35 per cent of weddings, and registrars 18 per cent. (Department of Internal Affairs, 2005). In personal communication with an Analyst at the Department in 2010 I was informed that the proportion of marriages officiated at by independent continues to be around 48 per cent of all marriages annually, a proportion which has remained substantially unchanged between 1998 and 2010. However, no formal publication of these statistics takes place.

Funerals: Neither the FDANZ nor the Department of Statistics keeps statistics on who leads funerals. A Dunedin funeral director and president of the FDANZ reports that in his funeral practice in Dunedin about half of the funerals are led by celebrants (Hope, 2007). Mary Hancock reports that 50 per cent of funerals are led by celebrants; however, I have been unable to find figures to verify this.

<sup>29</sup> Civil Unions: From April to December 2005 there were 278 civil unions. In 2006 there were 430 civil unions. In 2007 there were 393 civil unions. From January to September 2008 there were 308 civil unions (Statistics New Zealand, 2008).

influencing the ritual practices of New Zealanders today are summarised as follows. Secularisation, more noticeably from the 1960s onwards, meant that religious thinking, practice, and institutions lost some of their social significance. Instead pluralism in beliefs and lifestyles gradually became the norm. Pluralism is used here not only in the traditional sense of people who affiliate with an increasingly diverse range of religions which are reflected in their rituals, but also includes a large number of people with secularist views for whom religion is less important. Just as no one church has been able to provide a common civil religious narrative that represents a shared New Zealand national identity because of each church's very different traditions, histories, ways of worship, ministry, leadership, and governance (Davidson 2005: 327-328), no one church is in a position to prescribe or organise the contemporary rituals New Zealanders practice. For example, in important public services such as on ANZAC Day (a national day of remembrance for people who served in the military and those killed in wars), clergy play a role alongside civil or military dignitaries who usually preside. Individualism boosted by the counterculture continues to be a dominant value, and this – along with a trend away from institutionalised religious beliefs and greater freedoms and opportunities to encounter a broad range of cultural and spiritual traditions from around the world – has meant that now a multitude of personal, non-institutional and non-theistic spiritual traditions are practised. This is reinforced by an broadening range of cultural traditions New Zealanders come across by being more in touch with people around the world, and through the fact that New Zealanders comprise peoples from an increasingly wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and all of the hybrids and intermingling of traditions which come with that.

The bicultural and indigenous rights discourse of the last quarter of the 20th century has widened to more layered and complex multiethnic discussions in the early 21st century, reflecting the changed demographic picture of New Zealand to an increasingly multicultural and multi-religious society (Nachowitz, 2007: 1). In the fifteen years from the 1991 census to the 2006 census, the percentage of the population who identified as European changed from 83 per cent to 67 per cent. Māori, Pacific Island populations grew over that time. Over the same period, the Asian ethnic groups of New Zealanders more than tripled, from 3 per cent to 9.2 per cent, with the largest groups from China, India, and Korea. The numbers of New

Zealanders of Middle Eastern, African, and Latin American descent also increased markedly. One result of increasing cultural diversity for New Zealand has been the rise in religious diversity. Inward migration has meant the arrival of cultural groups with different belief systems, cultural, and religious practices from those traditionally familiar to New Zealanders. While there has been an 11 per cent decrease in the numbers of people stating adherence to a Christian denomination between 1991-2006, some Christian denominations have grown including Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity. Other religions have shown substantial increases in the number of adherents over this period; the most significant of these has been a 311 per cent increase in Buddhism, 257 per cent increase in Hinduism, and 492 per cent increase in Islam (Nachowitz, 2007: 3-6). To date there has been little research published on how recent migrants to New Zealand are celebrating their rites of passage. More visible are a diversifying range of community cultural traditions and festivals New Zealanders are taking part in, such as the February ‘Lantern Festival’ celebrating Chinese New Year Chinese in the major cities of Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch and also in some smaller cities and towns, such as Palmerston North. Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights is another example and this, too, is an annual event in the major cities of Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch.

Whilst today’s societal expectations for people to formally mark rites of passage with religious meanings in traditional religious services are greatly diminished compared with those in pre-1960s New Zealand, many people do continue to embrace ritualising to express the personal significance of important events and transitions. The roles performed by independent celebrants reflect and are in response to processes of individualism, pluralism, and eclecticism. Their personalised rituals support people’s desires to articulate and ritualise important life events and transitions, blending personal beliefs, cultural and religious heritages from around the globe and reflective of the diversity of the New Zealand population, into innovative, contemporary ritual traditions. Increasingly in the rites of passage performed it is possible to see themes particular to the local context emerging, and this study provides a uniquely New Zealand angle on some ritual traditions which are also common in other western societies – but which manifest in slightly different ways from those in Australia or the United Kingdom. These local versions derive from, are adaptations of, or are alternatives to the various mainly British Christian

denominational ritual traditions in place since Pakeha settled in New Zealand in the 19th century. They arose from the blending of Māori values, world-views, and spiritual traditions with European ones, from the particular, broad mix of cultural groups living in New Zealand now, or they are unique to the Southern Hemisphere lifestyles and values which have developed.

In the next chapter I begin to discuss in more depth independent celebrants and contemporary ritual-making in New Zealand. The chapter presents an overview and definition of the celebrants who are the focus of this study: who they are, what they do, how independent celebrants have emerged over the past 30 years, and some of the commonalities and differences amongst celebrants within this loose group. The community's structural characteristics are considered, as are some of the individuals whose contributions have had a lasting influence on celebrants' ways of working.

## ***5 Independent celebrants in New Zealand***

In this chapter I give an overview of the development of the community of celebrants and their ritual-making practices. I consider the extent to which the celebrants who are the focus of this study are different from others involved in similar work. Then I introduce what celebrants do. The field of celebrancy represents the work of several groups of people whose diverse practices and perspectives have developed in a relatively dispersed manner. I outline how funeral and marriage celebrants' work in particular has developed over 30 years in order to show how celebrants can now be regarded as one – albeit diverse – community. Celebrants now identify with each other in terms of their commonalities, whilst retaining characteristics unique to their allegiances with particular areas of celebrant work. I describe structures which connect celebrants through professional celebrant organisations and training providers. I also introduce people whose efforts have had lasting influence on celebrants' ways of working: key individuals who have encouraged and taught developing celebrants or authored celebrancy books. Lastly, I profile celebrants who were research participants in this study and whom I refer to by name in this thesis.

In New Zealand, anyone can call themselves a celebrant and offer services creating and leading ceremonies. Independent celebrants are people who identify as celebrants, who perform ceremonies, especially rites of passage, for people in their own community or on public occasions (e.g. memorial services), and who do this outside of religious and other organisational contexts. They choose to be involved in a field of celebrant work where they can tailor-make ceremonies for traditionally celebrated or commemorated life transitions such marriages and funerals, and other significant occasions and events. Whilst there is currently no way of definitively knowing the range, type, and numbers of ceremonies that involve independent celebrants, a 2004 survey of members of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand (CANZ) gives some indication. This survey showed that celebrant-led ceremonies included ceremonies of union (marriages, wedding blessings, commitment and recommitment ceremonies, renewal of vows, and affirmation of vows); ceremonies marking death (funerals, memorial services, interment of ashes, remembrance services, and unveilings); baby namings; house blessings and blessings of other

things and places; ceremonies to mark achievement (such as graduations); birthdays, anniversaries, crowning (a ceremony for women to honour age), healing ceremonies, seasonal celebrations, and pet ceremonies (Daly, 2004a: 1). Since this survey, civil unions have been introduced in New Zealand, with civil union legislation coming into effect in April 2005 and the first civil union ceremony performed on 29 April 2005.

Amongst the group of approximately 2,000 independent celebrants are: registered independent marriage celebrants, registered civil union celebrants, and funeral celebrants. In 2010 there were 1,631 registered independent marriage celebrants. This figure needs to be adjusted upwards to account for some other celebrants who perform other ceremonies but not marriages. Analysis (from 2005 when the number of the independent marriage celebrants was 1689) showed 54 per cent were female and 46 per cent were male. They ranged in age from early thirties to over eighty, with two-thirds were between 50 and 70 years. Three-quarters lived in the North Island (Department of Internal Affairs, 2005). Civil union celebrants, of whom, in 2010, there were 614, had a slightly higher proportion of women (66 per cent, based on 2005 figures when there were 693 civil celebrants) than marriage celebrants, and the age profile was slightly younger (Department of Internal Affairs, 2005). To officiate at marriages and civil unions, celebrants are required to be registered independent marriage celebrants and registered civil union celebrants respectively. (There is no registration requirement for funeral or other celebrants.) These appointments are made in accordance with legislation administered by the Department of Internal Affairs under section 11 of the Marriage Act 1955, amended in 1976 to appoint civil celebrants (known as independent celebrants since 2005), and under the Civil Union Act 2004. The Department of Internal Affairs administers the statutory processes of appointing marriage and civil union celebrants. There is no reciprocity between these appointments: in other words, appointment as a marriage celebrant does not authorise that person to perform civil unions, and vice versa. In addition, the criteria and processes for applying for appointment are slightly different in each case. This said, two-thirds of registered civil union celebrants are also registered marriage celebrants (Births, Deaths, Marriages, July 2005). Registered independent marriage celebrants are appointed by the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) on the basis of their suitability as individuals; in addition,

applicants must prove that there is a demand for their services, and provide the registrar with references attesting to their good character. As mentioned, there is a larger group of organisational marriage celebrants (7,831 in 2010) and registrars who also officiate at marriages; both groups are outside the scope of this study.

There are three main professional organisations representing celebrants. As well as the Celebrants Association of New Zealand (CANZ) there are two guilds: the Celebrants Guild of New Zealand Incorporated, North Island (CGNI) and Celebrants Guild of New Zealand Incorporated, South Island (CGSI).<sup>30</sup> Not all celebrants conduct a wide range of ceremonies. Some conduct only marriages or only funerals, or only civil unions. Others specify which ceremonies they conduct, generally including one or both of the most commonly celebrated rites of passage: marriages and funerals. Some celebrants also perform community or civic rituals where the events or changes being marked involve larger groups of people and sometimes have an organisational or commercial focus (e.g. the opening of a building or launch of a business).

In most ceremonies, the ritual-making role of the celebrant is much broader than it may appear to be to those attending the ritual enactment itself. For example, the enactment, or performance, of the ritual for a wedding, civil union, or naming ceremony takes only about one-fifth of the total time the celebrant spends with clients or writing their ceremony. There is no source of reliable statistics about the length of the ceremonies. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most weddings and civil unions are 20–30 minutes long; some are shorter (10–15 minutes) and others longer (up to one hour). Planning for these ceremonies takes around 10 hours. Funerals are generally one hour long. Funeral planning, research, and writing can take a celebrant several full days, depending on how many people and sources are consulted in preparation for the funeral ceremony. Prior to the enactment of the ritual, celebrants and clients together decide on the exact nature of the role of the celebrant and the processes of creating ceremonies. There are complexities and variations in the roles that different celebrants take in different ceremonies; likewise, the expectations and needs of clients differ. These are examined in Chapter Six.

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<sup>30</sup> In December 2005 a National Board was set up to increase co-operation between the CGNI and CGSI (personal communication CGNI Committee, February 2010).

## **Celebrants as a community**

I would not expect that all celebrants would declare themselves to belong to a discrete community of like-minded people on the basis of their involvement in celebrancy. However, they do constitute a community based on similarities and characteristics which many of them have in common as well as on some characteristics which distinguish them from other types of ritual-makers. The similarities and shared characteristics of independent celebrants are: a *modus operandi* whereby individual celebrants enter into agreement with each client around creating and performing particular rituals. The celebrant, rather than any organisation they represent, takes responsibility for providing that ritual to that client. Over the 30 years that independent celebrants have been operating they have not shown strong desires or attempted to organise their ritual-making offer so that they could deliver it via larger organisational or business models. Celebrants individually have a large degree of autonomy over what comprises the rituals they deliver, which clearly distinguishes them from organisational celebrants. It is common for independent celebrants to operate largely in isolation from each other, although this does not mean that they are not connected with one another at all. They interact with other independent and organisational celebrants through friendships, informal contact and gatherings, participating in training, organised networking, conferences, and professional development activities of the various professional bodies which some of them belong to, as well as through printed, web-hosted, and email-based systems of information sharing.

Two further shared characteristics of independent celebrants which mark them as a community are their shared belief around the beneficial role for ritual in life transitions, and the client-centred nature of how they work and what they create. Independent celebrants share a view of ritual as being helpful in times of change, especially loss. In particular they attribute importance to the personalising of these rituals according to the needs and beliefs of ritual participants, an observation in common with that made by Schäfer (2005) in his research amongst New Zealand funeral workers. It is because of this strong belief in the value of ritual that celebrants so willingly assume the authority to change, adapt, and appropriate ritual. They prioritise the value of ritual to ritual participants over and above any need to conform

to historical ritual forms and traditions, or a belief that the ownership or origins of ritual traditions deny them the right to draw on them as they see fit. These characteristics are explored in detail in the chapters which follow.

To appreciate the extent to which independent celebrants are different from the larger group of organisational (mainly religious) celebrants, it is necessary to understand some history relating to the pioneers in the field who were known as ‘secular funeral officiants’ and ‘civil marriage celebrants’. In the late 1970s and 1980s different people were involved in each of these groups in New Zealand. In these early days, the ways independent celebrants defined themselves and the nature of what they offered in their celebrant role differentiated them more strongly from others involved in similar work than is now the case. Another difference, which has remained unchanged, is that independent celebrants are not chosen by elders or anyone else in their communities, nor are they ordained like clergy. As described previously, the large sub-group of celebrants who are marriage and/or civil union celebrants must be authorised (registered) to perform these roles. This registration needs to be renewed each year. Other celebrants, however, having chosen to undertake the role, are not subject to any mandatory structures or processes to assess or ensure their competency in ritual-making or to afford them authority in their ritual-making role. To a large extent, their authority and capability to perform their work is attributed to them by ritual participants.

## **Funeral celebrants**

When Marian Barnes, the first secular funeral celebrant in New Zealand, started in 1979, she struggled with knowing how to refer to herself in her celebrant role; the title she chose was ‘funeral officiant’, a term still used interchangeably with funeral celebrant by celebrants and the public alike. In the late 1970s secular funerals were only just beginning to be offered in Auckland and I am not aware of them being widely available elsewhere in New Zealand then or any earlier, although they were already taking place in Australia (Messenger 1992 in Schäfer, 2005: 203). At that time, most funerals were officiated by clergy from the various Christian denominations. Considering the purpose of religious funerals from the perspective of the Church of England, Nixon (1992: 20) notes that Christian funerals are primarily

services of worship based on the Christian theological understanding of humanity's relationship with God, the nature of death and the body of the deceased, and the religious resources available for meeting the grief needs of mourners. Over time, what religious celebrants offer has changed. Instead of being almost exclusively confined to religious liturgy, personalised expression and celebration of the life of the deceased are now typically incorporated within a religious funeral. Douglas Pratt, for example, describes a new freedom in the Presbyterian Church and other New Zealand Christian churches, acknowledging that nowadays liturgies incorporate 'a measure of option and choice which was not the case a few decades ago'. He does not, however, link this specifically to the growth of civil celebrancy.<sup>31</sup> Some independent celebrants in this study (e.g. Barrie, Pratima) mentioned individual members of the Christian clergy who provided advice and assistance with writing civil ceremonies, particularly in the 1980s, and in doing so provide an example of the interrelationships between, and mutual influences on, religious and civil celebrants.

Religious funerals now are not dissimilar to funerals taken by independent funeral celebrants, in the sense that both can be seen as life-centred. Malcouronne, who worked as a minister and then as a funeral celebrant, documented this observation, describing how funerals have moved from impersonal religious services where the life of the deceased and the significance of that life were given a minor place to 'more personal, more human, more life-affirming' (Malcouronne, 2001:3) services which reflect a person's life and the importance of it. Schäfer explored this change from an anthropological perspective, from the point of view of funeral directors and funeral celebrants. He describes celebrant-led, life-centred funerals as being based on secular values, expressing the meaning of life and death in personalised terms at a person's death, and focusing on the celebration of a life lived (Schäfer, 2007: 109; 2005: 123-124). Mary Hancock, in this study, explained such funerals as being a celebration of the deceased person's life, recognition of the grief and loss that those at the funeral are experiencing, and a time of farewell and committal. A suggested distinction between funerals taken by religious celebrants compared with those taken by independent funeral celebrants is that the former are more likely to emphasise or include commendation to a divine afterlife (Walter 1990, in Schäfer 2005: 124). In

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<sup>31</sup> Douglas Pratt, (2008), personal communication

this study I have not delved comprehensively into funerary rituals of religious celebrants. However, based on independent celebrants' views of how religious celebrants operate, the applicability of this distinction to New Zealand society now is less certain with the diverse range of religious beliefs in New Zealand society, which are, presumably, reflected in religious funerals.

Several funeral celebrants I spoke to emphasised the differences they perceived between what religious celebrants offer now and what was offered in the past. They believed that it is important for the public to have a choice of religious or independent celebrants. They also believed that what was offered by religious celebrants in the past had been impersonal, irrelevant, and inadequate to the needs of the bereaved, and this conviction that the public should have alternatives had strengthened their motivation to become secular funeral officiants in the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. Marian, Barrie, Eddie). At first some funeral directors resisted secular funeral celebrants' efforts to offer an alternative to clergy-led funerals, a dynamic described by some (particularly Auckland-based) celebrants in this study (e.g. Eddie, Marian). Over time this too has changed, and some funeral directors (including some based in Wellington) played a part in encouraging and allowing celebrants to take on their new roles.

Thus, since secular funeral celebrants first emerged twenty to thirty years ago, there has been a 'blurring' of differences between what independent celebrants and organisational (mainly religious) celebrants offer. In other words, distinguishing the one group from the other in terms of what they offer is less applicable than it was. Independent funeral celebrants no longer define themselves primarily in terms of offering 'non-religious' alternatives and they often incorporate religious or spiritual beliefs, symbols, and traditions in the ceremonies they lead (Schäfer, 2005: 203). Clergy officiate at funerals that are more life-centred. One reason for the diminishing distinction between funeral services offered by independent and religious celebrants is, arguably, the interconnectedness that has developed between people in both groups. Examples are religious celebrants belonging to celebrants' professional associations, where they are identified as religious celebrant members; religious celebrants expressing interest in attending celebrant studies training courses; and in some instances a mutual sharing of texts and resources. The term 'celebrant' in

relation to funeral celebrants gained currency as more civil marriage celebrants were appointed; and as some marriage celebrants took on funeral work (and vice versa), ‘celebrant’ became widely used for people in both roles.

## **Marriage celebrants**

The 1976 amendment to the Marriage Act, which brought about the possibility of civil (subsequently changed to independent) marriage celebrants, was a response to public demand for non-religious celebrants to officiate at wedding ceremonies. There was already an option for people to have indoor Registry Office wedding ceremonies during office hours on week days, but the demand was for another alternative. The amendment also enabled some non-religious bodies, such as the Humanist Society, to have members authorised to solemnise marriages, and registrars to solemnise marriages outside normal office hours.<sup>32</sup> A new section of the Marriage Act (section 11) created the provision for the Registrar General to designate Justices of the Peace (JPs) and other willing people of good character as civil marriage celebrants, to meet the needs of those people who wanted to have a non-religious marriage ceremony in a setting other than a Registry Office.<sup>33</sup>

The first marriage celebrants were appointed in 1977. They included JPs and others who had an interest in the work. In the late 1970s secular funerals were only just beginning to be offered. Although it was noted previously that some people are both marriage and funeral celebrants, it was not until the early 1980s that some marriage celebrants took up funeral and other celebrant work, and some funeral celebrants applied to become registered independent marriage celebrants also. In other words, the first civil marriage celebrants and the first secular funeral celebrants were different individuals. The subsequent trend of celebrants extending from one ceremonial area into others has been entirely voluntary, and varies between individuals and between different communities and locations. In the late 1970s and 1980s, celebrants operated in their own cities and towns with, usually, only limited knowledge of a few other individuals involved in the work. As now, they mainly worked in isolation from each other, but at this time there was no systematic, co-

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<sup>32</sup> NZ Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 399 June 25 – July 22 1975, p3047

<sup>33</sup> NZ Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 404 July 21 – August 11 1976, p1129

ordinated way of finding out who other celebrants were, or who might be involved in similar work in other parts of the country.

At different times in the development of celebrancy, structures and processes have emerged which have connected celebrants with the work of their peers, and the influences of particular individuals have been felt through training, membership and participation in the activities of professional organisations, and attendance at national conferences. In the early days, though, there was little of this nature to assist those who wished to find their way into celebrant work. Until 1995 there was no formal training offered, and so those who entered the field between the late 1970s and the mid 1990s learnt their work in a variety of ways. A feature of this period is that celebrants were dispersed in pockets around the country, with very little structure or guidance as to how they could or should go about their ceremonial work. Many described themselves as self-taught. Some learnt from others involved in ceremonial work, including clergy and other civil celebrants. One of my interviewees, Barrie, who commenced civil marriage celebrant work in 1977, explained how his affiliation with the Presbyterian Church and his role as lay preacher at St Andrew's College in Christchurch assisted him in putting ceremonies together:

*We stumbled and sweated to get that first one together, because you were starting from scratch. But I suppose my previous church involvement ... I knew what sort of framework needed to be done and so by taking out the religious aspects you are left with a framework you can actually build on. (Barrie 1/11/05)*

Eddie, another research participant and a former funeral director who became a funeral celebrant in 1980, described using the same structure for funeral ceremonies as a minister would have:

*I think the original structure was the same [as what a minister would normally use for a funeral]. Like everything, there's a beginning, a middle, and an end ... When I first started it was quite easy to write a complete new service every time because I might only have been doing one a week ... All I knew was, I can offer an alternative basically. Back then in the eighties we were just feeling our way, yeah, there was no sort of books that you could refer to. There was nothing written about it, because, like I say, celebrancy didn't exist, so there was nobody out there writing books ... really, we were flying by the seat of our pants. (Eddie 3/11/05)*

Bill began funeral work in 1990. He linked his background in community activism and his experience of speaking at funerals for people with AIDS to his entry into funeral celebrant work. Rod Murphy, a former Anglican priest and former funeral director (who was the first civil celebrant in Wellington, where Bill lived) was also very helpful:

*I started getting asked to play big roles in funerals of people with AIDS and did a few funerals of people with AIDS ... I'd had a very public role in homosexual law reform and it seemed like something I could extend and so I did. And I went about it quite seriously. I talked to one or two funeral directors and one or two celebrants. In fact, particularly Rod Murphy ... He gave me a copy of the manuscript of his book and took me on an interview with a family, you know, who he was doing a funeral for and introduced me to funeral directors. Yeah, he was very, very good. (Bill 1/9/06)<sup>34</sup>*

Mary, who commenced her celebrant work in 1990, refers to her own experience with women's spirituality and ritual, her Methodist upbringing, and – specifically in relation to funeral celebrant work – the influence of Marian Barnes:

*Marian was a very intuitive worker and my learning with her was observing her. She never ... we never talked pragmatically about what she was doing. What she gifted me was being able to go along to interviews with families where there had been a death, observe her process of interview, and then see the final product she had produced – be at the funeral with her. And then she gave me a copy. (Mary 2/11/05)*

Other celebrants drew on skills they had acquired in their professions. Some struggled to find relevant resources and recalled relying on their own life experience, pragmatism, judgement, and skills. Pratima began marriage celebrant work in Auckland in 1998. Like Eddie 18 years earlier, she spoke poignantly about the isolation she experienced.

*You know the saddest part was that marriage celebrants up till now do not get any training before they go out into the market. And I think that's quite dangerous, too, because you've got to learn somewhere, you've got to start somewhere, and obviously you're going to make a few mistakes before you really come to realise that this is how it's done. That was the hardest and saddest part for me, that I was thrown into the sea and asked to swim out. No materials, no books, no direction as to where you get books to guide you, but they [the registrar] did give me some names of experienced Kiwi celebrants. (Pratima 1/11/05)*

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<sup>34</sup> After I interviewed Murphy in 2006 he showed me chapters of his unpublished manuscript. His discussion on the funeral as a celebration (Chapter 1) and his views on the similarities between interviewing for funerals and oral histories (Chapter 2: 16) were particularly interesting and relevant to this study.

New Zealand followed Australia in terms of civil marriage celebrancy. In Australia the national (federal) legislation which allowed for marriages to be solemnised by civil celebrants was the Marriage Act 1961 (Part IV, Division 2, Marriage by Authorised Celebrants, Sections 40–51). It was more than a decade before the federal law filtered down to state level and it took varying amounts of time in different states for relevant statutory and administrative processes to occur so that celebrants could perform marriages. In effect, civil marriage celebrancy was underway in Australia by the mid 1970s. Several of New Zealand’s pioneer celebrants knew of, and were influenced by, the work of the Australian, Messenger, and some had access to copies of his publication on civil celebrancy, *Ceremonies for Today* (Messenger, 1979).

One of those who did was Barrie:

*Well I did have the advantage of the Dally Messenger book which gave – gives – you a good basic outline. The key to any funeral service is telling the deceased’s life story, so the technique is how do you go about getting that information in an efficient way. All your life experience helps you in doing that. (Barrie 1/11/05)*

Marian Barnes, in my correspondence with her, expressed the view that some of Messenger’s resources were possibly derived from the Rationalists and Humanists Association. This is plausible, since the association had registered organisational celebrants who conducted non-religious marriage ceremonies prior to the introduction of civil celebrants in the late 1970s. On several occasions Messenger travelled to New Zealand. Speaking at the New Zealand Celebrants Inaugural Conference in the South Island (Christchurch, 26-28 June, 1998), he advocated celebrant-led ceremonies to ‘make memories’, and ‘move emotions’, through respecting traditions and ritual’s role in linking people with the past, attention to the processes by which celebrants work with clients prior to ceremonies. These included the need for sufficient ‘lead time’, preparatory components of ceremony development: clear intentional planning, thinking, creating, choosing, composing, consulting, refining and rehearsing. Messenger also highlighted a range of possible dramatic elements for civil ceremonies such as poetry, prose, music, choreography, locations, artifacts and costume (Messenger, 1998). Messenger spoke also at a later conference of celebrants in the Waikato in 2001.

Messenger's Australian book was among the first to be published on civil celebrancy, and since then, New Zealand authors have also written on the topic. The following New Zealand publications were mentioned by the celebrants I interviewed as influential in their work. The earliest book to focus on putting together marriage ceremonies was Douglas Pratt's *Celebrating Marriage: A Practical Guide to Getting Married in New Zealand* (1986), reprinted in 1990 then revised in 1996. The earliest book on secular funerals was Marian Barnes' *Down to Earth: The Changing Funeral Needs of a Changing Society* (1991). Hilary Hudson's *Civil Rites and Ceremonies* (1995) and Juliet Batten's *Celebrating the Southern Seasons: Rituals for Aotearoa* (1995) followed, the latter being revised and reprinted in 2005. Brian Malcouronne wrote and published *Honouring Our Loved One: Notes and Resources for Funeral Celebrants, Families, and Friends* (2001).

### **Celebrant professional organisations**

The first organisations of celebrants were the Marriage Celebrants Association in Canterbury (now CGSI) and the Civil Celebrants Association of New Zealand (CCANZ). CCANZ was formed in August 1980 by Marian Barnes and some marriage celebrants. Within a year there were 70 members (15 in Auckland and others in various parts of the country) and there was a quarterly newsletter, *Lifetimes*. The association's aims were to bring celebrants together and to make secular ceremonies available for funerals in particular, as well as for other occasions. CCANZ circulated resource material for secular funeral services, name-giving ceremonies, and marriage ceremonies. The association lasted only about two years. Looking back, Marian describes it as 'premature' and links its early demise to the fact that she was not interested in forming a national association and giving her energy to all that this would entail. Her passion was always for funeral work rather than celebrant work more broadly.

In the last decade, professional bodies have been influential in bringing previously isolated practitioners together to give them a sense of being part of a wider community of celebrants with a shared focus and commonalities in the ways they work. Importantly, professional bodies introduced codes of professional practice for their members. There is no requirement for celebrants to be a member of a

professional organisation, and many celebrants do not belong to one. Conversely, some celebrants are affiliated to more than one body. The celebrant professional organisations which exist now are CANZ, which was formed in 2000 and has around 240 members; and CGNI and CGSI, which together have a membership of between five and six hundred people. At least one professional organisation, CANZ, extends membership to registered organisational celebrants as well as those who are registered independent celebrants or who are involved in other ceremonial work. All professional bodies together represent, at most, 800 celebrants, less than half of the total number of celebrants believed to be practising.

A key function of the professional bodies has been convening conferences, and attendance at these has been consistently strong, with new and experienced celebrants gathering every two years for national conferences associated either with CANZ or the guilds. The conferences (usually 2–3 days duration) have provided members with a forum for learning from other speakers and invited guests on relevant topics, as well as practical workshops and debate, peer support, and a chance for social contact and the informal sharing of ideas and approaches. The range of speakers and workshops includes topics such as: experiential creative writing, spirituality, voice and public speaking training, processes for co-creating and facilitating ceremonies, multicultural sensitivity and skills, how to incorporate music appropriately, organisational and marketing aspects, professional supervision, trends, experiences and ideas on particular ceremonies such as the changing nature of funerals, funerals for babies, naming ceremonies, working with blended families, dealing with disharmony and tension, legal and ethical issues, and civil unions. Officers are elected and the contributions of volunteers are acknowledged as are the services and ceremonies that celebrants have provided. Also, every two years, CANZ holds an education day which aims to attract members from all around the country. CANZ publishes a monthly newsletter, *Panui*, and hosts a website which contains a directory of celebrants in each region of New Zealand and other resources for celebrants and the public. CANZ has six branches around the country, each of which has its own meetings, training activities, and communications with members. The guilds also have regular meetings, education-focused events, and newsletters. In 2008 a Certificated Celebrant Network was established. Convened by two Canterbury-based celebrants, it consists of an email newsletter sent to around 40

celebrants, all graduates of Auckland University of Technology's Certificate in Celebrant Studies training course.

The advent of celebrant training has been influential in providing celebrants with a structured entry into the work. Marian Barnes, in my interview with her in 2006, referred to Mary Hancock as 'a passionate idealist and a brilliant teacher'. Mary founded the first tertiary training course in celebrant studies at the School of Communication Studies at the Auckland University of Technology in 1995. The course began in 1996 and was run for twelve years. This NZQA accredited certificate course was taught over a series of (three or four) one-week modules, in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. It has attracted both experienced celebrants and those new to the work. Mary's course was the first of its kind in the western world, and celebrant training was subsequently introduced in Australia, England, and the United States. The course consisted of two compulsory areas of study, 'Ceremony and Celebration' as well as 'Professional Development', and additional optional areas of study, 'Marriage and Funeral Celebrant Training' and 'Ceremony for Transition through Crisis'.<sup>35</sup>

At the foundation course, 'Ceremony and Celebration', students were taught the role of contemporary celebrants and ritual-makers and the nature and design of contemporary ceremonies. 'Professional Development' included the study of effective communication, bicultural awareness, contemporary religious and spiritual practices, and ethics and business practice. 'Marriage and Funeral Celebrant Training' covered the legal requirements for marriage, the legal responsibilities of marriage celebrants, the design and preparation of marriage ceremonies as well as commitment ceremonies, training in the nature of funerals and what they are for, the preparation process for a funeral and the funeral ceremony. At the 'Ceremony for Transition through Crisis' students were trained in the design and implementation of ceremonies for the transition through crisis, including conceptual frameworks of grief, loss, and transition. In 2008, however, the host institution of the New Zealand course changed its focus to degree-level course provision and decided not to continue

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<sup>35</sup> This is the course structure as it existed in 2001. From 2002 the combined marriage and funeral celebrant training module was divided into two separate modules, so that students could choose one or both according to their interests.

with celebrant studies. In November 2008 Mary launched a private celebrant training establishment: The Celebrant School.<sup>36</sup>

## **Celebrants in this study**

Next are brief profiles of celebrants (in alphabetical order) who participated in this study and whose contributions are explicitly featured in this thesis. As I explained in Chapter Two, many celebrants participated, and I am immensely grateful to all who contributed generously to this study. Regretfully I am unable to include everything from everyone.

### ***Pinky Agnew***

Pinky Agnew is a Wellington-based registered marriage and civil union celebrant who began working as a celebrant in 1996. A member of both the Celebrants Association and the Celebrants Guild (North Island), she contacted me in response to articles I placed in these organisations' newsletters. I had become aware of Pinky's involvement in the field from other celebrants who had suggested that I make contact with her, but she contacted me first. I recorded two oral history interviews with her, in August and October 2006, at her home in Central Wellington. Pinky is a self-employed entrepreneur. She is Pakeha, in her early fifties, and describes herself as a business woman: an entertainer, performer, actor, comedienne, and celebrant. Her background includes working as an organiser for a trade union and she has also trained in journalism. In addition to the hundreds of weddings she has solemnised, Pinky also does a wide range of other ceremonies including commitments, funerals, namings, and civil unions. She has published two books of readings: *Heartsongs: Readings for Weddings* (2004) and *Lifongs: Readings for Milestones* (2006).

### ***Marian Barnes***

Marian Barnes is acknowledged as the first secular funeral celebrant in New Zealand. Having contacted Marian and invited her to take part in the study, I travelled to Ngunguru in Northland to record an oral history interview with her in 2006. In 1979, when she was fifty, Marian set out to establish an acceptable and readily available non-religious funeral alternative in Auckland. Earlier, she had worked as a registered

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<sup>36</sup> The Celebrant School [www.celebrant.school.nz](http://www.celebrant.school.nz)

nurse. She is Pakeha and describes herself as an atheist and a humanist. Marian worked as an Auckland-based celebrant for eleven years, from 1979 until her retirement in 1990. She became involved in other aspects of celebrant work, too: marriages and naming ceremonies. Couples devised their own ceremonies for those occasions, whilst Marian provided support and resources. Although these areas were not the main focus of her celebrant work, they were ones which, she says, gave her status and respectability. Marian's priority was funerals and she was always aware that plenty of other people were available to perform the other ceremonies.

Marian set up the first training course for funeral celebrants. She was also instrumental in setting up a national association of secular funeral celebrants, which published a newsletter for members, *Lifetimes*. Marian wrote a booklet about funeral work, *Funeral for a Friend* (1987), then later *Down to Earth: The Changing Funeral Needs of a Changing Society* (1991). She was keynote speaker at CANZ 2001 conference. Retired and no longer an active member of celebrant professional bodies, Marian continues to write on celebrancy. Her most recent publication, *God or Godswallow* (2003), includes perspectives on the potential roles of 'religiously neutral' celebrants in contemporary society. Marian was most surprised when I told her the proportion of marriages officiated by celebrants, how many civil celebrants are understood to practice now, and how extensive the memberships of the professional bodies had become.

### ***Rhys Bean***

Rhys Bean is a member of CGNI and responded to publicity about my study in the CGNI newsletter in mid 2005, offering to take part. Rhys has been a funeral celebrant since 1990, and believes herself to be one of the longest serving celebrants in New Zealand working exclusively in funeral celebrancy. She became involved in funeral work at the invitation of a funeral director in South Auckland when Marian Barnes retired in 1990. She works almost full time as a celebrant across the Auckland region. Rhys is in her mid fifties, a New Zealander of European descent. Her previous primary occupation was as a radiographer. She continues to work one day a week in radiography. Rhys comes from an Anglican tradition and at times has been deeply involved in the Anglican Church, serving on the vestry at her local church and as Synod representative for the Diocese of Auckland as well as being elected to the

General Synod. Later she moved away from her strong church affiliation and described the circumstances surrounding this in our interview. She has been involved in a bereaved parents' group and talked about her knowledge and interest in how people grieve and the processes which happen in communities when people are coping with death. Rhys includes the Presbyterian Church and the National Association of Loss and Grief (NALAG) among the places where she has obtained knowledge and resources relevant to her celebrant work. I travelled to Rhys' home in South Auckland to meet her and record an oral history interview (my first in this study) in October 2005.

### ***Julia Cameron***

Julia was President of CGNI when I interviewed her in Auckland in November 2005. She trained in Celebrant Studies in 2000, registered as a marriage celebrant shortly afterwards, and subsequently gained considerable experience across a range of ceremonies including marriages, funerals, baby namings, and reaffirmation ceremonies. Julia's recent professional background prior to entering celebrant work was in radio, advertising, and 16 years in television production. Earlier she had been a school dental nurse. Julia is New Zealand European in her mid fifties.

### ***Lynne Ewart***

At the Celebrants Association of New Zealand conference in 2003 Lynne spoke about children and grief and ways celebrants can encourage greater involvement of children in funeral services. This was when I first became aware of Lynne's work as a celebrant. I approached Lynne and invited her to record an interview and take part in this study.

Lynne is another New Zealand European in her fifties, who lives in Wellington. In addition to directing and officiating at funerals, Lynne performs some weddings. She has been a registered marriage celebrant since 2001 and registered civil union celebrant since 2005. Lynne's background is social work and bereavement counselling, specialising in working with children. Her role just prior to becoming a funeral director and celebrant was managing the Counselling, Social Work, and Spiritual Care Service at Mary Potter Hospice. She is a former president and lifetime member of the National Association of Loss and Grief (NALAG) and was

instrumental in establishing Skylight (previously the Children's Grief Centre), which provides support and counselling services for grieving children. While establishing new services, Lynne undertook considerable public speaking and fundraising work, the former being particularly useful as preparation for the role of funeral celebrant. Also, at Mary Potter Hospice, part of her spiritual care role over a five-year period involved running five or six remembrance services a year. In 1999 she took on the joint role of funeral director and funeral celebrant in a full-time paid employment capacity for a funeral directing company. In her first year there she also became involved in the Old St Paul's Annual Service of Remembrance, which around 500 people attend. Despite her initial nervousness about putting together the ceremonies and standing up and speaking in front of people, Lynne discovered that celebrancy was her passion. She chose the role of celebrant over that of funeral director when this opportunity arose with clients of her company. Lynne is a member of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand (CANZ), and a past-president of its Wellington branch.

### ***Barbara Goodman***

Dame Barbara Goodman became registered as a marriage celebrant in the early 1990s. She is European, in her mid seventies, and lives in Central Auckland. For 12 years she was Mayoress of Auckland. She was an elected to the Auckland City Council, and involved in several community and charitable organisations, including NZ Breast Cancer Foundation, Odyssey House, and the Rationalists and Humanists Society. Dame Barbara describes herself as a Jewish atheist. She is a member of CGNI. Barbara approached me after publicity about the study, offering to take part. I travelled to Auckland to record an oral history interview with her in August 2006.

### ***Mary Hancock***

Mary taught me how to be a celebrant. I met her when I enrolled in the AUT Certificate Course in Celebrant Studies in 1999. She has supported and encouraged me in my studies, and agreed to participate when invited to record an oral history interview in November 2005. Mary began her formal work as a celebrant around 1990. Her tertiary training prior to celebrant work was in teaching, education, and research. She has a master's degree in education and a diploma in teaching. For around ten years of her adult life, she was informally involved in ritual-making:

marking seasonal celebrations and exploring ritual in the context of expressing and celebrating women's spirituality. There was a strong spiritual tradition in her family when she was growing up, too, as her father was a Methodist lay preacher for 65 years.

When Mary attended a funeral officiated by Marian Barnes, she realised that she wanted to do the same work, and that she had the relevant skills. She contacted Marian and asked if she could apprentice herself to her. Marian agreed, and Mary embarked on funeral work. Later she took other ceremonies, such as baby blessings and weddings, for families for whom she had previously led funerals. She became registered as a marriage celebrant around 1990. Increasingly she has become involved in leading ceremonies for a wide range of rites of passage including ceremonies marking first menstruation, menopause, eldership, retirement, house blessing, house cleansing, separations, divorces, re-partnering, as well as gay and lesbian coming-out ceremonies.

Mary lives in West Auckland, is Pakeha, and in her mid fifties. She is self-employed, working full time in celebrant work, both as celebrant and celebrant lecturer. She has a Graduate Diploma in Celebrancy from a tertiary celebrant training organisation in Australia. Mary is the founder of tertiary-level celebrant training in New Zealand, having developed and taught the Certificate Course in Celebrant Studies at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) which was offered from 1996 until 2008. She is now the director of her private celebrant training establishment, The Celebrant School. Mary is a foundation member of CANZ and an executive foundational member at the International Federation of Celebrants.

### ***Bill Logan***

Bill is celebrant and counsellor in Wellington. I knew Bill from training sessions he had run at the CANZ 2003 conference in Wellington. This training focused on funerals for people who had suicided. I also had met him at other funeral training workshops he ran for the Wellington Branch of CANZ, to which we both belong. I developed an admiration and respect for Bill, and when I was starting out in celebrant work I sought his advice, particularly in relation to funeral work. I discussed my ideas for this study with him, as a way of identifying and working

through its implications for my professional peers. Bill is Pakeha, in his late fifties. He is an atheist. He began conducting funerals in the early 1990s. His entry into the work was gradual. He had a public role in homosexual law reform and other political activism in the mid 1980s. Prior to that, he taught politics at university. Bill was confident in the public speaking and performance part of funeral work. He had also done some training around grief and bereavement counselling and was involved in supporting people dying of AIDS and had other roles in the gay community. Bill became involved in leading the funerals of people who had died from AIDS and, with the support, encouragement, and training of a number of funeral directors and celebrants (notably Rod Murphy), Bill's funeral celebrant work increased. For several years he was doing one funeral a day. He continues to work as a celebrant, performing funerals and marriages, as well as civil unions, name-givings, memorial ceremonies, divorce ceremonies, dedication ceremonies, and unveiling ceremonies. He also works as a counsellor, having trained for this role in the late 1990s. Bill was active in the establishment of the celebrant professional bodies. His experience as a celebrant has been extensive, and by writing papers, providing training and professional development activities, and maintaining his website, he has shared his ideas about and approaches to celebrant work, funeral celebrancy, and 'difficult' funerals. I recorded an oral history interview with Bill in September 2006.

### ***Barrie Mason***

Barrie performs weddings and funerals. He is New Zealand European, in his late sixties. He lives on the North Shore in Auckland. Barrie was one of the first marriage celebrants to be appointed when the Marriage Act (section 11) created the provision for the Registrar General to appoint JPs as civil marriage celebrants. Barrie applied and was accepted for registration on 11 July 1977 and conducted his first wedding 12 days later. For 20 years, celebrant work was additional to his full-time position as a company manager and later director. In 1997 he moved to self-employment as a celebrant, which has been his primary occupation and full-time role for several years. Barrie contacted me after publicity about the study, and offered to take part. I travelled to Auckland to record an oral history interview with him in November 2005. Barrie is a member of both CANZ and CGNI.

### ***Eddie McMenemy***

Eddie McMenemy responded to my article in the June 2005 CANZ newsletter. He introduced himself as the ‘father’ of funeral celebrancy, explaining that it was his belief that when he started taking funeral services 30 years ago, the only other funeral celebrant in Auckland was Marian Barnes, and that he had heard Marian referred to as the ‘mother’ of funeral celebrancy. Eddie emigrated to New Zealand from Glasgow in 1974. His primary occupation now is as a celebrant in suburban West Auckland, mainly doing funeral work. Eddie’s first funeral as a celebrant was in May 1980, and for over 30 years he has conducted weddings, commitments, re-affirmations, and naming ceremonies as well as funerals. Eddie is in his mid sixties. Before becoming a funeral celebrant, he was a funeral director and has also served in the British army. He has worked in show business, and does some work as a comedian. He is a member of both CANZ and CGNI. In 1999 he was part of the steering committee for the formation of CANZ. His long service as a celebrant and his contribution to the profession was recognised with an award at the 2005 CANZ conference. I interviewed him at that conference. Later that year I met him again to record an oral history interview, at his Auckland home.

### ***Pratima Nand***

Pratima Nand is a registered marriage celebrant in South Auckland. She is a member of the Celebrants Guild (North Island) and responded to an article I wrote in June 2005 for their newsletter, inviting participants for this study. I recorded an oral history interview with her in late 2005. Pratima is a New Zealander with Fijian Indian descent, having lived in New Zealand for 32 years. She is in her fifties. Her background includes community work, Justice of the Peace work, and radio and television broadcasting. Pratima is Hindu and many of her wedding clients are Hindu couples from south and central Auckland. She speaks English, Fijian Hindi, and Indian Hindi. She has been a registered marriage celebrant for about eight years.

### ***Ruth Pink***

In 2005 Mary Hancock introduced me to Ruth, who had just completed the AUT Certificate in Celebrant Studies course. Ruth introduced herself to me as a writer, celebrant, and student. She had recently finished writing a novel and was setting up her celebrant business as well as studying for a qualification in counselling. I invited

Ruth to take part in this study and she agreed. I visited her at her home to record an oral history interview in March 2006. At that time she had conducted eight weddings and two civil unions. Since then I have continued to meet regularly with Ruth as we have developed a peer-support relationship in regard to our celebrancy work. She sought permission from some of her clients to share their ceremonies with me for the study. Ruth worked as a policy analyst for Creative New Zealand before changing to a career in celebrant work. She is now a registered marriage and civil union celebrant, and a counsellor. Her marriage celebrant registration was in 2005. Ruth is Pakeha, in her mid forties. Her transition to celebrant work was ‘a natural confluence’ of the public-speaking experience gained in her previous work and the ‘blossoming’ of the spiritual aspect of her life. Ruth talks about how the traditions of two great faiths, Buddhism and Christianity, influence the way she works as a celebrant.

### ***Marie Preston***

Marie describes her first love as tutoring. Trained as a midwife, she worked as a nurse educator and doing family therapy in her roles as a senior Plunket nurse and family health counsellor, prior to becoming involved in celebrant work part time. Marie began performing weddings in 1991. She also performs funerals, civil unions, naming ceremonies, renewal of marriage vows ceremonies, significant birthday ceremonies, house blessings, and other ceremonies. Spirituality can be important in the ceremonies Marie creates, and in my interview with her, she discussed her beliefs and how these relate to the relationships she forms and the ceremonies she creates for her clients. Marie lives in Wellington. She is Pakeha, in her late fifties.

### ***Heather Scott-Worsley***

Heather is a marriage and funeral celebrant. She began working as funeral celebrant in 1990, after 18 years in the funeral business (including being a funeral director). Prior to that, she was a social worker. As a registered marriage celebrant she has performed marriage ceremonies since 1998. Heather is New Zealand European, in her fifties, and lives in central Auckland. In addition to celebrancy she works as a Justice of the Peace, a co-ordinator of police volunteers, and as a volunteer for the Citizen’s Advice Bureau. She has been an active organiser and member of the Celebrants Association, later CGNI, including time as President of CGNI in 2003–

2004. I invited Heather to take part in the study, based on her long involvement in the Auckland celebrant community and with CGNI. When Heather agreed to an oral history interview in November 2005, she asked for Julia Cameron, who was then President of CGNI, to be included in the interview, and I agreed to this.

### *Sheryl Wilson*

Sheryl mainly performs weddings and naming ceremonies, but has led commitment ceremonies, interment of ashes ceremonies, and blessings, and she is also a civil union celebrant. Sheryl lives on the North Shore of Auckland. Previously a teacher, principal, then educational consultant, Sheryl acknowledges that communication is a large part of her life; she sees it as a keystone in family and community relationships. For 23 years she has been involved with International Toastmistresses, and has been club president, council president, national president, and on the international board. She describes the skills she developed in this public-speaking organisation as very relevant to celebrant work. Sheryl has been a Justice of the Peace since 1981, and shortly after registered as a marriage celebrant. She is New Zealand European, in her early sixties. I invited Sheryl to participate in this study and travelled to Auckland to interview her in July 2006. Sheryl had been described to me as someone with a lot of knowledge about how the celebrant community developed in New Zealand, obtained over her 25 years as a celebrant. She was involved in establishing CANZ, and was president in 2007–2009.

Participants in this qualitative study include a robust mix of celebrants with varying ranges of experience, from some who were very new to some who had been involved since the late 1970s. These participants are celebrants from a broad range of different backgrounds, including some formally trained in celebrant studies. They bring experience from conducting a wide range of rituals and ceremonies, and are varied in their approaches to ritual-making and in how they work with clients. The lack of a strong South Island perspective in the group of celebrants who participated in the formal interviewing aspect of this ethnography must be noted, since some of the most experienced celebrants are based in the South Island and also the longest established professional association (CGSI) is in Canterbury. Therefore this study may not include all of the potential regional differences that may exist and there is undoubtedly further rich history and learning to be gathered from wider-reaching

research which could augment this study, which emphasises perspectives gleaned from North Island-based celebrants.

## **6 Celebrants as ritual-makers**

This chapter focuses on celebrants as ritual-makers. First I outline my theoretical approach to examining the intentions of the celebrants and the processes by which they create ceremonies. I then explore the celebrants' motivations for being ritual-makers, their backgrounds, and the competencies they bring to their work. Next I consider how celebrants work with ceremonies: the roles they take in relation to their clients, the processes they employ in order to understand their clients' needs, and how, in the process of creating ceremonies, they mediate between varying influences and expectations. This sets the scene for a discussion on how celebrants personalise and adapt ceremonies to reflect the beliefs and requests of their clients: for instance, some celebrants co-create rites with their clients as well as facilitating the ceremony. It will be shown that both celebrants and clients draw on multiple cultural customs and spiritual traditions. It is not unusual for some celebrants to hold different beliefs and values from those of their clients, and I pay particular attention to situations where celebrants are faced with balancing and integrating their own beliefs and values about ritual with those of their clients. How celebrants manage the tensions and complexities which arise in this relationship are also discussed. Finally, I relate the findings of this chapter to my overall discussion on the postmodern characteristics of contemporary ritual-making.

This study foregrounds the intentions and ways of working of celebrants, who are one party in the ritual co-creation process. Consistent with the approach of Moore and Myerhoff (1977) who viewed ritualisation as an active process by which people construct particular interpretations of their social realities, I look at how celebrants work for and with their clients to construct ceremonies which deliberately convey their desired meanings. My broad theoretical approach is to view ritual from both the point of view of the main ritual performance and also from the perspective of the celebrants' relationships, intentions, and processes of working with and for clients in the lead-up to the ceremony. Here, ritual is acknowledged as being deliberate communication, a way in which people convey their interpretations of social realities as authentic and legitimate. Stanley Tambiah's (1981) work informs my theoretical approach as well. Like Moore and Myerhoff, Tambiah viewed ritual as a culturally

constructed form of communication, centred on the achievement of particular objectives. This approach to ritual acknowledges that multiple, contradictory, and contested interpretations of any ritual are possible.

Historically, rituals have received more attention in anthropological studies than the roles and intentions of ritual-makers, an observation made by Catherine Bell (1997: 223) and Kathryn Rountree (2004: 172) among others. Rountree acknowledges that ritual is constructed human invention, and explores the perspectives of ritual-makers in settings where individuals or informal groups create and perform rituals for themselves. My study is similar to Rountree's in that it explores the same phenomenon: ritual invention and the theories of action of the ritual-makers themselves. Like Rountree, I found that ritual-makers and participants collectively construct, invent, and appropriate ritual. Unlike Rountree's study, however, in the celebrant-client relationship, which my study focuses on, responsibility for ritual invention is not diffused democratically amongst all the ritual participants. Although the ritual-makers (celebrants), who are the focus of my study, create and perform rites and ceremonies for participants, who are paying clients, the clients exercise a strong influence on the form and content of the ritual. Thus the role of the celebrant is partly active and partly passive. Given the possible complexities of the celebrant's role, both behind the scenes and when performing with a wide variety of clients, it is interesting to see whether there are any commonalities in terms of the motivations, background experiences, skills, and interests that these ritual-makers bring to their work. In the next section, my discussion of these aspects provides a contextual understanding of the ways in which celebrants work.

### **Celebrants' motivations**

Celebrants' motivations towards their work are diverse, reflecting their broad range of backgrounds and the interrelated factors which influence their ongoing and changing relationship to their work. Overall, the celebrants I interviewed had a sense of a 'calling' to the work, and some actually used this term, for example:

*I feel really strongly that I have a calling to be a celebrant – that everything I've done in my life up until now has equipped me, almost perfectly, for what I do now. I'm always astounded about that. (Pinky 31/8/06)*

Shamans are a group of ritual-makers who have been the subject of considerable anthropological interest (Blain, 2001; Eliade, 1972; Harner, 1990; Harvey, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Wallis, 2003). Shamans are the ritual-makers most closely associated with the notion of 'calling' to their role in the sense of their being chosen individuals. In some non-western contexts the work of a shaman is regarded as a vocation which, even though it may be resisted by the individual because of the danger and self-sacrifice, is required of them. For example, typical Arctic shamans hold special social positions, through their training or spiritual endowment, which mean they are able to act as a mediator between members of their social group and the supernatural powers (Hultkrantz 1993 in Bowie, 2006: 179-181).

In western or neo-shamanism, people take up the calling of shamanic work in different ways to those in tribal settings. According to Western shamanic teachers, anyone can become a shaman. People entering trance states, going on soul journeys, or discovering animal spiritual helpers, are going to the same spiritual sources that tribal shamans have (Harner, 1990: xiv). A 'calling' to shamanic practices for modern westerners may be out of curiosity, or it may be driven by some deeper sense of purpose. Individuals themselves choose whether to take part. Many of the typical characteristics of shamanic initiation may be missing, or at least optional, for western shamans. They do not have to contact spirits for their help, they are not involved in an involuntary way, they need not have a life crisis or illness, there is not necessarily a long quest for them to undertake in preparation for the role, and they need not necessarily experience 'death' and 'rebirth' or other powerful transformative experiences to begin to acquire powers to connect with spirit world. Western shamans are not marked for life as being shamans. They can change their mind or retire if they so choose (Bowie, 2006: 187-189).

Another feature of western shamanism is that the emphasis is 'less on the social role that the shaman plays', rather it is 'more on the search for individual spiritual development and healing' (Bowie, 2006: 180). This particular feature of western shamanism, the search for individual spiritual development and healing, I found to be less important in the roles taken by New Zealand independent celebrant ritual-makers, although there may be an element of personal development in the mix of motivations celebrants have. The motivations for being in the role vary considerably

between celebrants, and they include a strong component of calling to serve the ritual needs of their communities and clients. This is not to say that celebrants' motivations are entirely altruistic or involuntary. But to liken them too simply to western shamans risks implying that celebrants' work is mainly about their own individualistic spiritual development, which it is not. And so whilst 'calling' in a shamanic sense of calling is relevant to some extent to independent celebrants in a contemporary New Zealand context, a slightly different use of the term, derived from a religious vocation in social work, is also useful.

Whilst celebrants did not convey a traditional religious sense of calling to their work in a sense of having been invited to follow a particular path by God, they did display a sense of psychological calling much like that described by Mary Eastham in relation to social workers. This type of calling refers to a view that everyone is born with a unique personal destiny, a way of living which 'asks to be lived' (Eastham, 2002: 72). When people are aware of their personal destiny, their focus becomes one of living this out. A high importance is attached to fulfilling this work or way of living by those who feel strongly spiritually or morally oriented towards it. Eastham describes how social work practitioners 'who conceive of their work as vocation are not just doing a job. They are engaged in a project involving the total orientation of the person – mind, body, and spirit' where one professes a 'unique sense of individuality in the service of community' (Eastham, 2002: 74-75). The concept of calling has two constituent parts: firstly an 'inner' orientation on the part of the individual that she or he is supposed to be doing this particular work or living this life; and secondly, a focus outside of themselves such as the community or context they are serving. Celebrants' sense of calling to their ritual-making work was linked to a sense of personal destiny, that they are 'meant to' be doing that work and that they have the motivation and skills to do it. There was also a perception that they are valued in their roles by the communities they serve, and that ritual-making work is held to be special and valuable to their communities. Pinky, for example, spoke of celebrancy 'feeding her soul'. She described how, as a celebrant, she felt she used all her skills and summed up the role like this:

*What celebrancy does, as well as enabling me to bring myself to it, is that it connects me to real events and real people in my community out there of New Zealand. That plugs you in to huge life events and the real stuff: birth, death, commitment. (Pinky 31/8/06)*

Whilst celebrants' backgrounds differ, there were similarities which could be observed in one or more of three areas, all of which require a range of communication skills and people skills. These were: performing or public speaking; people-based care and support service work; and community and civic work. The celebrants I interviewed had, for example, qualifications in teaching, education, political studies, nursing, midwifery, dental nursing, social work, radiography, psychology, and journalism, as well as counselling. Other celebrants (some of whom I met in this study, others whom I am aware of from publicly available information about them) have backgrounds in Justice of the Peace work, local government, school administration, training, social research, organisational research, educational research, sales, radio and television broadcasting, television production, human resources, Māori cultural advisory work, university lecturing, funeral directing, acting, clerical (church) positions, youth health, and family therapy.

A 2004 survey of members of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand showed that celebrants draw upon an extensive repertoire of competencies when undertaking their ritual-making work. Celebrants were asked which competencies they believed they used in their work. Communication skills, in particular listening skills, were identified, along with frequent mention of interviewing, language and writing skills. Relevant personal traits identified included being flexible, having empathy and patience, having respect for all belief systems, common sense, and being helpful. Creativity was listed with regard to creating unique ceremonies to meet people's needs. People skills included counselling, mediation, ability to empower people, cultural knowledge and sensitivity, and facilitation skills (Daly, 2004b: 5) .

Celebrants' motivations are reflected in the types of ceremonies they are willing to provide. Some work solely or primarily in one area – be it funerals or marriages or civil unions – though most undertake a range of work. Bill, for example, performs a wide range of ceremonies including funerals, unveilings, memorial services, weddings, namings, and civil unions, as well as commitment, divorce, and dedication ceremonies. He also works as a counsellor, a role he sees as closely related to that of celebrant. Rhys' work as a funeral celebrant is almost full time and she does not do other ceremonial work. Pratima is a part-time marriage celebrant, and combines this

with paid commercial and voluntary community work. Ruth is building up her celebrant business, having commenced work as a marriage and civil union celebrant in 2006. She is trained in celebrant studies and intends to do funeral work, as well, in the future.

In describing their motivations, celebrants referred to multiple, interrelated factors that brought them into this work and kept them involved. Often they found that their reasons for continuing the work changed over time. The main motivating factors included a desire to give community service, an opportunity to undertake paid work, an opportunity to extend their interest or career in communications, a belief in the power of ritual to help people cope with change and loss, and an opportunity for creative expression. These factors are often entangled for any one celebrant; they are not mutually exclusive in any way. Sometimes the factors which originally motivated an individual to become a celebrant differ from those which best explain their ongoing connection with the work. In relation to funeral work, for example, celebrants recalled being invited to take on the role of funeral celebrant by the person concerned before she or he died, or by family or friends of the deceased person, or by a funeral director. In such circumstances celebrants felt an element of obligation to accept, and so they wrote and led their first funeral service. As they found the work satisfying, discovered they had skills in the area, and further invitations ensued from members of their community or the wider public, these celebrants became involved on an ongoing basis.

Mary was influenced by a combination of interrelated factors to become a celebrant. The factors included a family history of ritual in a religious context, her involvement in women's spirituality and ritual in her adult life, a growing demand from the public for the services of celebrants, and serendipitous observation of the work of the only civil funeral celebrant working in Auckland at that time. Mary described several themes in her decision to move from a career in education and research to become a celebrant and trainer of celebrants. These included the strong spiritual traditions she had experienced growing up in a Methodist household where her father was a lay preacher. She also referred to being part of the generation of post-war baby boomers who had moved away from institutionalised religion and found themselves asking how they were going to mark important life transitions. In addition Mary linked her

exploration of women's spirituality, which included celebrating and honouring key things in her life including seasonal changes, to her celebrant work. At a time in her life when she was wondering how she could apply the 'informal' ritual-making skills from her personal celebrations, Mary attended a colleague's funeral at which Marian Barnes was officiating:

*It was the first non-religious [funeral] I've ever been to, and there was a civil celebrant officiating, Marian Barnes. And I sat there and it was one of those real 'ah ha', one of those epiphany experiences, I sat there and I thought 'whoa!', I want to do this work. I know I can do this work. I want to do it! How am I going to do it? (Mary 2/11/05)*

This was around 1989, and as a result Mary embarked on a 'formal' journey to become a celebrant, apprenticed to Marian Barnes. Further invitations to do other ceremonies came from families who saw Mary at work; 'families who you'd done funerals for would say, 'well look, you know, we're having a baby now, would you bless our baby?', 'so-and-so's getting married, could you marry us?', and so I came round to applying for my marriage licence, quite a reverse way round.' In addition to her own knowledge and skills and her desire to do the work, Mary refers to the growing demand for celebrants to carry out rites of passage at the time she was seeking to become involved:

*People were very aware that we'd thrown the baby out with the bath water. And we didn't have men and women to mark ... all of the rites of passage, and so increasingly people were inviting me to be involved in a whole range of ceremonies, like ceremonies for marking first menstruation. Older women were talking about menopause, others were talking about eldership, and some were talking about retirement. And all the different kinds of ceremonies that we could have, that I began to get involved in, blessing houses, cleansing houses, separations, divorces, re-partnering, gay and lesbian coming out ceremonies. You know the whole, it's just like, 'whoa', and suddenly I was up on this magical experience that really engaged me. (Mary 2/11/05)*

For celebrants like Pratima, community service was a strong motivator. The term 'community' in this context includes geographical communities, as well as communities of interest, ethnicity, and belief. Pratima spoke about emigrating to New Zealand, becoming involved with charitable organisations for Indian communities in Auckland, and discovering their need for a marriage celebrant who spoke Hindi.

*It was my community work that led me to become a marriage celebrant because as people started coming into the country we were getting people*

*who were not conversant with the English language and when they had to take vows they just couldn't do it in English ... I was in the right place at the right time to be able to give this to my community. (Pratima 1/11/05)*

For others, celebrant work is a chosen area of paid employment. Their motivation to become involved was associated with earning income. Pinky is one of several celebrants who were open about taking a business approach, though this is now complemented by the fact that she enjoys the work so much:

*What happened was, having approached it in a purely business, from a purely business point of view, is that I discovered that I absolutely loved it and that, in fact, in the ten years since I became a celebrant, I now consider myself a celebrant first and foremost rather than a performer. I consider it not just my core business, but I consider it my spiritual home. (Pinky 30/8/06)*

The nature of the job is an important motivating factor for some. It can appeal to those who like to work independently, who want take up work in their forties or fifties, or want (generally part-time) self-employment. Some find that this autonomous, flexible, part-time work complements other roles, interests, and commitments. Sheryl described a situation which had occurred around 2004 when a prominent New Zealand weekly magazine ran an article about part-time work and ways of earning extra income; celebrancy, as an idea of how women might do this, was included, resulting in the CANZ being 'inundated' with calls from people keen to become celebrants who thought it was a 'nice thing to do'. In Sheryl's view this situation was 'ghastly' and 'disappointing' because it portrayed celebrancy 'in the wrong light' as a way of 'earning easy money'; she thought a more appropriate description of it was 'a joy and the privilege of being part of important festivals, rites, ritual in people's lives and being invited to be part of that'. Celebrants, overall, express some uneasiness about their work being seen purely in a commercial light and many go to great lengths to emphasise that their motivations extend beyond it being a means to earn income.

Some Justices of the Peace were offered the option of becoming registered as marriage celebrants when civil celebrancy commenced in New Zealand in 1977 and many took up this option. Many independent celebrants, now, are also Justices of the Peace who became registered shortly after the 1977 Marriage Act amendment (including Barrie, Sheryl, and Heather, participants in this study). Others whom I

interviewed or have met at celebrants' gatherings also expressed a strong sense of their celebrant work complementing, or being an extension of, their roles in the teaching, social and psychological support services (e.g. counselling, social work), and other fields in which they had developed a range of people skills and communications skills (e.g. midwifery, rest-home management, funeral directing, radiography). Some celebrants had gained communication skills and experiences through public speaking, performing, and facilitating and they perceived a match between these skills and those required for celebrant work:

*I got really involved in 'International Toastmistresses', became a club president, a council president and a national president on the international board and was very involved for 23 years and I'm still a life member. So the skills I learnt from that have stood me in good stead ... in terms of writing ceremonies, presenting ceremonies, running workshops. (Sheryl 5/7/06)*

The opportunity to create ceremonies to assist people through important life events and transitions drew others to the work. Mary has already been mentioned as one of those whose knowledge of ritual-making from her personal life and close community led her to want to offer this more widely, to share with others something she believes is a positive experience. Other celebrants were motivated to create and lead ceremonies based around working with people at a transition in life that involved grief and loss. Such ceremonies, they believe, can be healing. These celebrants see ritual as part of broader psychological support and health or healing models and are therefore motivated to help individuals and communities by working with ritual within these models. Bill links the healing aspect of ritual with the important role celebrants have of listening and facilitating communal storytelling. Janelle, on the other hand, talks about ceremonies for 'active healing' in connection with women's health, fertility, miscarriage, life changes, and loss.<sup>37</sup> Lynne talks about healing in relation to encouraging families to involve children in the discussions preceding funerals, giving them the choice of participating in funerals, and supporting them in their expressions of grief.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Janelle Fletcher, interview 29/7/05, and website, [www.vitalpeace.co.nz](http://www.vitalpeace.co.nz), accessed 7/4/08

<sup>38</sup> Lynne Ewart, speaker CANZ conference, *So what about the children*, Wellington 27/7/03

## **The market, reward, and payment**

As with other spiritual practitioners and ritual-makers, many celebrants expect financial reward for their ritual-making activities. Peter Berger (1963) used market metaphors to describe how some North American Christian denominational churches sought to attract members with publicity strategies, product differentiation, and brand strategies. Guy Redden (2005) shows how market dynamics and commercial institutional arrangements partially conceptualises the New Age market, noting that there is a value-driven aspect to this market as well. Refuting the negative view of consumeristic orientation equating to New Age practitioners as necessarily ‘fleecing’ their customers, Redden cites research suggesting that the commercial activity of many New Age providers is accompanied by them being ‘highly committed teachers and entrepreneurs whose career choices signal their desires to realise their values in their life-styles and professions’ (Birch, Mulcock, Jorgenson in Redden, 2005: 244). Similarly, Redden views New Age consumption as ‘deliberate activity through which people elect to become involved in ideas and activities that may have profound personal significance, precisely because they are selected freely rather than by the dictate of bureaucratic authorities’ (Redden, 2005: 244). Nurit Zaidman (2007) looked at New Age shops in New Zealand and Israel, and discussed the spiritual marketplace. He argued that profit-centred activities and spirituality are not mutually exclusive; rather they can converge, with examples of New Age shop owners performing multiple roles in which they are both in charge of the economic exchange which involves selling at a profit (the business interest) and also create sacred spaces where they dedicate time to listening and helping people (2007: 361-372).

In terms of market characteristics, the value of the reward celebrants expect reflects the value clients place on buying ceremonies and also the payment celebrants expect in exchange for their work. However, a purely market model does not adequately conceptualise the variations and complexities of how celebrant services are exchanged between ritual-makers and clients for the following reasons. From a market demand perspective, using the example of marriage celebrants, clients rely on celebrants if they are seeking legal marriage (and do not wish to use organisational celebrants or registrars, both of whom generally offer less flexibility on the places, times, and ceremonial options than independent celebrants do). Celebrant services in

this regard can be seen as more like a public good, which means clients are obliged to make use of what services are available and have little choice over how much they pay for what is provided by celebrants. Also on the demand side, clients have limited influence over the overall pool of celebrants they have access to, in terms of their personal qualities, competencies, cultural and spiritually sensitive ways of working or backgrounds. Many regions of New Zealand have even more limited choice because of the small numbers of celebrants available in particular localities: if people want access to celebrant services, they have little choice but to pay what is demanded by a local celebrant. Taking a ‘supply’ side perspective, a purely commercial market model does not adequately conceptualise the arrangements of the celebrancy environment for several reasons. As described, celebrants’ motivations vary, some work – at times – for non-commercial reasons. Also, some celebrants actively cooperate rather than compete with one another. The Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages regards marriage celebrant work as a community service, and celebrants who share this view are motivated by a desire to do this without receiving financial rewards or because they believe that their clients do not have enough money to pay for their services. Some celebrants, such as those who have never been in the paid workforce or who derive financial security from other sources, have not considered charging for their work because they are not in the habit of putting a monetary value on their skills or their time.

Although most celebrants are part-time ritual-makers, some work in other areas aside from, or complementary to, celebrant work. There is less demand for celebrants in areas with smaller populations, and so there is a limit to how much any celebrant might be asked to do in such areas. Also, the numbers of celebrants are reported to have increased significantly in main centres, and some celebrants who once spent more of their time in celebrant work report that now they are less in demand, as the work is shared amongst a larger pool. Some celebrants are ‘full time’, in the sense that this is their main area of work and they are available for bookings most of the time, rather than in the sense of working nine-to-five, five days a week. Apart from funerals, which are generally held during daylight hours and can be on any day of the week, other ceremonies mainly take place at weekends. Meetings with clients and potential clients occur at any time of the day, and often in evenings and weekends to suit clients who have full-time jobs. Earnings can also be a problem, however. A

celebrant who for many years has wanted celebrant work to be her main source of income found that it has been a constant struggle to achieve this. There is enough demand for her services, but the amount she is able to earn as a full-time celebrant is not as much as she believes she should be able to make, given the value she puts on her skills and experience. Issues of the value celebrants attach to their work and how those who seek financial payment charge for it has been a topic of informal discussions at almost every celebrants' gathering I have attended, and celebrants are intensely curious to hear how other celebrants value their celebrant work or time in monetary terms to charge clients.

Those marriage and civil union celebrants whose work is their means of making a living, charge a fee, which is typically between \$150 and \$500 per ceremony; thus the range is broad. Some celebrants charged \$50, and others closer to \$1,000, per ceremony in 2006. Some have an hourly rate, for example \$60, and base their fee on the time spent working on the ceremony which, for a wedding ceremony, would typically be in the range of eight to ten hours. Broadly, the trend is one towards celebrants charging fees more closely related to what they perceive as the market value of the services they provide, rather than to the hours spent and expenses incurred (relating to items such as clothing, transport, office equipment). With no guidelines, controls, or central source for finding out about celebrant fees and charges, I have gleaned what is here from informal discussions with celebrants. Some are reluctant to share this information openly, conveying an element of unease with revealing this to other celebrants they perceive as competitors.

In summary, the factors that motivate celebrants to take up their work are multiple and interrelated, and a broadly market model is a useful although not complete way of conceptualising the arrangement and the environment celebrants operate in. The most memorable ritual-makers in traditional studies are from non-western societies, or they may be perceived as exotic or dangerous, such as shamans and witches. My closer-to-home celebrant ritual-makers appear rather ordinary in comparison. Some celebrants felt a sense of calling to their work and their ritual-making skills came mainly from other areas of life and work experience. Outside of the times when they volunteered or worked as celebrants, these people were not set apart from everyone else in their communities in particularly strong ways. I was not aware of people

regarding celebrants as notably different or special by virtue of the fact that they hold status as celebrants. Some celebrants did refer to how much they enjoyed positive feedback on their work, indicating a sense of satisfaction and a feeling of being special in their celebrant roles. For example, Sheryl said very definitely that she felt 'honoured and privileged' that people asked her to lead them in their ceremonies of marriage, celebrations, and other rituals, and Heather described feedback from people at funerals who described the experience as 'wonderful' and that as a funeral celebrant she 'was just a natural, I just loved it. I thought I've really found my niche'.

Entry into celebrant work in general is not restricted to people with special ritual-making skills or personal attributes, albeit that marriage and civil union celebrants must gain registration annually to perform legal ceremonies. This registration is based on the celebrant showing a demand for their services and evidence of good character. Celebrants as ritual-makers are remarkable more for how much they are like everyone else than for how they stand apart. In New Zealand people are not restricted from becoming involved in ritual-making and people can choose to act as celebrants and make their services available to the public with very little restriction. Ritual participants, then, are limited in the extent to which they can influence who independent celebrants are and what types of skills, attributes, beliefs or values this pool of ritual-makers hold. Celebrants themselves attest that they are client-centred in their individual ways of working. From a societal perspective, however, there is little else in terms of structures or processes influencing who has authority over ritual-makers and how they practice, beyond trusting the individuals involved. With the privatisation of religion and of ritual comes acceptance that people's beliefs and affiliations are not dependent on their adherence to attending or participating in shared, prescribed rituals in contemporary New Zealand society. There is, therefore considerable freedom to choose whether and what type of rituals and rites of passage they take part in, when, where, and how often, and whether to practice their ritual with the involvement of ritual-makers of any ilk: clergy, independent celebrants, or other ritual-makers.

### **Client-centred, dynamic ritual-making practices**

Celebrants aim to provide ceremonies which fit the needs and expectations of their clients, at the same time helping them to take part in rituals which enact and convey

both the continuity of traditions of culturally determined expectations and current personalised meanings. They see themselves as working for, and so implicitly answerable to, their clients. Their role involves asking and listening in order to understand their clients' beliefs, expectations, and needs. Then they work with this information to create or adapt ceremonies. Celebrants do not perceive themselves as assuming, or being credited with, positions of authority over clients. Clients expect celebrants to work in these exploratory ways, and they expect personalised ceremonies, similar to the desire for personalised ceremonies and the requirements of Kohn's 'new believers' (2003). In studying the nature of people's spiritual beliefs in contemporary Australian society, Kohn named a group of people as 'new believers', people engaged in exploring inward, self-focused forms of spiritual and religious expression, reshaping received traditions and minting new spiritual practices as well as taking their inspiration, direction, and language from a vast array of different spiritual and secular influences and ideas (Kohn, 2003:3-7). There are many interrelated socio-cultural reasons why Australians, like some other westerners, now expect personalised ceremonies, and individualism underlies them. Themes described by Kohn include: the counterculture and the dismissal of mainstream values and politics in the 1970s; the shifting focus to a 'subjective turn', an inner-focused search for meaning and spirituality; the globalisation of religious traditions, which means people have more choices and opportunity to encounter some of the vast array of cultural and religious traditions which exist; protest against formal creeds and crystallised forms of worship; and people's desires and searches for personally meaningful spiritual traditions.

The role of the celebrant is clearly broader than repeating existing rites and upholding traditions. The role entails forming a relationship of trust with clients, seeking information about their expectations, and organising and integrating this into a ritual framework. The tasks of the celebrant include interweaving components from relevant ritual traditions, adapting elements, and creating new parts or entire ceremonies as required. It extends to suggesting ways of symbolically enacting the transformation the ceremony is based around, as well as giving the clients choices around who participates in the ceremony, where they will be positioned in relation to each other during the ceremony, and how the significance of the location of the ceremony can be communicated to the guests. There is a technical project

management or stage management aspect to the celebrant role, too, and in different situations, different tasks may be performed. For example, the celebrant may coordinate with others who are speaking in the ceremony, such as individual family members or friends who are reading or speaking, or groups. Pinky referred to a civil union ceremony in which both mothers of the men joining in civil union and another close family friend 'gave their blessing on behalf of the families'. Lynne described having groups of school children singing as part of a funeral ceremony for a classmate. Celebrants may work with other religious ritualists who are performing part of the rite such as Hindu priests and Buddhist monks in marriage ceremonies. A slightly different example is where celebrants have to manage unscripted aspects of ceremonies. For example, I have been asked to include a time for 'open contributions' during a civil union ceremony where guests were invited to express their wishes to the couple. This 'open floor' opportunity to participate is a common, although controversial, feature of some New Zealand funerals.

Celebrants may weave in elements of creative design such as standing near beautiful backdrops (particular trees in gardens or parks, coastal outlooks, hilltop or bush settings). More traditional and symbolic creative elements, such as the gifting or placement of flowers, also commonly feature in ceremonies, and the particular personalised meanings of these need to be communicated along with their seamless enactment. An example is a civil union ceremony led by Ruth, where guests expressed their 'care and support' for the two women with 'tangible' gifts: flowers. These flowers were described by the celebrant to be 'eternal symbols of hope and love...grace and loveliness'. The flower gifting took place before the couple made their vows. Twelve (previously chosen) guests formed a line and one at a time presented their gifts, each of a single different flower, to the couple. As each guest offered their flower, they bequeathed 'aspirations of love' to the couple. For example, one guest said 'Love is, in all things, a most wonderful teacher', and another said, 'Love is a belief in a power larger than myself and other than myself, which allows me to venture into the unknown and the unknowable'. Afterwards the celebrant bound a ribbon around the bunch of flowers to form it into a bouquet while the two partners held it. The celebrant reinforced the symbolism of what was happening with an explanation that, 'these flowers, lovingly gifted to you by your friends and family, reflect your love....beautiful, radiant, abundant and blossoming,

they reflect each of you and the wondrous third entity which is your relationship'. The action of binding the bouquet was linked to the uniting of beauty and the lives of the partners.

Another example of creative design in a ceremony was Lynne's description of incorporating flora into a wedding ceremony for a young couple who had had five family members die in the lead up to their wedding day. For that couple, as part of the wedding altar, five flax leaves were arranged standing in stones, to acknowledge the absent family who were so keenly missed on that day.

The 'rose ceremony' is another example of a creative and symbolic element which can be incorporated into weddings, one which I became aware of from clients describing the idea to me and requesting that I script it into a form which could be included in their service. (Later I found the rose ceremony referred to in Cant's (2009) Australian book on celebrancy in the section on weddings.) The rose ceremony worked like this. During the wedding ceremony, after they had said their vows, the couple exchanged single red roses with one another. These roses were described by me as representing their 'first gifts to one another as husband and wife', as 'symbols of love' and as a way of saying 'I love you' to one other. I continued by suggesting that wherever they make their home in the future, they choose a very special place for roses, and that they place roses on that spot to remember the love that brought them together, and as recommitment to their marriage.

Candles are another creative element used in a multitude of different ways depending on the ceremonial need. For example, at the commencement of one wedding ceremony I performed, a bride and her sister lit a candle in remembrance of their mother who had passed away some time earlier. In a different wedding, the mothers of the couple lit a candle to symbolise the joining of their two families. In another example, a candle was lit by a couple to signify their love of God. The use of candles was discussed by several celebrants, all of whom stressed the importance of only using candles when these were meaningful to the families involved, and also the need to make it clear what the particular meanings of candles were in different ceremonies. Rhys, for example, described candles as part of naming ceremonies for

children. These candles were lit during a ceremony for a baby, and then taken home by the parents to re-light on birthdays and other milestones.

Exchanging gifts was another frequently mentioned creative and symbolic element of ceremonies. In weddings and civil union ceremonies, partners frequently gave each other gifts, with rings the most obvious example. Sometimes the couple's children were given gifts. Pinky described children being given jewellery (e.g. necklaces, bracelets) within wedding and civil union ceremonies. These were described as 'ancient ways of sealing vows', referring to the pledges made to the children which accompanied the gifts, reassuring the children about the security and love that would continue for them with the changing relationships and blending of families that the ceremonies marked. Some venues impose restrictions which celebrants need to be able to work within, such as outdoor venues where celebrants need to take into account how to gather participants as a group so that the bride and groom sense that everyone is surrounding and supporting them and the guests can also hear over the noise of sea, wind, water, or chirping cicadas. Celebrants often work out how to incorporate live music or performance into ceremonies, and they often need to take into account different languages spoken by the clients and guests.

The celebrants I interviewed were eager to tell me ways in which they personalised ceremonies. One spoke of arranging for a young woman's horse to be inside the place where her funeral was held, as a means of acknowledging the importance it had for her. On occasions, parts of the ceremonies were performed in other languages (including Māori, Japanese, and German) so that non-English-speaking members of the families attending could take part or at least understand what was being said. The celebrants emphasised that the rationale for their innovation was grounded in what they believed would be most meaningful for the ritual participants. Bill, for example, talked about his role as a funeral celebrant and counsellor for an extended family with Pitcairn Island connections. He conducted funerals, weddings, and unveilings for this family over many years:

*It's nice because you get to know people and it means a lot more somehow. Sometimes these are people who treat you as if you were their village vicar and sometimes it's not religious, at all, you know. It's funny with that family, the Pitcairn group ... had a Seventh Day Adventist background and they liked me because I didn't have any of the Puritanism of the Seventh Day Adventist*

*Church. You know I'd encourage them to sing the hymns they wanted to sing and so on, you know ... I was able to both use many of the same forms that were familiar to them from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, but allowed, helped, encouraged them to put in a lot of their own history and ways of thinking, and so on, which was clearly what they wanted. (Bill 1/9/05)*

These words indicate that Bill feels that he has helped that particular community by learning about which cultural and ritual traditions the individuals find most useful, meaningful, and helpful. He used ceremonies with similar ritual forms to those which the community were steeped in and also drew on the history valued by the community and their own ways of thinking. The fact that this community has invited Bill back over several years to perform his celebrant role for them suggests that they value the way he works and the ceremonies he creates.

Rhys described a funeral ceremony which she had planned with the person concerned prior to their death from a terminal illness. The family arranging the woman's funeral asked that the celebrant honour the detailed list of very particular personal requests the woman had made in relation to her own funeral. Some elements included dressing the casket to reflect things the woman had enjoyed (walking shoes, tramping boots, line-dancing shoes, coffee-maker and coffee). Other elements were woven into the ceremony and included: the woman's life story, several pieces of music in styles the woman had enjoyed (*Glenn Miller Orchestra*, *Victor Sylvester Dance Band*, *Jim Lowe's Green Door*, and *The Bayside Boys' Macarena*), a range of specified readings (from the Bible, from Katherine Mansfield, from Richard Bach's *Jonathon Livingston Seagull*, from William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*), invited speakers (including the woman's brother), particular prayers (including the Serenity Prayer), and candles which were blessed by a Chaplain and then given to guests to take with them as they left the service.

An overall observation in this study has been celebrants' openness to extending and innovating around the types of ritual performed. The trend is one of an increasingly broad range of occasions which are being marked ritually, and independent celebrants are at the forefront of this, both in responding to demand from people who come to them and also in their willingness to ritualise in new areas and in innovative ways. The CANZ website is one of the main gateways by which the public can

obtain information about the celebrants in their areas and what celebrants offer. Prior to 2009 the website listed a few broad categories of what celebrants offer: birth, marriage, civil union and commitment, funerals and memorials. In 2009 the website was updated, and now it lists more than 30 types of ceremonies celebrants offer.

These include:

- anniversaries,
- awards recognising achievement,
- blessings of a place or event,
- honouring the milestones for birthdays for any age,
- burial of the placenta as part of a naming ceremony,
- civil union,
- cleansing and celebration of new beginnings,
- coming of age,
- commitment,
- crowning and honouring of age and transition to wise womanhood,
- divorce and separation,
- engagement,
- farewells,
- funerals,
- interment or scattering of ashes,
- launching ceremonies,
- Matariki, the Māori celebration of New Year and the rising of the Pleiades,
- memorial services,
- special ceremonies for women or for men,
- name-giving,
- pet and animal farewell ceremonies,
- recognition of seasons,
- celebrations of promotions and new challenges,
- renewal of vows and reaffirmation of relationships,
- retirement,
- reunions,
- marking the seasonal cycles,
- unveiling of permanent memorials, and
- weddings.

A list on a website does not mean that such a range of ceremonies is commonplace in New Zealand, nor does it mean that all of these types of rituals have even taken place. But it does indicate an attitude of flexibility to ritualise in innovative ways by some celebrants, an attitude which is endorsed by one prominent celebrant professional organisation. My involvement with celebrants, reviewing of the newsletters and conference content, and discussions with various celebrants strongly confirmed the role of celebrants in advocating for, and broadening the types and times we ritualise. In my experience, individual celebrants openly and enthusiastically let it be known to other celebrants and people more generally the ideas and experiences they have around ritual innovation and adaptation. In their local and national networks celebrants actively develop and share ideas around tailoring ceremonies to the particular situation; for example, in the case of funerals where someone has suicided, where the deceased is a baby or child, or where a 'green' (environmentally-sensitive) funeral is requested. Some celebrants have worked with promoting starting-school and other ceremonies for children and adolescents, some with ceremonies of affirmation and celebrating ageing for mature women. Commitment ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples, as well as civil union ceremonies, are other areas where celebrants share ideas and resources. Several celebrants are active in the area of ritualising around loss, coping, and grieving. Some celebrants promote particular types of ceremonies such as business launching ceremonies or ceremonies for pets.<sup>39</sup> To summarise, celebrants' intentions and their

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<sup>39</sup> Bill Logan, CANZ Conference Workshop, '*Funerals for people who have suicided*', 2003;

Nicola Daly, '*Sasha's legacy: A guide to funerals for babies*', 2005, and CANZ Conference Workshop, '*Funerals for babies*', 2003;

Deb Cairns, Speaker, CANZ Conference, '*Greening the funeral*', 2009;

Kathrine Fraser and Elspeth Lamb, CANZ Conference, '*Ceremonies for children and adolescents*', 2005;

Wanda Brittain, CANZ Conference, '*Crowning of the wise woman – a ceremony of affirmation for mature women*', 2007;

Bill Logan, CANZ Conference workshop, '*Ceremonies for gays and lesbians*', 2003;

Keith King, CANZ Conference workshop, '*Creating the ceremony – Civil Unions*', 2005;

Winnie Duggan and Christine Bannan, CANZ Conference Workshop, '*Be fertile with your infertility – using ceremony and ritual to acknowledge the infertility journey*', 2009;

ways of working are primarily centred on meeting the needs and expectations of their clients, but the ceremonies also reflect the diverse approaches of different celebrants. The trend is towards an increasingly broad range of ritually marked occasions, and independent celebrants are at the forefront of this trend, both in responding to demand from people who come to them and also in their openness and willingness to ritualise in new areas and in innovative ways.

Celebrants' own perceptions of the qualities and competencies they bring to their ritual-making roles can be augmented with perceptions of others around them: fellow celebrants, clients, and others in society. How celebrants compare in respect to the qualities each brings to their role and clients' experience of them varies enormously. Anecdotally, I have heard several accounts of celebrants under-delivering on clients' expectations, and some descriptions imply that the celebrants concerned are not regarded as possessing the necessary qualities and competencies for the role they are purporting to perform. Examples include poor planning, ineffective time management, inadequate communication with clients prior to ceremonies, and poor facilitation of ceremonies. An examination of individuals' qualities and competencies must also consider the broader contexts, in order to develop a realistic understanding not just of how they operate, but also how changes can be effected. Among the weaknesses in the ways secular funeral celebrants work that Schäfer (1998) identified, was that they tended to be strangers to their clients. Celebrants may be strangers to their clients in other types of ceremonies, too. However I do not believe it is always the case that celebrants are strangers to their clients any more. Several of the celebrants I came across who had been practising for a long time, spoke of working for families and performing different ceremonies on different occasions, sometimes over generations. This suggested that clients chose celebrants they have some experience of working with, and that this is satisfying or valuable to them; from the celebrants' perspective, this satisfaction seemed mutual. For example, Marie spoke of how, even though she is involved with people for a short time when she creates and performs a ceremony for them, during that time she builds a relationship which sometimes extends beyond the ceremony because their 'paths

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Sandy Carden, CANZ Conference Workshop '*Clearing the negatives and moving on – ceremonies for marking significant changes*', 2009.

continue to cross for varying reasons'. On the other hand, some celebrants emphasised the importance of clients having a choice of celebrant, which translated into clients' right to choose a 'stranger' if they considered that particular celebrant would suit them best.<sup>40</sup> A further weakness raised by Schäfer in relation to secular funeral celebrants was that new and different funerary ritual can be less meaningful and therefore provide less comfort than familiar traditional ones. For some people, I would argue that the opposite applies: new and different rituals can be sometimes be more meaningful because they are personalised, and therefore more comforting. Chapters seven and eight provide detailed discussion of this point.

A further, slightly different, criticism arises if we shift the focus beyond celebrants as individuals to how celebrants operate in an environment reliant on self-authority and self-accountability. By definition, for practitioners operating in such a context, there are very few influences 'outside' the individual who can determine precisely what the nature and extent of that individual ritual-maker's ethical responsibilities should be. There are no formal structures or processes by which New Zealand society identifies, invites, or controls which celebrants are suitable as ritual-makers. Perhaps this is because independent celebrants, as a relatively new group in our society, have a reasonably low profile and their work is therefore not widely understood. Celebrants' autonomy, if misused, can as an example mean they deliver time-worn and predictable ceremonies, a weaknesses of the secular funeral celebrant model identified by Schäfer (1998) which applies more widely to all independent celebrants.

That anyone can offer themselves as a celebrant suggests that the risk of harm associated with their work is considered low, as is the need for greater social controls over what they do. Theoretically, at least, other groups of ritual-makers are more accountable for their actions via the organisations which appoint them to their roles: religious and other organisational celebrants to their churches and societies respectively, and registrars to their government-agency employers. The trend for

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<sup>40</sup> Whilst not implying that there is value in celebrants being unknown to their clients, it is relevant to consider that in many areas of contemporary life people are familiar with dealing with care and support workers from whom they do not receive continuity of care, i.e. such workers are more like strangers to them. An example is in family health services where large practices, mobile workforces, and specialised service providers mean that the families who once might have had one general practitioner for all the family over a long time now see a myriad of different health practitioners.

comparable groups of allied health professionals and support workers – such as social workers, counsellors, and psychotherapists – is also towards stronger accountability, which protects clients and communities. Attention is paid to such issues as entry criteria, comprehensive training, ongoing competency assurance, complaints processes, codes of ethical conduct, and practice standards. What is notable in the case of celebrants as ritual-makers is how little accountability exists through formal, broader institutional control, and also how little pressure for change there is from any constituencies apart from by a minority of celebrants themselves.

The trend towards greater professional organisation by celebrants (introduced in Chapter Five) partly addresses this need for greater accountability. But, as stated previously, affiliation to a professional celebrant body is currently purely voluntarily in New Zealand, and is one way in which this country is different from Australia, where celebrants are required to belong to a professional body. In the case of celebrants wishing to gain registration as marriage celebrants, there are limitations on the number of marriage celebrants registered at any one time by the relevant government agency (although the rationale for why it does so is not clear). But in the absence of selection criteria for who becomes registered relating to particular or special qualities or skills, no processes for retiring marriage celebrants, and very limited transparency in the processes by which celebrants are appointed, those who are successfully appointed are a subset, chosen at the almost complete discretion of local registrars, from an ongoing pool of people who volunteer themselves based on their own perceptions that they are appropriate for the role. Nowhere in the process of appointments can the public or interested parties openly influence the decision-making around marriage celebrant selection. As far as I have been able to ascertain from the appointing body, the Department of Internal Affairs, there are no active policies on their part by which they can monitor or influence how well independent celebrants match or meet the needs of their communities through criteria which may be important to the clients themselves, such as which cultural, spiritual, religious (or non-religious) backgrounds or knowledge these celebrants bring to their ritual-making work.

I now take a closer look at different processes of co-creating rituals within the celebrant–client relationship. Celebrants adapt their working processes according to

the situations they are faced with. I cover a mix of situations to illustrate the details and nuances involved in celebrants' dynamic ritual-making practices. These situations are: acting as mediator; judging when to slow down and listen carefully; judging when it is important to ask direct questions; showing tolerance towards integrating multicultural and spiritual traditions into ceremonies but not making assumptions about cultures or traditions from the ethnicity of particular clients; and careful listening in situations where clients may not be experienced in articulating their ritual needs. The process of deciding on ceremony content varies considerably between celebrants. Some offer clients a minimal choice or a fixed set of options. Others work in partnership with clients, facilitating a process which involves storytelling and sharing of meaning and ideas and leads to the development of the service. Celebrants who offered fairly structured formulas or templates of ceremonies to their clients tended to have been working in the field for 15 years or more. For these celebrants, personalising services meant providing some choice for clients, but this choice tended to be relatively limited. However, even these celebrants did seem open to considering the inclusion of other elements in the ceremonies if clients proactively requested this. Typically these celebrants offering clients some options for particular sections of ceremonies – a 'mix and match' approach. For example, one celebrant described having a pretty standard formula for wedding planning, consisting of 12 components from which clients, in a half-hour interview, select the ones that become theirs. The celebrant explained that clients generally tell them a little bit about themselves but that they (the celebrant) do not want to know too much about them. One interpretation of the type of comment made by this celebrant is that celebrants think they know better than their clients what their clients need. It could suggest that because of their extensive experience in their celebrant role, they were more efficient than their clients in knowing what clients need – before or without taking the time to listen or openly explore what might be behind the predetermined desired information the celebrant is seeking or expecting. This suggests quite a different positioning between the celebrant and their client, one where the celebrant is assuming authority over the ritual-making process and thereby also assuming greater control over what ritual should be. In the interview described above, the celebrant, who had been in the field for more than two decades, was ensuring that I became aware of their considerable experience and the ease with which they could create a rapport with their clients. Indeed, skills in setting clients at ease, creating a

rapport, and establishing a level of trust so that they can comfortably articulate what is personally important about their situation and their desires for how this might be expressed ritually are important in the celebrant role. Celebrants are ethically obliged to respect the confidentiality of the information revealed to them by clients, and to sensitively discern and distil ceremonial expression of relevant information.

Other celebrants described more open, idiosyncratic processes of working with clients. In their interviews for this study, they used language that suggests they see the process more in terms of working with their clients to co-create ceremonies. These celebrants encourage clients to take as big a role as they wish in the choices, design, and writing related to the ceremony. Ruth spoke of ‘a whole process that takes place ... behind the ceremony that you see on the wedding day is a process, is a psychic process, a spiritual process, an emotional process of a couple, a man and a woman, or two men, or two women, embarking on some journey together ... I want to embrace and facilitate the whole journey that I think a couple goes on for a wedding’. Ruth also described in detail her process of co-creating wedding ceremonies with clients.

*I usually give [the clients] a bit of an info pack when I meet with them. And then when they decide to go with me as a celebrant, we work through the pack. In it I give a bit of an overview really of how I would work with them, step by step. This is the policy analyst in me coming out, project manager in me coming out. Then I do a summary of the legal requirements of getting married in New Zealand. I then have a bit of a menu of possibilities that they can include in their wedding ceremonies ... things like how would they arrive, how would we begin the ceremony, are there people that we'd like to remember who can't attend, are there people that they'd like to acknowledge in their lives, ... who is going to do readings, what sort of music they'd like. Things like, 'would they like a symbolic enactment in their ceremony, like hand fastening or pouring of water from vases or lighting candles? Words about love? I try to just give them a bit of a menu of things that they could include, which is basically the bones of a ceremony for me. I get them to choose what they'd like, then I also include in the info pack some 'sample vows', some 'sample askings', some 'sample ring exchanges', and a list of websites that they could go to, to look for readings. So it's just a few pages, but I find it quite useful, especially working with couples who I haven't met, like through the internet.*

*Then we have a second meeting and I would interview the couple about love and how they met and what they love and like about each other, what attracted them to each other and stuff like that. That's a really, well it's a privilege to do that and to hear about their lives ... You get to hear, in a very candid way, about their relationship. So when I'm writing that information up I have to be careful about what I do and don't say. ... then I ... draft a*

*ceremony based on what they have told me ... I weave that information in around the structure that they have given me from the menu of what they want in their ceremony. So then I have a draft for them ... It's really important for me that they're comfortable. So then they look at the draft and ... we have a dress rehearsal and then the actual ceremony. (Ruth 17/3/06)*

Like Ruth, the majority of celebrants I spoke to spend time prior to the ceremony, asking pertinent questions and listening to their clients. These discussions enable celebrants to adapt and personalise rites to reflect the clients' cultural and spiritual beliefs according to their desires and requests. For registered marriage celebrants, spending time with clients is an expectation of the licensing agency,<sup>41</sup> and virtually all celebrants regard it as a necessary part of their role and take very seriously this responsibility. Other studies which show ritual-makers working in these ways, alongside their ritual participants, creating rituals specific to the lives and desires of those particular individuals, include those of Salomonsen who examines closely the reinvention of pagan rituals by contemporary pagan witches. She explains their ritual-making in the context of the ideals of late modernity whereby contemporary witches 'take away from theology and the educated priesthood the exclusive authority to interpret the will of God and perform rituals' and 'insist that viable religion can be created from lived experiences by ordinary people' (Salomonsen, 2002: 126). In a different study, Salomonsen shows how ritual-makers assess individuals' situations according to functional, fluid, and contextualised criteria, and then actively search for the rituals or ritual components that are needed in those specific situations (2003: 22).

Several celebrants described deliberate and intricate processes involved in meetings with families for funeral planning, the sensitivity required, and surprises and challenges which can sometimes arise. Bill, for example, described 'going into different people's lives as sensitively as possible and find[ing] out what is going to address their situation'. Elucidating what people need and expect in a funeral ceremony is not always straightforward. For example, Rhys referred to her role in ensuring that the requests of the deceased person are honoured in funeral ceremonies,

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<sup>41</sup> 'Celebrants have a responsibility to design the ceremony in accordance with the couple's wishes: 'according to such form and ceremony as they may think fit to adopt' (s.31(2)). Celebrants should therefore be meeting with the couple well in advance of ceremony, to discuss their needs' (Registrar of Marriages, 2007)

as well as the requests of the family. Sometimes she needs to negotiate her way around 'difficult families where there is a lot of tension' and as a celebrant she is 'someone who can keep things calm and even and fair'. Rhys talked about how she explores the 'philosophies' the deceased person liked so that she can bring them into the service: 'something comes up, somehow, that you can hold on to, like "she was a good neighbour" or "she lived by the golden rule".' Eddie described the importance of relaxing people before starting to talk with them about the kind of service they expect. With 25 years of experience as a celebrant, he quickly forms a strong awareness of 'what people actually need' but he'll 'still talk to them about it and, you know, sometimes I get surprised and they come up with something different'. Bill said that when preparing for writing funerals, he needs to know what people think about an afterlife. Bill's words, like those of Rhys and Eddie, show the attention and care funeral celebrants take with this part of their role. The directness with which they question people on issues of spirituality derives from the perceived importance of getting this aspect right so that clients' beliefs regarding what happens to a person after death are reflected in the funeral ceremony:

*I suppose I do approach the question quite carefully. I think that when someone has died, [people are] more open to the question and they know you're there for a purpose and they can see the point ... I will say, 'Look, I need to know what sort of things we are going to read, or what sort of things do you want to say about Joe and what's happening now'. (Bill 1/9/05)*

Bill also referred to people's ambiguous – sometimes contradictory – beliefs and how he would find a compromise by using language which encompassed the contradictions and did not attempt to resolve or clarify or judge their views:

*I think it is fairly simple really. People don't believe in God, but they do. People don't believe in heaven, but they do. People are capable of having contradictory views and they're not capable of facing the fact that they've got contradictory views. So it's all, kind of in a bit of a muddle. It's not my job to point it out. It's my job to find out. And ... usually ... there has to be a compromise whereby there is a little bit of a sense of an afterlife and a God, but not too much and not too heavy, and that's it. (Bill 1/9/05)*

In this celebrant's view, there needs to be a compromise to accommodate contradictory beliefs held by a client. The celebrant does not regard it as his role whilst planning a funeral to challenge and potentially disrupt a client's spiritual belief, as this could be detrimental to the client at this time. Instead he takes a passive role in the way he relates with the client and simultaneously an active one in that he

is working to incorporate the client's views into the ceremony in an appropriate way for this particular situation.

The ideas for the ritual content sometimes come from the clients, expressly. Typical examples are where clients ask for a particular poem or reading to be included. Sometimes ideas for ritual content are suggested by the celebrant or sought specifically by the celebrant in response to a perceived fit with the clients' desired focus or meaning of the ritual. Often the celebrant has to balance multiple traditions, beliefs, preferences, and desires. For example, clients may want to include in their marriage ceremony several different elements or influences from different periods of their lives, perhaps because they wish to reflect the integration or balancing of each partner's different traditions, beliefs, or life experiences. As a result celebrants and clients openly draw on customs and cultural and spiritual traditions, believing this to be acceptable and appropriate. Bill's relationship with the Pitcairn family was an example of integrative and dynamic ritual-making in the context of a funeral. In a wedding context, Pinky's example of an Irish bride and Jewish groom from Israel, whose ceremony included a Jewish blessing along with prayers from different religions, illustrates the same point.

Nevertheless Pinky learned from her own experience that it can be unwise to assume clients want 'cultural stuff'. She wrote a ceremony for people resident overseas and when she eventually met them at the rehearsal, she realised the groom was Māori. She told him that had she known this, she would have included a Māori greeting. 'He replied, "I'm not in to all that stuff ... one of my uncles might leap out with something." ... That just wasn't him, he wasn't in to it'. Pinky concluded that the wish to have such elements in the ceremony must be first expressed by the clients, either directly or implicitly, in which case the celebrant can offer some suggestions. On another occasion, Pinky wrote a civil union ceremony for a couple, one of whom was 'steeped in his Māoritanga'. She spoke of that being a challenge for her as a Pakeha to make sure that she addressed all this in the correct fashion, but also made it genuinely reflect the client's desire to incorporate Māori cultural elements in the ceremony. The venue was a marae, and Pinky and her clients involved cultural advisers in the early stages of planning the ceremony. The possibility of her saying something inappropriate in her role as celebrant was avoided by ensuring that the

clients had seen and approved the script beforehand: ‘every word would be vetted and understood and agreed upon. So that’s a really good way of working and it’s held me in good stead over the years.’

Funeral celebrants are commonly faced with situations where the ceremonies they create need to take account of the beliefs or wishes of the deceased along with traditions or beliefs of the partner or family. In such cases the role of celebrant can extend to sensitively negotiating the design of the funeral ceremony between the different parties involved. The celebrant, then, can become a mediator, seeking ideas and diplomatic solutions that allow for people’s different expectations and needs yet are in keeping with the overall intention and integrity of the ritual. Selecting inclusive wording is one technique used in such situations, as shown in this example from Bill:

*Joe was a theosophist, but Mary is a Christian and would like a Christian prayer ... often it’s unstated and you find ways of talking about these things, which are ambiguous. That’s one of the reasons why that ghastly thing by Canon Scott Holland is so wonderful – you know, ‘Death is nothing at all ...’ That strikes me as profoundly wrong – death is a hugely important thing. But people like it because it is both religious and it talks to everyone and, you know, it has an ambiguity ...<sup>42</sup> (Bill 1/9/06)*

Ruth referred to clients who carry with them fragments of religion, perhaps in the form of memories which, even though they might not be named, ‘inform’ the clients and are ‘part of them’ and which might ‘bubble up to be conscious’. When she notices ‘religious objects or religious remnants ... sneaking in’, she takes it as a cue to explore the extent to which these things were part of someone’s upbringing and are important to them now, and whether they would like them reflected in the service. She gave this example from a civil union service:

*One of the women ... wanted an archway, which was reflective of her Jewish upbringing. So they built in their house, where we had the ceremony, they had a beautiful archway which we stood under and it was adorned with flowers. (Ruth 17/3/06)*

Whilst celebrants need to find out what the client wants, this is not always clearly articulated by the client. Sometimes clients make contradictory or unclear requests

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<sup>42</sup> Holland, Henry Scott (1910) *Death Is Nothing At All* in *Facts of the Faith*, 1919

about elements that are very important to them. In these instances celebrants accept the situation and attempt to work with the perceptions and realities of their clients, integrating these into the ceremony in non-judgemental ways.

I did not directly question independent celebrants on the topic of ethics in this study, however many aspects of the study indirectly inform my understanding of the ethical commitments characteristic of the independent celebrants' ways of ritual making. (See Chapter 5: qualities and competencies of ritual-makers, Chapter 6: tensions and difficulties in ritual-making, Chapter 7: eclecticism and appropriation, Chapter 8: spiritual sensitivity in ritual-making). Individual celebrants are not bound to work to a code of ethical commitments specific to their profession, unless they choose to be affiliated to a professional organisation. Examining the code of ethics of one of the celebrants' associations, the Celebrants Association of New Zealand, reveals that high priority is placed on celebrants' ethical commitment to respond to their clients' rights to have personal choice and decision making around the rituals. Celebrants agree to have due regard for their clients' ethnic origins, philosophical and spiritual beliefs.<sup>43</sup> In practical terms, these ethical commitments focused narrowly on the choices of individual clients, couples, and families who are celebrants' direct clients does not address the wider ethical implications of how the rituals and ritual-making practices could be perceived as inappropriate, offensive, or harmful to others more broadly.

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<sup>43</sup> The *Code of Ethics of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand (Inc)* states that 'Members of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand accept the responsibilities entrusted to them in their relationships with: the clients they serve: the public at large, the profession of which they are a part. Specifically they have agreed:

- To accept as a duty the maintenance of truth, accuracy, dignity and integrity
- To maintain in all matters the highest standards of business, professional and personal conduct.
- To obey the law in relation to the duties they perform
- To respect in all circumstances the confidentiality and trust placed in them by reason of the role
- To preserve within the bounds of dignity, practicality, the right of personal choice and decision making for the clients they serve, having due regard for their ethnic origin, philosophical and spiritual beliefs.
- To provide accurate information concerning the service they provide, the cost of the same and the functions and responsibilities accepted on behalf of their clients.'

Personally, in my celebrant role, my intention and my practice involves an ethical commitment not to deliberately disrespect any other person or culture or spiritual community through the ways in which I facilitate ritual for my clients. For me, as an atheist, I do not use liturgy in my ritual, as I regard this as the territory of religious celebrants. However, at the request of my clients, I have conducted marriages in deconsecrated Christian churches and cathedrals, I have included karakia (prayers in Māori) led by Māori members of the family concerned, I have included pagan spiritual elements in ceremonies. In deciding each of these practical examples, I have carefully considered the ethics of these decisions and for none of them could I confidently say that I have not offended someone else whose cultural and spiritual and philosophical beliefs are different from mine and my clients. I am also aware and tolerant of the fact that other celebrants operate differently from me. For example, some celebrants do bring a mix of knowledge of culture and religions to their work for clients and they make their own ethical judgments on what they are comfortable to offer in ritual for their clients. To my knowledge, independent celebrants would be unlikely to support requests from clients in their private rite of passage which overtly aimed to disrespect or ridicule someone else's culture or spirituality. Nevertheless, the possibility that ritual as it is practised by this group of celebrants may be perceived as offensive or harmful by people inside or outside the ritual settings does exist. Because this study is from the perspective of celebrants, I cannot illuminate further on the possibility.

### **Balancing celebrants' own beliefs with those of clients**

I have emphasised celebrants' firm belief that they practice in client-centred ways and that the ceremonies they create reflect what their clients want. Within this general principle, complexities and tensions arise, for example when celebrants are faced with balancing and integrating their own beliefs and values about ritual with those of their clients. Each celebrant responds differently, depending on their own particular approach to celebrant work, their own beliefs and values, and what is being asked of them as ritual-makers. Next I present scenarios which demonstrate ways different celebrants balance their own beliefs with those of their clients. The scenarios demonstrate three key findings. Firstly, fundamental to the celebrant role – in particular the funeral celebrant role – are celebrants' beliefs that they are helping

their clients and that their own beliefs should not interfere with this role. However, celebrants will only perform ceremonies which reflect values and ethics acceptable to them; they are reluctant to perform something which they cannot bring sincerity to. Secondly, and an apparent contradiction to the first finding, some celebrants seek to explicitly incorporate particular values and opinions of their own into ceremonies. Thirdly, there is a performative aspect to the celebrant role. Finally, I look at some of the strategies celebrants use when their values and beliefs differ from their clients. In the first scenario, Rhys, a funeral celebrant, clearly expresses a point of view which was voiced strongly by many celebrants in this study: that the celebrant's role is primarily about helping people, and that the celebrant's own beliefs should not interfere with this:

*I want to give someone the last gift of love that they can, do it in a way that is appropriate for them, and I can help them do it. .... One of the things I say to people when I go in, 'my job is to help you do what you want to do'...if we need to, we follow the wishes of the deceased but I do it to help the families.... It is not my prerogative, nor my right to impose my belief system on other people when I'm with them. (Rhys 31/10/05)*

A similar point of view emerged from Bill, who talked about helping bereaved people cope with death and how this related to his atheism. He explicitly stated that he sees his role as helping people and that when taking funerals he placed a strong emphasis on the living. In his opinion, celebrants' own views and the views of the deceased are of lesser importance than allowing those bereaved to do 'what they have to do'. As a celebrant he doesn't want to push his personal philosophy on clients and he is 'happy to go along with' his clients' beliefs:

*I guess that they [funerals] are about, for me, helping the people who are surviving, assimilate the death, cope and do what they've got to do. I don't even quite like the phrase 'move on', because what does that mean, really? Of course, they're going to move on whatever happens, it's [a] fact, and that doesn't mean exactly leave the person who's died behind, either. But, it's a question of doing those processes of moving on and establishing what kind of relationship they want with the person who has died in ways which are ... comfortable ... Yes, so I think that's what it is for me. I do have a strong emphasis on the living in this.*

*That doesn't mean that I don't think the person who has died is extremely important and their viewpoint is very important, but in this, it's very much a matter of my personal philosophy, I wouldn't want to try to push this on a bereaved person at all. But, for me the person who has died lives on in the people who have survived. I'm an atheist and for me personally the person*

*who has died is dead and there is no afterlife for them in the sense of living somewhere else or in another dimension or anything like that.*

*I'm very happy to go along with people's belief in an afterlife and prefer to see it as a metaphor, but it's one which, by far, the majority of the people I work with like and I see it as entirely helpful to them and that's fine. It's just not my philosophical belief. (Bill 1/9/06)*

Whilst claiming to operate in client-centred ways, celebrants – and particularly funeral celebrants – are simultaneously and actively seeking to construct rituals they perceive will be helpful for their clients' situations. Although celebrants are clearly client-centred, for instance when they include a particular hymn or reading which is expressive, familiar, or comforting to the bereaved, this practice applies only to requests which fit within the celebrant's overall intention for the ritual to be sympathetic to a secular notion of healthy grief. In these ways celebrants, whilst describing themselves as relatively tolerant of the different beliefs of their clients, bring their own values about the role and importance of ritual, and their beliefs about how they as ritual-makers can assist people to make and mark life transitions.

The second key finding is that some celebrants explicitly incorporate particular opinions of their own into ceremonies, as is illustrated in the following scenarios.

Bill, for example, expressed his belief in the importance of storytelling as being 'the right thing to do', explaining that:

*One of the things that our [celebrants'] work does is to help give guidance in our own culture of the popular storytelling culture – that this actually works, this is the right thing to do... death is a time at which stories need telling, for psychological equilibrium. (Bill 1/9/06)*

Bill's view was that funerals mark 'continuity as well as ending'. He brings to his funeral planning an opinion that although the funeral marks an ending, the bereaved have a continuing relationship with those who have died, and that the funeral provides a context for creating stories which reflect these ongoing but changed relationships. Among the celebrants in this study, a few of those with strongly held values and beliefs reported situations where they had persuaded clients to change their minds on something and accept the celebrant's advice, or where celebrants had overridden the wishes of some people and chosen a particular course of action. Pinky, for instance, brought her understanding about how children adjust to change,

and the importance of involving children in life-transition ceremonies, into the wedding ceremonies she planned:

*Children can feel a bit scared sometimes about parents remarrying ... [they] worry about these things and ... so I usually raise that with [the couple] if they've got children, [suggesting that] perhaps they'd like to ... include the child in the ceremony in some way – to perhaps make a vow, the two of them, to the child and give [the child] a gift. (Pinky 18/10/06)*

Here celebrants are bringing in their own opinions to the fore about what is helpful and appropriate for particular situations.

I come now to the third key finding: that although there is a performative aspect to the celebrant's role, celebrants only perform ceremonies which reflect values and ethics they accept, and which do not offend them or go beyond their own particular ethical boundaries, beliefs, and values. An example is where a couple requested a celebrant to perform, word-for-word, a wedding ceremony which had featured on an American reality television programme. The only exception was that the bride's and groom's names were changed to those of the couple concerned. To the celebrant this idea seemed 'cheesy', 'trite', 'very sentimental', 'cliched', 'pap off the internet'. She wondered how the words and symbols from the TV show could be relevant to the couple. In particular she was concerned about 'a ritual involving sand' which was meant to symbolise commitment. Nevertheless, although she felt she could have written a better ceremony, she listened to the couple's request sympathetically and thought deeply about whether or not to decline the role she had been asked to perform. Her decision was influenced by what she always told couples: 'It's not about what I want, it's about what you want', and as the ceremony did not offend her, she concluded that she would make it work and bring as much sincerity to it as she could. She felt she really had to 'act', in order to 'make it good for them'. So she downloaded the ceremony, put the couple's names in it, looked at it, practised it, sent it to them, and they loved it. They 'talked it through' and 'rehearsed quite painstakingly'. The clients found the ceremony to be 'very significant and meaningful ... They loved the words, they loved the ritual, they loved the sand thing ... They were just stoked with it. They were very pleased with the way I delivered it.' From the celebrant's point of view, the ceremony was successful simply because she had honoured her practice of delivering what her clients wanted. In describing her

decision-making process on that occasion, the celebrant acknowledged that her clients' request to perform the ceremony from television did not offend her. This raises the possibility that if clients request something which is offensive to her, she may not accept that work. As well as highlighting the performative role of the celebrant, this scenario also illustrates the point that celebrants bring sincerity to the ceremonies which reflect values they can accept and which do not violate their own values and ethics.

Other celebrants also described strategies they used for accommodating differences between their clients' values and beliefs and their own. Barbara, a marriage celebrant who describes herself as Jewish, liberal, and atheist, explained that she was not prepared to say anything religious in marriage ceremonies she performed because she felt it would be hypocritical for her to do so. However, she was happy for clients to incorporate religious components such as prayers into wedding ceremonies, and for someone other than herself to say them. In this way the celebrant and client together found a way in which they could accommodate the celebrants' own beliefs and those of her clients. Strategies used by other celebrants to address such situations include choosing not to work for particular clients (and referring them to other celebrants) or not performing ceremonies which they do not feel comfortable with. Nevertheless, celebrants often set aside their own beliefs on certain issues, as the following scenario illustrates. Here, the celebrant perceives her role as primarily creating client-centred ceremonies and rituals, and that this does not necessarily mean that she needs to share the same values or beliefs as her clients. Pratima, herself Hindu, gives her views on her role as a independent celebrant for Hindu couples marrying in New Zealand:

*I do not let my beliefs and my values interfere with anyone else's beliefs and values. As much as I would expect respect from someone else for the way I think, the way I want to do things, I give the same to the others. ... I just go along with the way they want. I'm there to do a specific job ... I'm appointed to do the civil marriage celebrant work, which is the signing of the marriage register, making sure that the vows have been taken in the context that they have been written by the law books and that's exactly what I'm designed to do and that's what I do, you know.*

*It's not my job to really interfere, although I may sit back and think, well you know she's going around the fire, is she really a virgin or not a virgin? Again, it's not my job to interfere in that. She knows it very well and if she is happy to take it whether it's gospel truth or not gospel truth, she has to live with it. Pratima (1/11/05)*

Traditionally in Hindu marriage rites, brides come to the ceremony as virgins. Pratima described how, in contemporary New Zealand, the importance of this tradition is no longer upheld by all brides, even though they choose to marry in a Hindu ceremony (such as those she facilitates as an independent celebrant, alongside (or followed by) a Hindu priest who administers traditional Hindu rites). Pratima explained how her own views on the importance of virginity and whether these are respected by the bride are not relevant to her role in marrying a couple. She thus demonstrates her tolerance of the different values of clients marrying in New Zealand's relatively liberal, contemporary society.

### **Postmodern ritual**

I have shown that there are several postmodern characteristics evident in the practices of celebrants as ritual-makers in a contemporary western setting. One is the broad sense in which people assume the 'right' to participate in creating and performing rituals – clients and celebrants alike. Ritual-making is not restricted to being an activity which only certain groups of people can do, and people do not have to have any training to be a celebrant. Creating and performing ritual is not restricted to contexts of codified belief systems or authorised individuals (apart from marriage and civil union celebrants who must be authorised). As a commodity available for purchase, ritual-making is distinctly postmodern. Furthermore, celebrants, as individuals who self-identify as ritual-makers with (relative) expertise in ritual-making, expect to negotiate the particular roles they take in their relationships with clients. Different celebrants operate differently and have particular competencies and preferences that influence their decision about the roles they are prepared to take and the types of ceremonies they provide for clients. In each celebrant–client relationship there is usually some degree of discussion and negotiation about what the client wants and what the celebrant will provide for that specific occasion. Additionally, contemporary celebrant-led rituals reflect the individualism of our society. Ceremonies have different (and multiple) meanings for different people and celebrants actively construct them with the intention of conveying particular, individualised meanings according to their own values and their clients'.

Clients demand a degree of personalisation so that the content, symbols, and meanings of ceremonies styled for them reflect their wishes. This way of working is postmodern in that the celebrants accept that some people will not necessarily be able to clearly articulate what they want from ritual and so a process of exploration might be required. Facilitating this process of exploration is something they regard as part of their role. Also the ceremonies which are created express partial, provisional, sometimes contradictory values and beliefs. Celebrants operate comfortably in this context, and dedicate time and skill to the processes of building trusting relationships with clients, seeking to find out exactly what is important for each client, and creating or adapting ceremonies accordingly. Eclecticism, construction, and re-construction of rituals from various cultural customs and traditions are the product of these ways of working. Celebrants and clients openly appropriate information available via the media, marketing, and the internet if they find this relevant to their own needs and desires.

The internet has increased enormously the amount of information on ritual and cultural traditions and practices available to clients and celebrants alike. Celebrants no longer necessarily have exclusive or greater access to information about ceremonies than their clients do. As well as affecting the nature and content of rituals (discussed in Chapter Seven), the internet has impacted on the nature of how independent celebrants and clients interact and how celebrants interact with one another. Internet-based communication technologies have been in making available increased information, and therefore choice, to clients. From a client's perspective, when they are seeking suitable celebrants, internet-based directories of celebrants and websites hosted by individual celebrants have contributed to the ease by which they can identify and contact celebrants. This ease of interconnection across the celebrant market via the internet has meant that web-based searching has become a very common way in which clients locate celebrants. Clients are able to find out much more about what different celebrants offer and how they work before they meet them than they could when they relied on local print-based publications such as telephone directories and government-agency generated lists of 'local' celebrants (which only included celebrants' names and addresses). With internet-based websites and contact, clients can obtain greater information on the choice of celebrants they might engage, albeit that those clients have almost no influence over the overall pool

of celebrants who are available. Even with the overall effect of greater information and easier contact, clients can still only select from celebrants who make themselves available for ceremonies. In addition to the websites of celebrants' professional bodies, there is a plethora created by individual celebrants, and so clients have access to more information about a celebrant before they select one.

The internet has also increased celebrants' perceptions of competition between them, as they promote their skills and convey their points of difference via websites in their attempts to attract clients. Alongside this market dynamic, some celebrants are trying to control the dissemination of information and resources they place on websites. For example, some celebrants assert ownership over the intellectual property they display on their websites, including ceremonies and other resources. And whilst the internet did not bring about the possibility that celebrants copy one another, it increased the ease by which this can happen by virtue of the fact that it is difficult to control how information in the public domain of the internet is used. Given that celebrants are widely dispersed and many of them work in isolation from one another in their everyday work, the internet has meant easier interconnection between celebrants. For those who have internet access, dissemination of resources is straightforward and affordable and the dispersed community of celebrants can contact one another more easily and be more aware of what other celebrants are doing. An important caveat though, is that the existence of a range of communication options and the information the internet provides does not necessarily enhance or improve ritual-makers' knowledge or practice or performance in their role; it is merely a means by which people may change how they work and it may make it easier for them to become knowledgeable. The internet cannot assure competent practices or improve governance, but it can be a useful tool in strengthening governance, for example, by making structure and processes more visible and so able to be scrutinised, thereby encouraging transparency. The internet is a 'place' where the public can find out what standards of behaviour and performance they can expect from celebrants and the processes by which they can hold celebrants accountable for their performance.

In relation to the range of possible ritual-making processes, the internet has enhanced the ease by which ritual co-creation can occur across distances, and commonly weddings and sometimes other ceremonies are planned via telephone and email

interactions in the lead time before the people arrive for the event. The publicly accessible nature of material on the internet has meant that no longer do celebrants necessarily hold exclusive knowledge about rituals and traditions compared to their clients. Anyone who is interested can find an enormous amount of information via the internet and so clients can more readily compile ceremonies themselves without using celebrants at all. Also celebrants have been forced to respond by more clearly communicating what they do offer, promoting their 'craft' in terms of ritual-making processes and practices in addition to, or as more important than, the mass of resources and examples of ritual content which are publicly available to anyone through the internet.

Information-sharing capabilities brought about by the internet and email enable clients to participate more easily in the scripting of their ceremonies. Typically celebrants might show clients several drafts of a ceremony over the period when they are developing it, so that clients can see the detail of what the celebrant is planning, as well as provide feedback, contribute, or edit the draft easily. Whilst there is easier access to information on a broad range of cultural and spiritual traditions and practices, this information is sometimes inaccurate, and from unverifiable sources. One dynamic which characterises the effect of the internet on contemporary ritual-making is acceleration, speeding up the global exchange of information on spiritual and ritual traditions and practices (McNaughton & Lam, 2006: 7-9). Potential risks and consequences for people who may be affected by misuse of the information which has been displaced and decontextualised from cultural and spiritual contexts are not obvious, nor can they be controlled. This is an issue celebrants need to be aware of, and an area in which they could be held accountable for their practices. One final observation on the impact of the internet relates to personal attendance and participation which is still a prominent feature of the ritual experience for rites of passage. In an age when 'virtual' attendance is technologically possible (for example, through real-time internet connections), people's active choice to personally attend rituals indicates an enduring importance ritual holds for many of us.

## **Tensions and difficulties**

Not surprisingly, ritual-making where the desires and expectations of several people are involved is not without tensions and difficulties. To develop insights into contemporary rituals, Grimes (2000) explored ‘troubled’ rituals – why people changed rituals or no longer practised rites that used to be important to them. A related area is the investigation of the implications and effects of breaking ritual rules, and of failed ritual performances (Husken, 2007). Whilst this had not been a major focus of my study and was not an area which I had explored in any depth in interviews, exploring the reasons why people were experiencing difficulties and tensions around particular rituals provided another angle for understanding what role ritual was playing for people and how they were wanting to use it. My approach to this issue is similar to Grimes’: to look at ritual-making and draw out some tensions in order to further illuminate the processes by which celebrants create rituals with and for their clients. At the 2009 CANZ conference I took part in an interactive professional development workshop facilitated by two experienced celebrants entitled ‘identifying and managing disharmony and dysfunction in wedding and civil union ceremonies’.<sup>44</sup> Participating in it I heard of typical tensions experienced by celebrants, and how celebrants manage these, which are discussed next. The situations were familiar to many celebrants there, and the strategies they employed for managing them received a reasonable level of consensus. However, this was a short workshop, with limited time for exploring differences in opinion or questions raised by the suggested solutions. From a research perspective there is still an opportunity to explore the area of conflict, disharmony, and tension in celebrant work more fully, and I expect that this would need to be approached through one-on-one confidential interviews.

A typical situation was where couples have different expectations about what the ceremony will entail and specifically where one of the couple (typically the groom) appears to not be as interested or committed to the process of ceremony planning as the other. Here celebrants actively attempt to generate commitment and involvement

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<sup>44</sup> Carolyne Smith and Josie Dolan, CANZ Conference Workshop, *Identifying and Managing Disharmony in Celebrations*, 2009

from the person who at first appears less interested. They aim to facilitate a process whereby both the bride and the groom are able to articulate what they want most from the ceremony, and the celebrant focuses most on commonalities important to both. In one scenario, a man assumed that his role as father of the bride would be to give his daughter away, but the couple had other ideas for their ceremony. In such situations, celebrants typically support and affirm the bride in her right to choose. Celebrants emphasised that they wanted the clients, in this case a couple, to know that there is no right or wrong way to have a ceremony. Such scenarios demonstrate that, for celebrants, an individualistic focus of ritual takes precedence over a collective community focus. However, they perceived that their responsibilities and actions in such a situation would extend to suggesting an alternative role to the father or assisting him to find one, such as escorting the bride rather than giving her away, provided all the parties agreed; or asking the bride to talk to her father and explain her and her partner's wishes and her father's role (or lack of one) in the ceremony. A different situation is one where the mother of one of the bridal party behaves as if she is the most important person in the ceremony planning and expects to be able to have the deciding word on what will happen. Here the celebrants were quite strong in their conviction that they would work with the couple to find a meaningful role for the mother, and reinforced that the ceremony is "owned" by the couple. Some added that this solution would be harder to achieve had the celebrant's contract been with the parents rather than with the bridal couple. Celebrants were familiar with the situation where a couple's strongly religious parents expected their children's wedding ceremony to be religious, but the couple intended to hold a civil ceremony somewhere other than in church. Celebrants described often having to find ways to incorporate into the ceremony readings and blessings which might normally be associated with a church or cathedral service. This is a theme I discuss in detail in Chapter Eight.

In this chapter I have focused on celebrants as ritual-makers, their motivations for being involved in the work, the roles they take, and the processes by which they create ceremonies in relationship with clients. The discussion of these aspects concluded by identifying some postmodern characteristics in the ways in which the ritual-makers operate. In the next chapter I will continue my exploration of the ceremonies and rituals which are the product of celebrant–client relationship,

focusing on wedding ceremonies, and demonstrating characteristics and functions of contemporary rites of passage including postmodern features of these ceremonies.

## ***7 Celebrant-led ceremonies, wedding case study***

Here I consider characteristics and functions of contemporary rites of passage focusing on wedding ceremonies led by independent celebrants, the bread and butter of what most celebrants do. Western civil wedding ceremonies are primarily secular in their focus. They are celebrations at the time a heterosexual couple makes a formal, legal commitment of marriage. The primary role of the marriage celebrant is to witness the pledges to this legal union and to provide a style of service to suit each couple's requirements. In this chapter I discuss the wedding ceremonies created by celebrants for their clients, comparing these with wedding ceremonies in New Zealand 30 years ago, when religious weddings were the norm. I explore characteristics of the postmodern era which are manifested in celebrant-led wedding ceremonies: open acknowledgement of ritual eclecticism and personalisation of ritual. Despite the freedoms associated with the postmodern era, ritual forms utilised by celebrants are remarkably stable and enduring over time and I look at some reasons why this is so.

The ceremony of marriage needs to be interpreted in the context of the wedding as a whole. From this perspective, it is a relatively minor, although essential, component of the occasion. Other components can include the choice of location for the service and for the gatherings which surround the ceremony, membership of the bridal party with roles assigned to bridesmaids and groomsmen and others, specific wedding attire and adornments, invited guests travelling and attending the wedding, wedding presents, music and dance, flowers, the wedding rings (purchasing, exchanging, and wearing), and much more. Celebrants, typically, have a relatively small part in what comprises the entire wedding event; their role is focused on the creation and performance of the legal ceremony of marriage. Some celebrants, however, do offer related services – such as providing venues for wedding services and receptions, catering and arranging accommodation, photography, and entertainment. These services are part of a wedding industry which is hugely influential in New Zealand as in other western consumer societies. Grimes refers to weddings as being 'products of marketing' and as 'the single ritual performance upon which we in the West spend

the largest amounts of time, energy, and money. The imaginative, intellectual, and social resources invested in weddings are matched by no other rite of passage' (Grimes, 2000: 152-154). Legge, in Australia, refers to modern wedding celebrations as 'the mother-lode of a service industry-powered economy' (Legge, 2008: 22). Similarly, marriage celebrants in New Zealand operate in a market alongside many other people whose businesses are wedding-related. Wedding clients of celebrants usually expect to pay for the products and services (including celebrant services) they choose for their wedding. They also expect involvement in decision-making and a degree of choice in having the various aspects of the wedding tailored to their individual preferences and requirements. There is a focus on consumption and large displays of items and services that demonstrate beauty, wealth, and status as well as love and commitment. Celebrants are undeniably part of this industry, too. However, many also hold a view that the tradition of the wedding fulfils a significant, authentic social function for the couples and communities who choose it.

Weddings are ritualised to communicate the formalising of the marriage partnership, and provide an important occasion to experience personal togetherness, to build and connect families and community. They are also occasions when physical and emotional closeness can be experienced. The social expectation of marriage to sanction the interpersonal relationship between the couple is less evident than it has been in the past. To a large extent it is socially acceptable in New Zealand for adults to enjoy the freedom to live as a couple and be openly regarded as formal partners (with the associated legal rights of married couples). Many couples live in de-facto relationships, for example, and are recognised as husband and wife. For those who do choose the path of legal marriage, there are simpler, less ritualistic options than engaging an independent celebrant to facilitate a personalised marriage ceremony. This suggests that there are other reasons for couples to want an independent celebrant to create their wedding ceremony. Weddings are important, marking marriage as an institution worthy of communal celebration and communal oversight (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002:93). Through the ritual, people 'actively construct' how they wish to communicate the meanings which are specific to their lives (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977), indeed the intentional 'meaningfulness' of ritual is integral to how ritual is often defined (Harvey, 2005: 4-5). Furthermore, the western ceremony of

marriage sanctifies romantic love, and marks the transition of a couple's relationship into legal marriage (Grimes, 2000: 162) .

Wedding rituals also affirm continuity and structure. The form is predictable and familiar enough for family and guests to understand the broad meaning it conveys of the union of the couple's lives. The act of attending and participating in a ceremony of marriage affirms the bonds amongst those present. As Leeds-Hurwitz describes it, weddings balance continuity and structure with transformation and change in appropriate ways so that there is 'enough continuity that the audience recognizes what is occurring as a valid example of a particular type of ritual; enough creativity that the audience will recognize the appropriate adaptation of an old form to new and changing circumstances' (2002:91). This is similar to Bell's description of how 'rituals are always changing and do not necessarily need to be static to be effective', and how ritual practices are influenced by 'experiential individualism' (Bell, 1997: 220-222). She sees 'a growing social legitimacy for many types of ritual improvisation as well as the unprecedented visibility of the very dynamics of ritual invention' (Bell, 1997: 224). 'The self-conscious invention of ritual is not just a modern phenomenon, although the degree to which people now feel free to eschew any claims for ritual antiquity may be relatively unprecedented' (Bell, 1997: 225). Nevertheless, the extent to which rituals can be changed and the nature of the changes are complex issues, and Bell warns that 'frivolous changes can undermine qualities that make ritual aesthetically moving or authoritatively reassuring' (Bell, 1997: 222). These particular qualities vary between cultural contexts, change over time, and emerge from the imaginations of the individuals and communities involved in creating the rituals (Wilson in La Fontaine, 1972: 200). Part of the purpose of ritual-making, then, is to convey the continuity, connection, and universalism of what we share in terms of life stages and the need to ritualise these changes as families and communities. There is a traditionalising element to ritual, a concept introduced by Myerhoff (1977: 8).

### **Choices of celebrants and ceremonies**

As noted, couples in New Zealand are relatively free to choose whether or not they legally marry, and it is their choice whether an independent celebrant, an

organisational celebrant, or a registrar at a registry office best suits their needs. Although the role, influence, and significance of an independent celebrant in creating and performing the wedding ceremony may be relatively small in the context of the occasion as a whole, such a person is essential in order to officiate at a legal marriage. This requirement, along with the wish to secure the services of a friendly person whose fee is reasonable, may be enough to motivate a couple to choose an independent celebrant. For some people, the choice is as simple as agreeing to contract the first celebrant they happen to come across who is available on the day they require, indicating that people regard the choice of celebrants as a low-risk one: they trust that whichever celebrant they select will competently fulfil the required role. Often clients are unsure of their own criteria for selecting a celebrant, although they interview several before making their choice. As noted, clients' uncertainty about their selection criteria and about what different celebrants offer indicates that the work of celebrants is not widely known about in contemporary society, and is not well understood by people prior to engaging personally with a celebrant for the purposes of their wedding ceremony.

The very diversity currently found among celebrants may be one reason for clients' unfamiliarity with what celebrants do. If there were less diversity, people would be more used to a 'norm'. Another reason is that unless people have seen celebrants at a wedding or a funeral (the life transition ceremonies where celebrants are most likely to be involved), they will have had little experience of how they work. Even clients who have seen independent celebrants officiating probably would not know what was involved in creating the ceremony prior to its performance. On the other hand, most do seem to have quite strong ideas about what they want to include in their ceremony.

In Chapter Six I discussed how celebrants and clients work together in these circumstances, with the role of celebrants being to both advise clients about what form ceremonies need to take whilst taking into account clients' ideas and preferences. Clients in urban areas are likely to have a choice of celebrant for their wedding if they give several months notice. As we saw above, many independent

marriage celebrants have websites advertising their services.<sup>45</sup> A list of registered marriage celebrants is published in the *New Zealand Gazette*<sup>46</sup> and available from the registrar's office and on the website<sup>47</sup> where couples intending to marry apply for their marriage licence. This is where some people find out the names and contact information of potential marriage celebrants. Other places people obtain celebrants' names from include: directories of the professional celebrant associations, promotion and advertising in wedding magazines, through wedding planners and wedding planning websites, wedding venue operators, at wedding expos, and from social networks.<sup>48</sup> People typically interview two or three celebrants, then select the one they believe they will be comfortable working with and who will provide the style of ceremony they are after. Celebrants are mainly open to suggestions from their clients and tolerant towards delivering wedding ceremonies focused on clients' preferences in terms of tone, style, length, and formality. Celebrants who become aware that the expectations or beliefs of their clients are outside what they feel capable of delivering will decline to work for such clients; however, they will often assist them to find someone who is more appropriate. Also, sometimes, as discussed in Chapter Six, situations arise where a celebrant chooses not to officiate at a particular ceremony because the people involved are seeking expressions of religious belief that celebrant does not offer.

Celebrants describe wedding ceremonies as 'belonging' to their clients because the ceremony is openly acknowledged as reflecting the clients' wishes. Clients take a strong role in creating the service and selecting readings, poems, and other personalised components of their wedding, even more so than they do for other rites of passage such as funerals. In practice, ceremonies are openly co-created by couples

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<sup>45</sup> Some participants in this study have their own websites. For example, [www.ruthpink.com](http://www.ruthpink.com), [www.bl.co.nz](http://www.bl.co.nz), [www.lifecelebrations.co.nz](http://www.lifecelebrations.co.nz), [www.vitalpeace.co.nz](http://www.vitalpeace.co.nz), [www.pinkyagnew.com](http://www.pinkyagnew.com).

<sup>46</sup> The *New Zealand Gazette* is the formal legal process for publicly notifying the registration or removal of people from the list of registered independent marriage celebrants.

<sup>47</sup> Registrar of Marriages at the Births, Deaths, and Marriages Office of the Department of Internal Affairs, [www.bdm.govt.nz](http://www.bdm.govt.nz)

<sup>48</sup> An example of a directory of the professional celebrant associations is [www.celebranz.org.nz](http://www.celebranz.org.nz), Celebrants Association of New Zealand. An example of promotional material includes [www.nzweddingplanner.co.nz](http://www.nzweddingplanner.co.nz), New Zealand Wedding and Wedding Services website. An example of a wedding exposition is [bridalshows.co.nz](http://bridalshows.co.nz)

and their celebrants. Celebrants pull all the elements into a coherent form. They build upon the ideas and requests of their clients, sometimes searching written and on-line resources and making suggestions that might fit in with the particular couple's desires.

An example of a wedding from my own experience was held in summer at a remote east coast beach community in Northland, in the North Island of New Zealand. The bride and groom chose the venue because it was a place that fitted with how they liked to spend their leisure time, fishing and scuba diving. The wedding ceremony took place on a public reserve in the late afternoon under hot sun, under the shade of an enormous, flowering Pohutukawa tree. Behind the grassed area where everyone gathered was the beach, and the quiet sound of waves and sea birds could be heard during the service. The bride wore a long white dress, the groom was in semi-formal attire, and the guests were in a range of clothing from smart casual through to formal. The bride's father (who had emigrated from Scotland in the 1960s) and some male family and friends wore formal Scottish outfits in Clan tartans (kilts). Scottish cultural traditions had been part of this bride's upbringing. The bridal procession moved from the holiday baches across the quiet country road and on to the small reserve, to an accompanying Piper. The song the piper played was a favourite tune of the bride, and was not a traditional wedding song. The celebrant and couple stood facing the guests whilst the twenty minute ceremony took place.

The ceremony commenced with the celebrant reading *Winesong* by New Zealand poet Keri Hulme. This was chosen for its love themes and its evocative references to the New Zealand coast. The story of the couple's meeting and decision to marry was told in a light and humorous style. Early on, a special welcome was made to the primary-school aged child of the groom who was participating in his father's marriage to the woman who was to become his stepmother (a parenting situation which had already been in place for several years prior to the couple marrying). A second short poem with themes of love and friendship was read by the celebrant, *Today*. The father was asked to 'give away' his daughter to the groom, then the couple said their vows. An adaptation of a Scottish tradition of drinking from the same glass was enacted. The groom then poured a glass of wine which the couple both drank from, and the celebrant explained that the cup was a symbol of their

shared future together. A friend of the couple came forward and read a Celtic blessing. The celebrant pronounced the couple to be married and the marriage certificates were signed by the couple, with the bride's mother and the groom's mother as the two witnesses. Then the celebrant said some closing words for the completion of the ceremony. An informal barbecue style wedding breakfast was held in a marquee in the evening. The flowers which decorated the marquee were gathered by a friend of the bride from wild-growing native flowers and grasses gathered from around the bay where the wedding was taking place.

As introduced in Chapter three, the dramatic and performative aspects of ritual have received considerable attention, particularly from Victor Turner (1982) and Richard Schechner (2003), and contemporary wedding ceremonies are rich examples from which to understand the ritual process as performance. The ritual performance that the celebrant and clients co-create centres on the communicative, dramatic enactment of a scripted ritual which tells and shows the transformation taking place. The people present are aware that the ceremony has been constructed to be both recognisable as a marriage ceremony and personalised to the couple, thus blending the 'traditional' with the uniquely creative. However, this format, whilst not hidden, is not emphasised either. The ceremony is performed and presented as a seamless whole which moves people's understanding of the relationship of the couple to the new, permanent, legally formalised relationship. The celebrant as ritual-maker is accepted as having expertise in understanding ritual form, in leading a process of constructing personalised ceremonies, and in delivering a seamless dramatic performance of it.

Couples, more so than their parents or others in their families, decide in conjunction with their chosen celebrant what the ceremony of marriage will comprise. Expression of the personal meanings of the union for particular couples, their stories about their relationship, their decision to marry at that time, the significance of the place of gathering for the wedding, and their aspirations for the future typically form part of the ceremony. Other important components include: values they hold and ways they would like to relate to one another in their marriage (e.g. equality in partnership, respecting individual dreams), remembering ancestors and significant family members not present, thanking parents, couple's desired relationships with their families and communities as they enter marriage, acknowledgment of continuing

relationships and commitments as families blend (e.g. relationships to step-children), asking support and intervention from people close if this is needed in the future, cultural and spiritual dimensions of their identities and what these mean in the context of marriage. Celebrants set up the ritual ceremony so that the people attending are familiar with the format of the ritual which will follow. They recite the agreed script, and guide participants through the actions, movements, exchanges, and speaking parts.

Clients taking an active role in stipulating what they wish the ritual to comprise to their ritual-makers is different from the passive role of ritual participants described by van Gennep, which involved societies taking participants metaphorically by the hand and moving them through to the new status. Today's couples are very active in the process of inducting themselves into their new status, compared with the classic model where the neophyte participating in the rite of passage was conceptualised as passive and being guided by the ritual-maker and affirmed by the attendance of the broader community. Celebrants in this study believed that an important function of a wedding is that it brings people together, fulfilling their need for personal contact and belonging. It also gives them the experience of spending time in close proximity with a couple important to them, whose union they are celebrating. Part of the celebrant's role is to express these experiences in words and to build the participation of guests into the wedding ceremony. Celebrants in this study also had a strong sense that they, and the couples they work with, view these rituals as important family and community gatherings, and they want the ritual to affirm, perform, celebrate, and perhaps strengthen these bonds. Examples of couples participating in saying and enacting their ceremonies, along with affirmations of support for their pledge of marriage from the wider group (parents, bridal party, or everyone gathered) were commonly mentioned. It is also common for significant family members and friends to participate in the wedding ceremony, for example by writing and/or reciting poetry, giving readings, saying blessings, signing marriage certificates as witnesses, and lighting candles or gifting something during the ceremony.

The physical placement of the wedding party and their guests is also important in conveying the inclusion of the wider group and signifying their relationship to the couple. My interviewee Barbara, a marriage celebrant, described a small difference

between weddings at which she officiated and how she understood church weddings to be. This difference was the symbolic importance of seating guests in a way which includes them in the ceremony (curved rows of seating), having the ‘bridal party facing and curved, so that they can see their friends and their friends can see them’, and encouraging couples to have their parents with them ‘so it’s a real family function’. Since interviewing Barbara, I discovered a recent Australian publication, Sally Cant’s (2009) *The Heart and Soul of Celebrancy: A Guide to Creating Memorable Ceremonies* in which she discusses choreography of movement and connection of components of wedding ceremonies. Cant considers choreography to be vital to the smooth running of the elements of the ceremony and to make it look professional. Barbara’s point was about smooth running and the overall look, but it was also about something more important and symbolic: showing and creating a sense of inclusiveness in the ceremony whereby guests participate closely through their proximity and positioning to the marrying couple (Cant, 2009: 62-63). Each family has, of course, its own particular circumstances and celebrants adapt rituals to reflect and affirm the diverse situations within which couples today marry. In ceremonies I have put together, for example, I have created roles for biological parents and step-parents, and for new spouses and partners of parents, so that these people can be appropriately included in the wedding ceremony. If the couple marrying has children, these children would typically be mentioned and often participate in a symbolic or physical enactment that expresses their importance in the lives of the newly married couple. In such ways, celebrants and their clients ‘own’ the ritual in the sense that it expresses their lives and beliefs and aspirations. This type of ritual-making is in contrast with rituals embedded in traditional religious doctrine, which may not be flexible enough to reflect and affirm people’s diverse personal situations. The active construction of rituals by celebrants and couples together also reflects the democratisation of ritual: anyone who chooses to can make ritual work for them.

Another difference between this type of ritual and those based on religious doctrine is that couples can choose the level of formality and the tone of the performance – for example, a degree of informality, fun and playfulness is an option. Celebrants take their cue from couples and tailor the language of the ceremony accordingly. Mary talked about how ‘people want there to be a direct connection between the

expressions of meanings they have in their ceremonies and what works for them'. Some celebrants also described the ceremonies they create as fulfilling clients' desires for something sacred, in the sense of the occasion being intentionally special and extraordinary, set apart from everyday life. Such rituals are not necessarily sacred in the sense of being sanctified by a deity or drawing on a supernatural power, but can be thought of as 'stepping out of our usual roles and the honouring of some human need or an honouring of some sacred human interaction', for example (Ruth, 17/10/06). Celebrants are aware of the social and legal significance of the commitment being made, and the transformation is emphasised in terms of its permanence. And so whilst wedding rituals involve dramatic performance, there is no element of pretence, superficiality, or impermanence. Another celebrant viewed weddings as fulfilling people's desire for authentic social occasions where people 'slow down' and gather together with those close to them. This view related to situations where families and communities were dispersed nationally and internationally, and where opportunities for expressing and celebrating the connections between them were rare and therefore precious. Weddings are such important occasions that the people invited try very hard to attend them. People's intimate, shared experiences in wedding ritual is somewhat like Turner's (1969) notion of *communitas*, where he referred to people's intense awareness of being bound together as a community through the experience of sharing liminal moments of rituals. In the case of a wedding ceremony, the couple's 'liminal' experience is different from the experience of the guests attending, however.

Historically, motives for marrying across different societies have included creating alliances between families, continuing lineages from which progeny are born, exchanging or redistributing community wealth, and performance of duty to families, nations, or traditions. However, many North Americans eschew these as conscious aims of their contemporary western weddings, instead emphasising the celebration of romantic love as the intended meaning, and regard all other reasons – 'security, friendship, economic solidarity, family making' as having lesser importance (Grimes, 2000: 162). Grimes describes how, when he asks young North Americans of marrying age what they consider the heart of contemporary western wedding, they often point to the vows (Grimes, 2000: 156). New Zealand celebrants, too, emphasised the importance of vows in their wedding ceremonies. They demarcated

the vows as a serious, fundamental element of the ceremony. Under the New Zealand Marriage Act there is no prescribed form to the marriage ceremony or particular words which comprise the vows, as long as the celebrant and two witnesses are satisfied that the words exchanged clearly indicate the parties' intentions to take each other to be legal husband and wife. Celebrants wanted to ensure that the integrity and seriousness of the promises being made in the exchange of wedding vows are maintained. One celebrant remarked: 'I never let them mess with the vows. What you're doing is promising to spend the rest of your life with this human being' (Heather, 2/11/05). This seems to make celebrants more like traditional ritualists in that they see it as their responsibility to ensure the serious ritual elements are done to bestow the new status on the ritual participants.

### **Case study: ceremony of marriage**

This section includes the text of a wedding ceremony written and performed by a marriage celebrant, Ruth. It is included with her permission and the permission of the couple for whom the ceremony was created. I have removed some of the personal identifying detail which is not central to my discussion, thereby affording some privacy to the couple concerned, and I have shortened what was originally a 16-page script. I acknowledge that my editing process has created an element of subjective bias as I have chosen to retain elements which illustrate my ensuing argument. By including the ritual text, I am aiming to provide some element of thick description of the phenomenon I am studying (Geertz, 1973).

This particular example is chosen because its structure is fairly typical of celebrant-led ceremonies I have encountered and because it is a very rich one, demonstrating several of the features I want to highlight. It is also a ritual script which became available to me through my relationship with the celebrant concerned. I felt comfortable approaching and asking for her and her clients' consent to its inclusion. One of the key limitations of a ritual text like this is that it stresses the formulaic aspects of ritual (Bowie, 2006:141). It does not give an adequate sense of what happens at a ritual, what Tambiah calls the moment of actual dramatisation; the space, the placement of participants, visual aspects, sounds, interactions between and emotions expressed during the performance (1981). Whilst this type of ritual analysis

requires a methodical discussion of the constituent parts of the ritual text, it is important to keep in mind that rituals are performances which exist in the moment of their enactment (Grimes, 2000: 7) and so it is the convergence and interplay of the parts (Tambiah, 1981: 505) which matter. Rituals are best understood if they are considered as whole performances (Schechner, 1973: 324), and not overlooking the dynamics of how they are composed.

## **Ceremony of Marriage**

### *Opening and Welcome*

#### *Dedication of the Space, Honouring the Earth and the Elements, Honouring the Buddha*

*Several spiritual traditions converge and flow through this wedding ceremony. Christian, Buddhist, Native American Indian, and Māori aspirations, which are dear to Groom and Bride's hearts support this grand celebration of their love. Special reference will be made to Buddhist beliefs when Groom and Bride make their vows of marriage. They will seek to see the Buddha-nature in the other. Buddha-nature is something that we all have. It is the capacity to be supremely wise, vastly compassionate, and not swept away by the changing fortunes of life. Buddha-nature is our highest spiritual potential. It is to be One with all that is.*

*And just as the strands of Buddhist, Christian, American Indian and Māori faiths are entwined in this ceremony, so too have the cream and green strands in your wedding invitation been included. You will find them symbolically woven into your programmes in the form of a bookmark. These bookmarks are a memento of this occasion for you; a gift from Groom and Bride. Representing past, present and future, family and friends, and the lives of the two individuals pledging themselves to marriage, these gifts reveal the beauty of their interconnection. They represent the weaving together of lives that will take place here today. Let us now begin with a prayer, dedicating this beautiful church to the ceremony that is about to unfold.*

*God of many names, Lover of all Peoples. Life is not hurrying on to a receding future or hankering after an imagined past. [R.S Thomas, from 'The Bright Field.']*

*We arise today, Through the strength of heaven, Light of sun, Radiance of moon, Splendour of fire, Speed of lightning, Swiftness of wind, Depth of sea, Stability of earth, Firmness of rock. [The Deer's Cry, from 'The Confession of St. Patrick.'] We are atoms born in stars, made of all Elements, and connected to all things. Knowing this we give thanks. And we give thanks for this day, and for each precious moment. Amen.*

*Here gathered, here celebrating. We dedicate this space to the union of Bride and Groom. Though in the world outside there is strife; Here may there only be*

*peace. Though in the world outside there is hate; Here may there be love. Though in the world outside there is grief; Here may there be joy. To the honouring of spirit, We dedicate this place. To the development of wisdom, We dedicate this place. To the flowering of compassion, We dedicate this place, and To the power of Love, We all dedicate this place. [I have taken the two verses above from the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order's Puja book, but I have adapted them for this ceremony.]*

*Please join me now in reciting the Buddhist prayer The Four Immeasurables  
May all beings have happiness and be the cause of happiness,  
May they be free from suffering and the cause of suffering,  
May they never be parted from the joy that knows no suffering,  
And may they dwell in equanimity, and peace, free from attachment and aversion  
to those near and far.*

#### Remembrances of Ancestors, Teachers, and Other Loved Ones

*Remembering them, our connection to them and to each other, let us join together, to say The Lord's Prayer.*

#### The Lord's Prayer

#### The Joining of Families

*Today Groom and Bride will marry, but let us remember that marriage is not simply the joining of a man and a woman, but also the joining of families, and the making of new ones. Groom and Bride would now like to pay special tribute to their children. Would the children please come forward. Take each other's hands. (Everyone takes each other's hands so that a circle is formed).*

*Children, named, Groom and Bride honour you. They thank you for the part you have played in the journey to this ceremony today. You are precious to them and are a hugely important part of the formal commitment they make today. Family is the place where you are connected, comforted and at home. Bride and children; you have become family. Joined together by trust, by care and respect for each other; you are joined together in love.*

#### Stating of Intentions

*Bride and Groom, your families have become one family. Please now state the intentions you have for your marriage. Please repeat after me.*

*Groom and Bride: Today we promise to dedicate ourselves completely to each other. In this life, in every situation, in wealth or poverty, in health or sickness, in happiness or difficulty, we will work to help each other. The purpose of our relationship will be to attain enlightenment through spiritual growth.*

#### Song – Hine E Hine

#### Words about love and marriage

## Reading – The Apache Wedding Blessing

### Vows

*So being mindful of the seriousness of the commitment you are about to make, I ask you now before God, before your family and friends, to make your vows of marriage.*

*Each: I promise to be gentle, faithful, respectful, and clear with you. I promise to listen openly and to speak gently, to tenderly care for you and to encourage you, to accept you and to seek harmony. I will seek always to see the Buddha-nature in you. I, take you, to be my beloved wife, my trusted companion my most cherished friend. May we strive to develop loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity in our lives together.*

### Exchange of Rings/ Pronouncement

*Vows of marriage have been made before us all. The pledges of these vows are now sealed with the exchange of rings. Groom and Bride, these rings, with their perfect circle of gold and pounamu, are symbols of your marriage. They have been specially crafted for this day from the most sacred of materials. Each ring is a loving gift given warmly to the other, representing your beauty, brilliance and inner wealth. The pounamu or greenstone in the rings represents good fortune, vitality, strength and durability. Bride and Groom as you exchange your rings, you exchange and enrich your marriage with all these qualities. And let the rings be a reminder for you to develop the Perfections of Generosity, Integrity, Patience, Enthusiasm, Meditation and Wisdom.*

*Each: I give you this ring as a sign of my love and the seal of my promises. Wear it with joy.*

*Now by the power invested in me by the Government of Aotearoa, New Zealand, it gives me great pleasure to pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss your bride.*

### Signing the Register

#### Blessing the marriage and offering of support by friends and family

*Let us pray. God of many names, Lover of all Peoples; Make blessings fall like rain upon this marriage. Bride and Groom, united now – your resolve, united – your hearts. May your spirits always be at one, and may you dwell long together in unity, concord, and love. [Adaptation of the final verse of The Rig Veda]. Amen.*

*Congratulations, Groom and Bride you are now well and truly married! Bride and Groom we all wish you great happiness, and I now ask everyone present: As you have supported and cared for Groom and Bride before, will you continue to stand by them as they begin life anew as husband and wife? Will you support*

*them in their marriage? Will you encourage them and help them through any difficult stages in Life, and celebrate with them in good times?*

*Everyone: We will*

*Singing of Pokarekareana*

*Offering the Goodness of the Marriage up to others*

*Through the power and the goodness of this marriage may our lives be rich in spirit and love. Living thus may we abandon all unwholesomeness. Through all the difficulties of life may we strive to be happy and support others to be well and happy. May all blessings be yours. May God keep you and protect you in the palm of his hand. May this union of Bride and Groom be an inspiration to us all.*

*Conclusion*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me to welcome Bride and Groom, partners in spirit and life. (Bride and Groom step forward to greet their guests. As they walk down the aisle, 'Love Changes Everything').*

One area I have emphasised is the extent to which celebrants personalise ceremonies for clients. In this ritual text of a marriage ceremony, material from multiple spiritual traditions is combined: Christian, Buddhist, Māori, and Native American Indian. The ceremony includes the celebrant telling a story of the couple's partnership. The joining of two families and the importance of the children in the partnership are specifically mentioned. The children are thanked for their part in the journey to marriage and their inclusion in the marriage is enacted through holding hands in a circle with the couple. Interspersed throughout the ceremony are songs, readings, a blessing, and a prayer, reflecting the multiple cultural and spiritual beliefs and tastes of the couple. In the script of the ceremony, but not during the performance of it, the celebrant acknowledges the authors and sources of prose and prayer.

Before focusing on these postmodern characteristics of personalisation and eclecticism – how each ceremony differs from others – it is relevant to ask what elements such ceremonies have in common. How do we even recognise that it is a wedding ceremony when each one can be altered according to individual desires? To begin with, the situation is familiar to us through our cultural knowledge and experience to recognise that the celebrant, or ritual-maker, in this scenario is taking a formal role in relation to the joining of the couple, and we trust our assumption that

they would only take this role if she had the legal authority and ritual-making ability to do so. There are also visual cues from the attire of the couple, the language and attentiveness of those gathered, and the formality of the occasion. Furthermore, at the commencement of the ceremony, the celebrant states the purpose of the gathering and her role as the ritual-maker. A number of elements in a ritual form remain stable and enduring over time, so that we recognise this ceremony as authentic and effective. There is a familiar, three-part structure. Repetition is important; aspects of ritual form and particular elements gather meaning because they are repeated. Within the recognisable ritual structure, personalised content which is unique to this particular ceremony has been incorporated. Whilst the ceremony would not be described as very formal, the overall style and tone of the occasion is clearly special in the sense of being obviously different from everyday behaviour. Weddings are absolutely staged performances, with evocative presentational style where symbols (e.g. rings, attire) and dramatic sensory stimuli (e.g. flowers, readings, songs, and music) are used for particular effects and meanings. And the ritual participants are acting – performing roles and saying words which are planned and deliberate rather than spontaneous, for example, the scripted opening, dedication, joining of families, intentions, and vows.

Key elements are the symbolic enactment of the union of the couple and van Genep's (1960) three-part structure (separation, transition, and incorporation). These three-phase transitional rituals take place in what Durkheim (1965) called sacred time, and Turner (1967) liminal time. The celebrant begins with an opening and welcome and a dedication of the space which 'separates' the group of people gathered for the wedding from their everyday lives. According to Turner, during liminal time ordinary social reality was suspended and people were assigned 'ambiguous and indeterminate attributes' as representatives of the community prepare to reshape or mould them into their new, transformed status (Turner, 1995: 103-106). It is during the liminal time, the 'in between' time, that the ceremony takes place, and the couple are led by the celebrant through the spoken and symbolic transformation to being legally married. Turner showed particular qualities to the social relationships during liminal time, when ritual participants bonded based on their intense awareness of being bound together in a community, an intimate shared experience, characterised by marginality, inferiority, comradeship, and equality

(Turner, 1969: 95). Only one of these particular qualities described by Turner emerged strongly in relation to ritual participants' experiences of contemporary celebrant-led wedding ceremonies, at least from celebrants' understanding of it, and this related to the intimate nature of the experience.

Symbolic transformation is enacted through the wedding couple declaring their intentions, pledging vows of commitment in marriage, exchanging rings, signing marriage certificates, and receiving blessings of support from guests. Towards the end of the ceremony, the celebrant pronounces the couple as married, which signifies the commencement of their reintegration into everyday life in their new roles as spouses. This is further enacted by the couple as they leave the ceremonial space together, after which the role of the celebrant comes to a close. Further wedding traditions follow, including the wedding breakfast, speeches, cutting the wedding cake, and sometimes a honeymoon, which are important to the overall wedding ritual but which typically do not directly involve the celebrant.

Christianity has strong links with contemporary celebrant-led weddings in New Zealand, a topic explored in more detail in Chapter Eight. Christianity, to a greater or lesser degree, is a familiar part of the heritage of Pakeha New Zealanders, and many independent celebrants have learnt ritual-making by drawing on Christian ceremonies and the role of Christian clergy. Some celebrants had an affiliation with a denomination of a Christian church prior to becoming independent celebrants and have brought their knowledge and resources into their work. Moreover the examples of ceremonies the registrar gives to newly appointed registered celebrants are versions of Christian wedding ceremonies. These are templates which they may, but are not obliged, to follow. Also, as is evident from the marriage ceremony quoted above, independent celebrants are not, by definition, non-religious in terms of their own world-views, nor necessarily are the ceremonies they lead. Like many people in contemporary New Zealand and other western societies, celebrants' own beliefs, their clients' beliefs, and the services they perform display eclectic mixes of parts of several religious, spiritual, or other belief systems, with ritual components drawn from these and reinvented in pastiche forms. The venue for the marriage ceremony

example here is an Anglican church which is available for public hire.<sup>49</sup> Whilst this ceremony was not solemnised by a religious celebrant, it is accepted by all of the people involved that there is a Christian component to the lives of this couple and that they believe they are marrying in the presence of the Christian God. This acceptance reflects the phenomena of ‘believing without belonging’ to an organised church and the privatisation of people’s rituals of worship, so that people no longer perceive the need for a particular institutionalised religious ritual to still be true to their faith.

### **The changing nature of New Zealand weddings**

For a perspective on how Pakeha weddings have changed over the last 35 years, it is valuable to revisit the work of Eleanor Horrocks (1973). Her anthropological thesis on the typical Pakeha wedding, based on participant observation of wedding rituals in Auckland, provides an interesting comparison. When Horrocks did her fieldwork, traditional (Christian) church weddings were the norm. Her work focused on detailed observation and analysis of a small number of weddings, including one where the ‘wedding ceremony itself seemed rather low-keyed, brief, and traditional’ (Horrocks, 1973:83). One wedding was ‘absolutely as printed in the order for the solemnization of matrimony from the book of common prayer (Anglican)’ (Horrocks, 1973: 84). In another, ‘involvement of the congregation was minimal ... the singing of a hymn’ (Horrocks, 1973: 85). In yet another, it was the ‘participants themselves, rather than clergymen who lent a particular individualized style to their wedding’ (Horrocks, 1973: 86). In her overall analysis, Horrocks comments that ‘the uniqueness of each wedding that I attended was a particularly sobering fact of my research experience. As well as ethnic factors, there are also differences in the wedding ceremony based upon the individual preferences of the marrying couple’ (Horrocks, 1973: 89). She gives some examples of ‘weddings notable for their individuality ... differences based upon the preference of the individuals rather than upon religious or ethnic differences’ (Horrocks, 1973: 89-90). Individual preferences included pop music in traditional church ceremonies and non-Christian readings. My research found that by

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<sup>49</sup>This particular venue was previously a Parish Church. It is non-denominational and advertises as offering the ‘opportunity to design a traditional or modern wedding ceremony, a religious or civil service with your choice of minister of religion or civil celebrant’.  
<http://www.historicplaces.org.nz/en/placesToVisit/lowerNorthIsland/oldStPauls/venueHire.aspx>

personalising ceremonies in various ways to reflect not only the cultural beliefs and experiences of individuals but also their individual preferences, celebrants are continuing to reflect the theme of individualism which was present 35 years ago. The kinds of characteristics that Horrocks was commenting on have become commonplace. While 35 years ago they struck an alternative note, those incipient trends have now become very familiar norms.

Clearly a greater proportion of couples now want a non-religious ceremony compared with the pre-1970s. However, along with this secularisation and the associated trend away from weddings performed by religious celebrants in religious institutions, there has been a diversification of the population in terms of many characteristics besides religiosity. Today there are weddings of people of many different religions; more religious weddings are personalised; and there is a myriad of scenarios, officiated at by independent celebrants, which reflect variations and combinations of religious, secular, and spiritual elements. This study focuses on independent celebrants, however no inference should be taken from this that somehow there is a clear distinction between the type of ceremony independent celebrants provide compared with religious celebrants. As previously stated, 30 years ago religious celebrants were offering personalised wedding ceremonies, and the trend has continued. And although initially independent celebrants offered only non-religious wedding ceremonies, this is no longer the case. Today both religious and independent celebrants offer ceremonies that reflect the desires and diversity of the couples concerned.

Specifically in relation to Pakeha ritual, in the mid 1970s Horrocks observed that 'Pakeha New Zealand culture is poor in high rituals, in the symbolic communal expressions of meaning that give richness to many other cultures'. Thirty years on, 'high ritual', such as an elaborate formal ritual of high Anglicanism or Catholicism deriving from the United Kingdom and Europe, is a term no longer strongly associated with Pakeha New Zealand culture. But I would argue that Pakeha are clearer and more confident now about the type of symbolic communal expressions of meaning that give richness to our culture. Our focus is on what represents us and what is meaningful to us now (what it means to be a New Zealander, the land and the outdoors, our diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds), rather than on comparing

our rituals to the high rituals from the cultures of our European ancestors and striving to import those rituals here. Early migrants to New Zealand identified aspects of the old world that they did not want to perpetuate in New Zealand society – the class system, for example. In more recent times, it would seem that some of the ‘high ritual’ aspects of some denominations have been similarly identified. Horrocks also commented that ‘generally a traditional ritual well done was better than a patched-up affair that showed all the seams in an attempt to be individualised’ (1973: 95). Clients are less likely now to have to choose one or other of these options, as many celebrants are well-versed in precisely the convention of personalising ritual in such a way that the ritual flows in a seamless manner.

### **Ritual personalisation, eclecticism, and appropriation**

In Chapter Four I introduced some of the different ways postmodernism manifests in ritualising. Fragmentation of cultural customs and rituals, and the eclectic reconstruction of these in pastiche forms which combine symbols from disparate cultural and ritual traditions is one of these ways. Next I consider the postmodern characteristics of celebrant-led weddings, in particular the personalisation of ritual and ritual eclecticism. Previously I have shown that personalisation of all manner of rituals is a defining feature of what celebrants do. A key reason people choose celebrant-led ceremonies is that these ceremonies reflect the beliefs, meanings, and significance of the life transitions to them particularly, as individuals, couples, families, and communities. All the celebrants I spoke with emphasised the importance of personalising ceremonies. Such ceremonies reflect client expectations of celebrants. They are a response to the individualism of our society generally, and to people’s expectations of having access to ritual which reflects their identity, is familiar and comforting to them personally, and which reinforces their world-view during times of life transition. Marriage celebrants are open to rituals being adapted and reinvented. They are aware that they are doing this, and they do not perceive it as problematic or potentially harmful. Marriage ceremonies are not regarded as ‘untouchable’ and changing or augmenting them is considered acceptable and appropriate.

The personalising of ritual involves similar processes and attitudes to those described by Salomonsen's (2003) discussion on contemporary ritual invention as making 'meaningful rites to mark the most important passages of life'. She refers to processes and acts by which the phenomenon of ritual invention takes place, where people dismiss obligations involved in the performance of conventional rituals, and display confidence that they have enough knowledge and ritual competence to reform or imagine new inventions and to actively search for intellectually and spiritually meaningful forms of living and symbolising (Salomonsen, 2003: 15 - 23). This same confidence and imagination is now routinely demonstrated at wedding ceremonies conducted by independent celebrants in New Zealand. Kapferer's (2004) notion of the 'virtuality' of ritual as a means by which people are able to slow down the tempo of everyday life and change it through the processes of ritually adjusting, restoring, or introducing new elements captured the important theoretical dimensions that emerged in this study, namely the intentionality and reflexivity by which celebrants and clients alike approach the creation of rites of passage. The ritual is different from 'actual' life but strongly linked to it. There is a future-focus to rites of passage. In the planning stages, clients clarify their intentions for how they would like their marriage to be understood by those who attend the wedding (and people in their wider community and society). Important features of the ritual, when viewed from the clients' (couple's) perspective, are that they can be involved in directing and contributing to the preparation and production of the ritual, as well as (obviously) taking part in its performance. Specifically, through how the rite of passage is choreographed, couples seek to convey to those gathered the specific, sometimes unique, meanings of marriage to them.

The expectation that marriage celebrants will provide personalised services is contained in the codes of ethics of the relevant professional bodies and in the Marriage Act.<sup>50</sup> The responsibility of these celebrants is to design the ceremony in accordance with the couples' wishes, 'according to such form and ceremony as they

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<sup>50</sup>'Celebrants will provide a style of service that recognises the unique personalities of those with whom they work, being sensitive to their needs, wishes, values, philosophical and spiritual beliefs and cultural backgrounds.' *Celebrants Association of New Zealand Code of Ethics*; and 'Celebrants shall serve the community' 'through the efficient and sensitive provision of relevant ceremonies', which 'respect the confidentiality and trust, cultural and religious beliefs of clients' and 'preserve client rights of personal choice and decision-making', *Celebrants Guild of New Zealand Inc. Code of Ethics*.

may think fit to adopt' (Marriage Act 1955 s.31(2)). The expectations of the Registrar of Marriages extends to setting out in policy that celebrants should meet with couples well in advance of the ceremony to discuss their needs. Celebrants are also required to check that the correct marriage licence has been obtained and that it has been issued accurately, and to confirm the identities of the couple. That processes for personalising the marriage are formally included in the guidelines and policies within which celebrants operate further reinforces personalisation of ritual as a norm in contemporary New Zealand society. The fact that personalisation is now instituted as official policy means, perhaps ironically, that the personal is being traditionalised.

Celebrants exercise eclecticism when they create rituals and compile them from fragments of other customs and traditions to reflect the lives and expectations of their clients. Celebrant-led ceremonies are commonly pastiche re-constructions of combinations and fragments of cultural customs and symbols. The eclecticism practised by celebrants is mainly grounded in the relationships they build and the processes they follow in finding out what is important to their clients and what their clients expect from the ceremony. This is clearly evident in the marriage ceremony scripted by Ruth, which contains Buddhist prayer ('The Four Immeasurables'), Christian prayer ('The Lord's Prayer'), Māori songs ('Hine E Hine' and 'Pokarekareana'), and a Native American Indian blessing ('The Apache Blessing'). According to Ruth, these components 'converge and flow' in the ceremony. They are combined because they reflect the beliefs and cultural traditions of the couple. In my experience, a combination of elements from various sources can be found in most rituals, each element linked to the lives and beliefs of the people concerned. The eclecticism of the ceremonies celebrants create therefore reflects the diversity of the population they serve, and the exposure (including exposure via the media and the internet) of this population to a vast range of cultural traditions, faiths, and ritual practices from which their beliefs and ritual preferences emerge. Where people have knowledge and experience of a diverse range of cultural traditions and hybrids, combined with easy access to information about the ritual traditions of the cultures concerned, they can easily draw on these when compiling rituals. Many celebrants facilitate and encourage borrowing ritual traditions in this way. As a celebrant, I would, for example, be completely comfortable building in Welsh ritual traditions

into a ceremony for people who have Welsh ancestry, or Scottish ritual traditions into a ceremony for a couple who have Scottish lineage.

There is a further client-driven rationale behind the eclecticism whereby celebrants accept and carry out, uncritically, the requests of their clients. Commonly weddings (and other ceremonies) include readings, poetry, and music chosen by those for whom the ceremony is performed. ‘The Apache Blessing’ in the wedding above is one example of how people with no specific link to a culture, other than finding a text tasteful for their occasion, incorporated it into their New Zealand wedding ceremony. This eclecticism is carried out knowingly. It is not regarded as remarkable, because poetry and readings and songs are commonly used to embellish such occasions, and, as mentioned previously, there is a large amount of freedom around the style of wedding rituals in New Zealand. In my study, I heard about celebrants openly and comfortably officiating at a range of different styles of ceremony. Examples included medieval theme weddings, Wiccan weddings jointly facilitated by an independent celebrant and High Priestess, outdoor naturalist weddings, ceremonies held at breakfast time on a weekday, and ceremonies replicating the words spoken at a wedding on a reality television show.

The situation in Australia is similar to New Zealand’s with regard to the rich history of personalisation and eclecticism in weddings and other rituals. Cant reported that Australian weddings included the following examples of rituals and symbolism: hand-fasting or tie-the-knot ceremony, unveiling of the bride, rose ceremonies, unity sand ceremonies, candle lighting, dove ceremony, warming of the rings, palm ceremony, sharing of the wine, ring blessings or warming. She also notes that a number of rituals are ‘brought in from other cultures’ and these include the ‘tea ceremony, breaking of the glass, pinning of the tartan, chuppah-wedding canopy, wine and bread ceremony, wreaths/ stefana, and jumping the broom’. Along with this list of elements which are considered freely available for inclusion in wedding ceremonies ‘for cultural, religious, or personal reasons’, Cant suggests that it is important for celebrants and couples to establish the ‘origin of the rituals’ they use and ‘acknowledge the source if known’ (Cant, 2009: 71-72), which brings me to the discussion of issues of eclecticism, borrowing, and appropriation.

The paradoxical role of the celebrant ritual-maker is relevant to examining the processes of eclecticism and appropriation. In one way, the celebrant can be seen to be fulfilling a passive role as agent of their client. In another more active way, some celebrants also bring expertise and experience in ritual-making to processes of co-creation, intentionally advocating for what they regard as effective, powerful ritual, practised with compassion and sensitivity and vitally effective to the transitions being made by their clients. In the postmodern spirit of eclecticism, celebrants in this study openly selected information on cultural traditions and ritual elements from a variety of sources in order to personalise pastiche forms of ritual. They did so in collaboration and negotiation with clients according to the specific requests of clients and the overall requirements of the occasion. Often the ritual elements they included held personal significance to clients and other people involved, and so reflected their diversity, complexity, trans-cultural and hybrid life experiences and beliefs. For some celebrants this link between the client and the cultural tradition or ritual element was a crucial one, part of a process of keeping the ritual 'meaningful' for an individual client. For others, any sense of the need for the client to own or attribute personal significance of a particular tradition as a precursor to having it included in their ceremony was unnecessary and these celebrants would, sometimes, include components of ceremonies because they were dramatic, interactive, emotional, or experiential as much as because of symbolism or belief from that particular clients' cultural context(s). So some celebrants perceived themselves purely as uncritical agents whose sphere of responsibility extended to their immediate clients only, and whose task was to make the symbol or enactment mean what the client wants it to mean for them personally. They were comfortable choosing from a range of contexts, inventing and adapting elements as they saw fit, using them in their function of satisfying the needs of their clients. The ease with which knowledge and resources on diverse cultural and ritual traditions can be obtained via the internet and through other media meant that actually doing this was quite straightforward.

Grimes considers a range of rites of passage from a variety of cultures and religions practised in North America, noting the risks in such a method are that cross-cultural interpretations which 'rip' the rites out of their contexts can serve to reduce the meaning of rituals, falsify them, and invite 'stereotyping and pilfering'(2002: 8-9). These same risks exist in relation to eclectic practices in ritual-making. It has been

shown, then, that some celebrants extract material from other cultural and spiritual contexts and include or adapt it for rituals in the contemporary New Zealand context. Sometimes celebrants act as ritual-makers for people of different cultural backgrounds than themselves, for example celebrants of European descent officiate over marriages and naming for Maori and Asian ritual participants. What are the wider effects? How might celebrants' practices of eclecticism be concerning? <sup>51</sup> To the extent that eclecticism can be shown to be appropriation of cultural and spiritual materials, one might argue that these contemporary ritual-makers are not acknowledging or respecting cultural and ritual knowledge as being embedded in a particular cultural context, nor that it belongs to the indigenous cultures or spiritual communities from which it was derived. Cultures have the right to have control over their knowledge. In how these ritual-makers appropriated it, indigenous cultural groups and spiritual communities were excluded from discussions and decisions concerning how cultural and ritual knowledge is held and practised.

Ritual practice and the significance of it within a particular cultural context is localised, grounded in the specific spiritualities, meanings, traditions, customs and community relations that operate in a particular setting. By extracting rituals and ritual elements from their contexts, celebrants may be contributing to the breakdown of cultural systems, through potentially misrepresenting them, and by denying them their voice and their identity. Losing ritual and cultural knowledge in such ways can weaken cultures, and it can change cultures in identifiable and possibly also in unintended ways as well. Cultural misunderstandings can occur. People may feel marginalised, hurt, disrespected knowing that ritual and cultural knowledge is being used by others without their permission, and conflict can occur. Also, rituals may not perform their presumed or required functions. By deconstructing rituals, taking them apart and using the elements they so choose for their clients' contemporary needs perhaps celebrants are prioritising the needs of a small number of individuals over the rights of the cultures and communities who own the material. Celebrants may utilise the elements differently, which in itself may be disrespectful to the cultural

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<sup>51</sup> This discussion is based on my understanding and application of principles from critical indigenous methodologies, including Smith (2001) and Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008), material on ethics and guidelines on fair practices in indigenous research in Battiste (2008), as well as *Recognising, Engaging, and Understanding Difference 4<sup>th</sup> International Traditional Knowledge Conference* (2010).

groups concerned, and they may practise rituals differently from how was originally intended by the people who own the material. In certain circumstances these ritual-making practices which involve subsuming one kind of ritual into another can be argued to be neo-colonialist practices because it is contemporary western ritual – makers (who are in positions of power) effectively privileging their contemporary, Western style of ritual-making over the indigenous / source values and ritual practices. Cultures have the right to ‘do’ their own ritual-making. If someone else does their rituals, in addition to the issues identified above in respect to control over ritual-making, people may lose the habit, and importantly the skills, in their own ritual-making. Responsibilities and processes of maintaining cultural identity may be weakened if people cannot or do not engage in acquiring and preserving their own cultural knowledge and traditions and have the opportunity to influence how they are related or adapted to contemporary living. A useful question when thinking about appropriation is to ask: who benefits? People have the right to be empowered from any collaboration around their cultural and ritual knowledge being practised, or studied, by others. In relation to the ritual-makers in this study, decisions to use ritual from other cultural contexts are initiated by them and their clients, not the cultural group they are drawing upon. And the same can be said for decisions on what is acceptable or not acceptable. Conversations about collaboration seem to not occur, and so any possible benefits of collaboration, such as self-determination and empowerment, on the cultures and communities from whom the ritual elements are being drawn cannot be known. Indeed the opposite may be more likely and the effects of non-collaboration may, unintentionally, be harmful.

Sabina Magliocco (2009) described a spectrum of attitudes held by neo-pagan ritual-makers in relation to cultural borrowing. At one end of the spectrum were ‘nativist’ and ‘traditionalist’ practitioners who generally avoided borrowing outside their own traditions because they believe that genetic heritage creates a birthright to the use of cultural materials and would disdain contaminating the purity of their own cultural traditions by borrowing from other ethnic groups (Magliocco, 2009: 236). At the other end of the spectrum were ‘eclectic pagans’ who believe that humans share common elements cross-culturally so that cultural borrowing equates to sharing beliefs and practices and is an act of admiration. Examples of other attitudes exhibited by pagan ritual-makers Magliocco discusses include: sensitivity towards

issues of cultural appropriation and colonialist practices towards indigenous (Native American) traditions; intercultural exchange between expert practitioners of different cultural and religious groups; and formal study and initiation into spiritual traditions of other cultural groups (2009: 236- 238).

Like the ritual-makers in Magliocco's study, ritual-makers in my study displayed a range of attitudes towards cultural borrowing and there was no clear, shared perspective. Neither end of the spectrum identified by Magliocco fitted with the attitudes of celebrants in New Zealand. They were like eclectic pagan practitioners in the ways that they openly used ritual traditions from other cultural and religious traditions as they saw fit. However, the way I understand their rationale for doing so was not so much a notion of shared ownership or admiration for different cultures. Instead it was more about their perception that all individuals anywhere were free to decide for themselves their own spirituality which extended to freedom to use any spiritual traditions they desired (York, 2001: 367). Aside from ignoring issues of cultural ownership, they demonstrated a disregard for the claim that other people's ceremonies are culturally embedded, culturally-specific wholes which arguably lose their integrity and meaning when lifted from the original cultural context or broken down into 'ritual elements'.

Many celebrants did not conceive of their practice as equating to appropriation. They did not see that in using ritual traditions in the ways they do that they were taking something without requisite permission. Indeed it did not seem to occur to them that permission might be required. Their focus was on satisfying their clients. It was not on the cultural sources and owners of the material from whom they drew, which is summed up in the term 'uncritical acceptance' (Magliocco, 2009: 238). They would explain that their intentions are not to seek to own what they 'borrow' exclusively, nor symbolically or instrumentally to have power over anyone else through using it. Clients' needs were given precedence over what seemed to them more distant, unspecific implications for the cultures from which ritual elements were taken. A number of celebrants emphasised the importance of bringing their own ethical frameworks into their decision-making about ritual creation and the selection of ritual elements and traditions suited to the needs of the individuals, couples, and

communities they worked for directly, which included consideration of how people from other cultural and spiritual settings viewed ritual appropriation.

## **Stability of ritual form**

Postmodernity suggests freedom to deconstruct, discard, or radically change ritual, and yet ritual frameworks appear to remain relatively stable and enduring over time. Firstly, what are the elements of ritual which can be seen to have remained stable? The three-part ritual structure, because it is an effective storytelling formula which people recognise, is an enduring element. Lynne, for example, likens the structure of her ceremonies to the essential structure of any written narrative:

*I guess it's like someone writing a book. There's a beginning and there's an ending and there's a middle. So for any ceremony that you create, there's a beginning, and there's an ending, and there's a middle ... I'm the one who is putting the ceremony together, so it's got to be about how I see it ... For me there's a flow. (Lynne 1/5/06)*

There is also the symbolic centre of a three-part ritual structure, the point at which there is a change. Ruth also referred to a three-part ritual structure and the importance of the ceremony building to a 'climax' and having a 'pinnacle':

*I've got this idea that a ceremony is like, you know the beginning, middle and end, you know the business. It's kind of what we had raised many times at the AUT course. A ceremony must have a beginning, middle and an end ... There's a slow building of a climax ... For a wedding, it's like this slow, almost long undressing – to use like Michael Parmenter's words – or a slow peeling back of a man and a woman to each other to a point where they meet and they're married ... So for me the ceremony must have those aspects, like a building, a building to a pinnacle.' (Ruth, 17/3/06)*

There is also the view that the tripartite ritual structure is somehow universal; that all humans use ceremonies like this, which Mary expressed:

*[The ceremonies I facilitate] have the same structure and form in terms of, there is always that process of some beginning, some middle enactment, and some end. Always. Because you can't vary from that in terms of for thousands of years we've always used that. That's how humans use ceremony. But the way people might do whatever we do varies incredibly. (Mary 2/11/05)*

The need to have some kind of symbolic enactment of exchange within the ceremony is also a feature of the wedding ceremony which remains stable, in addition to the

exchange of vows which comprises the legal requirement of the ceremony. Often this exchange follows traditions of the exchange of wedding rings, and the symbolism of these rings is further elaborated along such lines as: the strength of the material (e.g. gold, titanium) being symbolic of the strength of the relationship of marriage, and the shape of the rings being symbolic of the unending nature of the love in the marriage. Ruth's example, earlier in this chapter, demonstrates a different, although related symbolism of the ring exchange. So variation and creativity on familiar symbols and ritual themes are prevalent. In that example it is notable that the rings were made of pounamu (greenstone) as well as gold. Pounamu is a strong, precious, and rare material, sacred in Māori spirituality and for this couple. The element of exchange is not always included in wedding ceremonies in the form of ring exchange, however, and some other examples of exchange which happen instead of, or as well as, wedding rings include jewellery, flowers, and carvings.

Celebrants use familiar ritual forms and symbols and recognisable language in ceremonies in order that the people present, and participating, experience the important meanings being conveyed through the ceremony. In my experience as a celebrant, and from celebrants I have spoken with, rituals are not considered to be any less efficacious simply by the fact that they are recognised as being constructed, arbitrary, and invented. It is important, however, that people who gather to witness and so participate in a wedding – not just the couple who have choreographed the wedding and have seen the script beforehand – know how it is going to proceed. Repetition of familiar terms and also other aspects of ritual form ensure that people can follow the story and sense, fully, the power of the message. For example, when couples declare their intentions or say their vows some people choose to use patterns of language which are recognisably 'old', highlighting the fact that the couple are undertaking a transformation which has similarities to what countless other couples have done over many years: entering into the social institution of marriage.

For the celebrant this means that their role whilst constructing the ceremony to fit with their clients' desires is to also retain essential recognisable ritual components which convey the important meanings of the ceremony to people present. In the lead-up to performing ceremonies, and during them, celebrants are additionally required to explain what was happening to the people gathered as witnesses and participants,

including how they were expected to take part (for example, creating a circle around the bridal couple, giving their affirmation or pledge of support to a couple, gifting, singing). The purpose of the ritual is communicative, to convey the transformation which has occurred or is occurring, and so for the ritual to be effective, people need to understand this. Because each ceremony nowadays tends to contain different variations on essential ritual elements, the onus is on the ritual-maker, once they have created a ritual text for or with a couple, to try to bring the people present at the performance around to understanding what to expect and lead them to appreciate the particular meanings and expressions that the couple concerned have chosen to build into their wedding service. Additionally, even though each ceremony has unique elements and meanings, part of the whole point of rites of passage is for the couple to make a connection between their wedding ceremony and previous ones. Celebrants balance the individual expression of a ritual of a particular couple or family with ritual elements which have been celebrated, throughout history, by other people who have moved through inevitable life stages and chosen or shared similar life paths. Part of the power of what ceremonies do is to recall and enact ceremonial forms, repeat words, and engage the symbols and codes of cultural understanding of communities. This resonates with notion of rituals being staged performances (Schechner, 1973; Tambiah, 1981) where the celebrant is taking responsibility for the construction and staging of the performance and providing guidance to clients about how to best achieve the purpose set by them.

Moore and Myerhoff expressed the view that rituals are not as efficacious if they are recognised as being constructed, arbitrary, and invented (1977). However, in this research contemporary ritual-makers highlight the constructedness of ritual and explain particular elements and symbols so that people can understand and appreciate the reality the ritual is representing. Such awareness thereby makes rituals more efficacious for participants, not less. American examples from Leeds-Hurwitz include ethnic festivals celebrating traditional rituals in front of non-group members where the new audience requires that the event be framed and explicitly introduced so newcomers will understand and appreciate what occurs, and intercultural weddings where a priest calls attention to the parts of the wedding that not everyone will understand in an effort to include all participants and ensure that everyone

understands the significance of the major parts of the ritual (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002: 95-96).

With regard to the theoretical nature of contemporary ritual, individualism has been demonstrated as a central focus for rites of passage. Intentionality and reflexivity are fundamental characteristics of contemporary, western, celebrant-led ritual. Both clients and ritual-makers actively construct rituals which are processes to effect social transformation (Catherine Bell, 1997: 89) and also strong 'forms of self-expression and of individual authenticity' (Seligman *et al*, 2008:10). Kapferer suggested the importance of emphasising how people construct their rituals, in order to appreciate the intended experience and meanings for participants and not overemphasise what a ritual overtly presents when viewed as a performance (Kapferer, 2004: 20-21). I agree that it is important to look at how rituals are constructed to fully understand them, and in this ritual making context that translates into a need to examine ritual-makers' intentions in conjunction with their clients', paying attention not only 'how' but also 'why' rituals are put together the way they are. The nature and breadth of what comprises rites of passage varies depending on the interests and intentions of those ritual-making (Grimes, 1995).

The term 'rites of passage' remains a useful one to the extent that all rites of passage mark deep, lasting change and transformation, and there is an inevitability and universality to much of what is typically marked ritually, for example rites of passage associated with the life cycle. However, other significant life events which some people choose to ritualise have a greater element of choice and control associated with them; commitments, civil unions, marriages, for example. The distinction is important because there are subtle differences in the relationship between the ritual-maker and their client and the roles each takes in ritual development, and these differences in the ritual-making environment effect the nature of the ritual produced. In the case study of the ceremony of marriage in this chapter, the celebrant has the time to work equally alongside her clients, co-creating a ceremony that is a dramatic, staged performance on behalf of the clients. The role of celebrant is not always like this, for example, where the focus of the ceremony is on assisting clients in transition through loss and grief, celebrants could take more of pastoral role with families, advocate for particular ritual elements which they feel

would be beneficial, and take greater control for the scripting of the ceremony and in the process make assumptions about elements a ritual needs to contain. Some ritual-making situations, such as weddings, are more suitable for celebrants to explore possibilities for innovation and personalisation. The function and nature of rites of passage can be quite different depending on the type of change occurring and the control and choice clients have over that change, and for this reason, it is important to generalise about rites of passage cautiously.

This chapter has considered the nature of contemporary marriage ceremonies which are primarily secular in their focus, where the role of the celebrant includes providing a style of ceremony to suit the requirements of the couples they work for. Compared with wedding ceremonies in New Zealand in the mid 1970s when religious weddings were the norm, personalisation is increasingly a strong element in the content of the ritual. Eclecticism is also a feature of these celebrant-led marriage ceremonies and from this arises an examination of appropriation. A similar ritual form is retained and utilised by celebrants over time so that those participating can understand the transformation that the ritual manifests and celebrates.

## ***8 Spirituality and celebrant-led ceremonies***

In this chapter I begin by exploring how the spiritual and religious beliefs of both celebrants and their clients can be intrinsic to the rituals they practise. Following this I explore the relevance of spiritually sensitive practice to the work of celebrants, drawing on knowledge around such practice in the helping professions, particularly social work. Celebrants' commitment is to providing ceremonies which fit with clients' perspectives and needs – secular and spiritual. In response to the diverse and changing spiritualities of New Zealanders, celebrants take an active role in changing ritual traditions as they go about their work of honouring and accommodating this diversity and satisfying clients. In New Zealand the term 'spirituality', in a theoretical sense, often covers its existential elements (e.g. searching for meaning, making choices, taking responsibility for actions, and connectedness with other people and the universe), theistic elements (e.g. a sense of the sacred and where sacredness lies in relation to a person), and indigenous, holistic, land-based concepts from tangata whenua. These elements are variously emphasised in the definitions discussed here.

Spirituality can be seen as an important aspect of a person's life, though one that is not always conceptualised or experienced as separate from other aspects of life. It is related to, but generally differentiated from, religious beliefs and practices, which for (especially Pakeha) New Zealanders would traditionally have meant Christian precepts and practices. Sometimes spirituality is differentiated from religion (Tacey, 2005:6). For example, it can be described as a subset of practices within the broad concept of religion, but which takes place outside of traditional, institutionalised religious contexts (Morris, 1999:17-21), or as more expansive than religion (Rose, 2001:205). Furthermore, spirituality can have a place in secular and humanist thought, notwithstanding the focus on humankind and the affairs of the world associated with these philosophies. In this way it is sometimes differentiated from religion. Heelas and Woodward describe spirituality as commitment to the sacred cultivation of a unique subjective life, a deep truth that is to be found within what belongs to this world, whereas religion expresses commitment to a higher truth that is 'out there', lying beyond what this world has to offer (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005:

5-6). Arguably, dichotomising religion and spirituality from a theoretical perspective is not useful, because in practice the meanings and usage of both terms overlap.

Definitions which emphasise the distinctions between spirituality and religion and set them up as essentially different conceptual terms are too absolute. Spirituality is often perceived to be less dogmatic, more tolerant and flexible, and better suited to the pursuit of personal inner quests than religion (Davie, Heelas, & Woodhead, 2003:2). Spirituality refers to an individual's unique experiences around searching for meaning, morally fulfilling relationships, and the understanding of the reality that has the greatest significance for him or her (Canda and Furman 1999: 313, Coombes & Morgan, 2001:12-13). Spirituality often also incorporates notions of deities and beliefs around the supernatural. The women's spirituality movement, for example, incorporates and indeed centres on a notion of 'Goddess' which is both within and without. Māori notions of spirituality are holistic, and spirituality (wairua) is an integral part of the Māori world-view. 'Te Whare Tapa Wha' is a Māori holistic approach to understanding individual and collective health and well-being frequently used in health and social work (Durie, 1985). In the Te Whare Tapa Wha model, wairua is an essential component of well-being. This is integrated with a person's mental and emotional well-being (hinengaro), their physical well-being (tinana), and also family and community aspects (whanau). Wairua incorporates an individual's own spiritual awareness and also their relationship with the environment (which is often seen as sacred), with others or with their ancestors and heritage.

Religion has been defined as a means of spiritual expression and experience involving a set of organised, institutionalised beliefs and social functions (Carroll 1998, in Nash and Stewart 2002: 15). In terms of Christianity, which has been the dominant religion in Pakeha New Zealanders' European-based culture, the meaning of religion involves a relationship with God. A recent trend in some quarters of Christianity has been a movement away from the concept of God as a being which exists independently of humanity towards a concept where God is a force, energy, or spirit underlying reality. This idea is much closer to 'New Age' ideas and those of people who claim to espouse spirituality but not religion. Another notable difference is the greater emphasis people place on finding personal relevance and guidance from their (changed) concepts of what religion means to them.

## **Contemporary New Zealand spiritualities**

At a societal level there have been enormous changes over the latter part of the 20th century in the extent to which religion and spirituality influence New Zealand society. Chapter Four discussed how people's understanding of what it means to be religious has changed as their beliefs and practices have changed. The freedom experienced through living in a society where there is no state-sanctioned or strong societal expectation that people will follow one particular faith or a particular denomination of the Christian religion means that people have more choice around the nature and extent of religious faith and practice, if indeed they choose to follow any at all. For some people this has meant that religion has become less central to their lives. In a 2009 social survey in New Zealand 40 per cent of respondents said they had no religious affiliation (NZPA, 2009). This finding is similar to the 2006 census data when 38 per cent of the population said they had no religion or did not state their religion. For many people, religion remains relevant, even though they are less involved in church-centred activities. Also, within Christian denominations there is now more acceptance of flexibility and choice in religious expression. In a 2009 social survey 53 per cent of respondents said they believed in God or a form of higher power, 57 per cent believed in life after death, 51 per cent believed in heaven. Non-Christian religions have become more numerically prominent in the mix of faiths New Zealanders claim affiliations with, as immigrants from many different countries have brought with them different faiths. To a lesser extent, New Zealanders changing from traditional Christian denominations to other religions have contributed to this trend. Chapter Four gives the history and context of these changes.

There is now greater choice in ritual practice, as discussed in Chapter Seven. It is no longer the case, as it was during most of the 20th century in New Zealand, that rites of passage are circumscribed in nature and primarily delivered in churches. Now, ritual practice can relate to a person's private understanding of religion. For some people this means that the rituals they participate in take place at, or are specified by, their religious organisations, institutions or respective places of worship. But this is not so for many of the rites of passage ceremonies, weddings in particular, where (as previously mentioned), approximately half are performed by independent celebrants. With more freedom of choice in the style and content of contemporary rites of passage ceremonies, and independent as well as organisational celebrants available to

facilitate these, a wide variety of secular, spiritual, and religious meanings relating to the clients' personal belief systems and their well-being can be expressed through the ritual-making.

The function of contemporary ritual is more than an expression of shared belief. Ritual cannot exist in a vacuum and unavoidably conveys a world-view, even if that world-view cannot consciously be articulated by the person who holds it. In this study of contemporary celebrant-led ritual, celebrants claim that it is their intention to create rituals which express their clients' beliefs. In actuality, the ritual expresses a combination of beliefs that reflect the celebrant's own social and cultural contexts, and the client's. In this way spirituality in celebrant-led ritual is linked with the changing role and ever-changing expression of ritual. By contrast, in times past, ritual would have expressed the shared beliefs of all ritual participants in a group (e.g. a congregation or community). Now clients' personal spiritualities have greater predominance, and so the role of ritual can be seen to be less about reinforcing collectively held norms and more about expressing individual values and preferences. At the same time as there has been a reduction of participation in organised religion, there is some evidence that there has been growth in the relevance of spirituality in many western societies, including New Zealand. In their discussion of spiritual trends in modern societies, Nash and Stewart conclude that there is support for the 'notion that organized religion persists but also that a sizeable group of people is seeking new ways to understand and express themselves spiritually' (2002:13). Similarly, contemporary Australians' preference for the inward, self-focused spiritualities over politically directed expressions of churches has been remarked on by commentators (for example, Kohn, 2003:3, Tacey 2005:5).

Contemporary celebrant-led ceremonies explored in this study, from the perspectives of celebrants, reflected clients' eclectic, personal spiritualities, and these were not necessarily individually cohesive or static in nature, much less collectively coherent. The very diversity of personal spiritualities means that where ceremonies are focused around the needs and participation of more than one individual, which most ceremonies of course are (weddings being an obvious example), the task for ritual-makers in contemporary contexts includes negotiating how to reflect or respect multiple spiritual perspectives within the ritual framework. When I was asking

celebrants about spirituality I did not always feel as if I was using the right language or phrasing my questions in ways which helped celebrants to articulate how they worked. I found that conversations which had been progressing smoothly sometimes became disjointed when I raised the topic of spirituality, which was a slightly sensitive one for celebrants. I discovered that some celebrants did not find using the term 'spirituality' to be an appropriate way for them to find out what their clients wanted to express in their ceremonies. For some celebrants, this was because spirituality was synonymous with religion, and they regarded their ritual-making as non-religious and so non-spiritual. For others, spirituality referred to something different from what they saw themselves as being involved in. They regarded their non-spiritual ceremonies as the 'norm' and spirituality as something fringe, less serious, which other (New Age) ritual-makers dabbled in. For some of these celebrants, spirituality had connotations of rituals performed for fun, rather than for the more serious, conventional reasons (e.g. legal marriage) they regarded their rite of passage ceremonies to be about. For another group of celebrants, matters of spirituality were seen to be very important to their ritual-making, but this did not necessarily mean that they used the term 'spirituality' when talking with their clients. This was because these celebrants did not regard the meaning of spirituality as precise enough for them to use in these conversations. Rather, they described how they carefully and explicitly explored their clients' spiritual beliefs and how they might wish these to be expressed ceremonially.

### **Spiritually- sensitive practice**

In New Zealand society more broadly, beyond the discourse between celebrants and clients, it can be observed that there is some awkwardness in discussing matters of spirituality. Mary commented on this:

*It [the word spirituality] has got a lot of connotations with it that can clam Kiwis up. ... So as celebrants we are very careful and need to be careful about the words we use when we're questioning, and not raising these issues around spirituality until people are comfortable with us. (Mary 2/11/05)*

What are these connotations of 'spirituality' that can prove problematic and which celebrants are wary might make people 'clam up'? They may relate to New Zealanders' Christian backgrounds and cultural heritage. Whilst in many ways we have challenged the importance of Christianity and its role in our everyday lives,

there may be an element of discomfort around completely rejecting this cultural heritage. People may still be tentative about exploring what replaces religion and are thus ambivalent about it. This tentativeness may be in relation to what they believe, and also whether they have the confidence and language to firmly state a position. It can be easier for people to be clearer about articulating what they don't want and what they don't believe than to articulate what they do believe – especially if they are unsure, or are concerned that they will be judged by others for doing so. Celebrants sometimes encounter such tentativeness or ambivalence when clients express contradictory requests, for instance when they say they “don't believe in religion” but they want religion included in their rituals nevertheless. Times of transition, especially transitions through loss and grief, can be precisely when people do look to religion to assist them in making sense of what is happening, as well as for comfort and reassurance that they will adjust to the changes.

Matters of clients' spirituality were regarded by celebrants as being deeply personal, and so they felt they needed to get to a certain point of trust in the relationship before their clients felt comfortable divulging information about their personal spiritualities. Asking too directly, or too soon, could come across to clients as insensitive and so hinder the trust and openness celebrants sought. Celebrants worked intuitively, seeking to explore some of the many different sources and aspects of clients' spirituality and find out which were important to them. Some celebrants emphasised to me that spirituality cannot be separated out from other aspects of a person's culture. Part of the reason celebrants regarded spirituality as a sensitive topic to discuss with clients was that they respected the view that, for clients, it could be not just a personal but also a significant matter. Thus, celebrants do not usually try to resolve or correct ambiguities and contradictions expressed by their clients in relation to their spiritual beliefs. They seek appropriate, inclusive, solutions to addressing such circumstances through the dynamic ritual-making practices discussed in Chapter Six.

Celebrants are operating in a similar manner to some other contemporary ritual-makers. In the context of witches' ritual-making, Jone Salomonsen showed ways in which that group of ritual-makers consciously celebrate and accept the differences and plurality of spiritual and cultural traditions of those they encounter (Salomonsen,

2002: 98). Arising from this is a question about how celebrants manage the conflict arising from clients who are participating in the same ritual having differing spiritual views. This was not an issue I specifically enquired about, nor was it described in any detail by celebrants interviewed individually in this study. An explanation for why conflict did not feature strongly in my discussions with celebrants is that it may be rare and had not been an issue for those I spoke with. Whether they chose not to mention difficulties in dealing with this type of conflict because they wished to present themselves in a positive light to a researcher whom they were just getting to know and who was recording their interviews as oral histories is unknown. I mentioned that I was fortunate to be able to take part in a workshop in mid 2009 at which a group of celebrants came together to share experiences and generate techniques around identifying and managing disharmony and dysfunction in wedding and civil union ceremonies. This gave me some insight into the processes by which celebrants manage conflict (see Chapter Five). This is an area it would be valuable to research further. To summarise the discussion on spirituality so far, New Zealand's strong historical and customary connections with Christianity influences many aspects of how spirituality is expressed in celebrant-led ceremonies. Nevertheless celebrants know that spirituality means different things to different people, and try carefully not to assume what it means for their clients but to explore this openly and neutrally. Spirituality, for some celebrants, is one important aspect of the ritual-making they carry out, and one which they accept need not always be precisely articulated by clients or separated out from other aspects of people's culture, beliefs, and expectations around ritual. Some examples of how different celebrants explain the relevance of spirituality to their work are discussed below.

Mary Hancock, who trained me in celebrant studies, motivated my interest in issues of celebrants' spiritually sensitive practice. In the certificate course in celebrant studies taught at Auckland University of Technology from 1996 to 2008, students received training in issues relating to biculturalism and its application to celebrant work, contemporary religious and spiritual practices in New Zealand, as well as effective communication skills. When I met with Mary during this present study, she spoke of the importance she places on the need for celebrants to have the skills to understand clients' spiritual needs and to assist them to decide whether, and explore how, they might express their spirituality in celebrant-led rituals. This was said in the

context of talking to me about the dramatic changes in New Zealand society over more than 25 years, with the gradual move away from institutionalised religion to other forms of spiritual expression and the desire for rituals directly connected to personalised meanings and needs around important life events and transformations. My view, similar to Mary's, is that people who approach celebrants have a diversity of spiritual beliefs, and celebrants cannot assume they know all they might need to about clients' beliefs and expectations when they begin working with them. Different civil celebrants may offer different types of ceremonies based on their own various belief systems whilst attempting to cater for clients who also have a diverse range of beliefs. Celebrants tend not to be experts in religion. Rather their role is more functional and does not require them to have expert knowledge on all possible religious or spiritual matters their clients may want expressed ritually. Thus celebrants need to be able to communicate with clients around issues of spirituality. Relevant questions include: how celebrants find out about clients' spirituality, needs, and expectations relevant to the ceremonies they are creating for them; how celebrants' spiritualities and beliefs matter in relationships with the client and the ceremonies they create; and how celebrants communicate with their clients around issues of spirituality.

Other professions, such as social work, have theorised issues of spirituality in their practice (Canda, 1988; Canda & Furman, 1999; Kilpatrick & Holland, 1990; Nash & Stewart, 2002), and I am interested in whether there are similarities between social workers' experiences and the experiences of celebrants, or ways in which celebrants might draw on the experiences of the social work profession. Knowledge of spirituality can influence social work practitioners to take notice of spiritual matters and such knowledge shapes their motivation, theory, styles, and techniques of helping. It can assist them in making connections with people, regardless of their own faiths and spiritual orientations (Nash & Stewart, 2002:19-20). Practitioners can respond sensitively to the diverse spiritual needs and modes of expression of their clients by drawing on skills such as empathy, careful listening, and loving acceptance. In social work, specific spiritual techniques and approaches have been developed whereby practitioners can find out more about the relationships, sacred experiences, and realities of their clients (Nash & Stewart, 2002:12-20). Spiritually sensitive social work approaches include utilising clients' world-views; attempting to

connect cross-culturally by avoiding stereotypes and generalisations as well as being perceptive to power differences; finding inclusive perspectives; practising self-enquiry into one's own beliefs, values, and philosophies; respecting others; reflecting on the potential for both benefit and harm that may arise from sharing one's own beliefs; facilitating wellness; openness to the unknown, mystery; interdependence between people and environment regarding fulfilment and health (Nash & Stewart, 2002).

Spiritually sensitive practice in social work addresses many issues which I believe may be relevant or adaptable to the work of celebrants. Practitioners who are self-aware are more likely to recognise these influences on their world-view and that spirituality is inseparable from the helping relationship. They can support a person's healing and address both individual growth and social justice. Spirituality is a dimension of cultural diversity and so must be considered by those who want to achieve competence in cross-cultural work. Sensitivity to spirituality supports the dignity and worth of clients, regardless of their beliefs, values, and actions and contributes to empathy and connection between practitioners and clients (Nash and Stewart 2002: 19-20).

There are several differences between a social worker's relationship with their clients and a celebrant's relationship with theirs. The social worker's involvement in their clients' lives may be short or long term, whereas celebrants' contracts with clients typically relate to a brief episode – a wedding or a funeral, for example. The nature of a social worker's function is fundamentally one of getting involved, intervening in some way. The central role of a celebrant is fundamentally performative: to prepare and lead a ceremony on behalf of the clients. Social workers' involvement with a person or a family or a community may be based on a clear need for them to intervene although not necessarily through having been asked directly to do something by the particular individuals concerned. Celebrants, on the other hand, are working for their clients who have explicitly invited them to do so and are paid a fee directly by their clients for each ceremony they perform.

There are also similarities between a social worker's and a celebrant's ways of working. The main similarity is that both social workers and celebrants aim to establish close and trusting relationships with their clients in terms of the issues,

vulnerabilities, and transitions they face. Careful enquiry, compassion, and open-mindedness to clients' varying world-views are essential from both celebrants and social workers, in order to tailor their involvement (in ritual-making or various forms of social work intervention) so that it is sensitive and appropriate to people's situations and interpretations of it. Because of these similarities, spiritually sensitive practice is relevant to celebrants and much can be learnt from the collective experiences of social workers. Like social workers, celebrants who are affiliated with professional bodies agree to an ethical code of conduct which expressly acknowledges their responsibility to respect clients' cultural, religious, and spiritual contexts.<sup>52</sup> Celebrant work overlaps with other types of work, too, such as relationship counselling. CANZ, one of the celebrant professional organisations, has a formal relationship with Relationship Services New Zealand, a professional organisation of counsellors, whereby both organisations can seek to identify and then share ways they can work more effectively to help their members and those members' clients.

I discovered quite a broad spectrum of views amongst celebrants on the issue of exploring spirituality. Some celebrants regarded the ceremonies they offered as not spiritual at all. They believed that what independent celebrants should offer were non-religious, and therefore non-spiritual, ceremonies, and they focused on their role of 'representing the Crown' to witness the legal aspects of marriage. Some of these celebrants seemed either dismissive of the term 'spirituality', or at least very cautious about linking it with what they offered, or implied that they assumed their clients would not want anything spiritual, which they seemed to perceive as being

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<sup>52</sup> The *Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers 2008: Code of Ethics*, for example, states that 'members respect the worth and dignity of clients, and work in non-discriminatory ways that acknowledge the age, beliefs, culture, gender, marital, legal or family status, intellectual, psychological and physical abilities, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social and economic status of clients.' Also: 'A member's moral position or religious convictions do not override their duty to ensure client independence. They will maintain professional objectivity, advise clients of any potential and relevant personal, moral or religious conflict, and if indicated, offer appropriate referral to another social worker.' [www.anzasw.org.nz/excerpt-from-code-of-ethics.html](http://www.anzasw.org.nz/excerpt-from-code-of-ethics.html), Accessed 16 May 2009

The *Celebrants Association of New Zealand (CANZ) Code of Ethics* states that 'Members of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand accept the responsibilities entrusted to them in their relationships with: the clients they serve, the public at large, the profession of which they are a part. Specifically they have agreed to preserve within the bounds of dignity, practicality, the right of personal choice and decision making for the clients they serve, having due regard for their ethnic origin, philosophical and spiritual beliefs.' [www.celebranz.org.nz/code-of-ethics/](http://www.celebranz.org.nz/code-of-ethics/), Accessed 16 May 2009

equivalent to 'religious'. Several celebrants spoke about the importance of spirituality in people's lives. They therefore felt that spirituality, when it was important to their clients, should rightly be reflected in their ceremonies, because their ceremonies were expressing something unique about individual identities. Pinky, for example, described spirituality as a 'force' in people's lives. She described how people still think that there are forces at work in their lives and in their relationships that are 'something to do with God'. Several celebrants chose to illustrate what it meant to incorporate clients' spiritual perspectives by referring to funeral work, where they generally explored clients' views on an afterlife during the planning stage so that their personal beliefs could be appropriately expressed in the ceremony when referring to matters such as what happens to a person after death.<sup>53</sup> From the celebrant's point of view, it is important to include clients' personal beliefs not because the celebrant necessarily believes that these forces are at work, but out of respect for the clients, and so that the symbolic and transformative powers of such beliefs can be evoked. Here again, in relation to spirituality in ritual, the role of the celebrant as a functionary rather than a religious specialist is reinforced. This is different from the traditional role of ritual-maker, which is one of leading ritual participants through 'correct' forms of ritual and at the same time conveying to them, through the ritual form, important shared meanings relating to the occasion, the individuals' identities and their belonging to the particular culture or faith concerned.

I found that celebrants did not regard spirituality as something which could be, or needed to be, separated out from other aspects of a client's culture or life. Sheryl, for example, raised this point:

*Sometimes 'spiritual' background may not be the right word, maybe 'cultural' background might be more it than 'spiritual'. But often you can't separate the two. Sometimes they go hand in hand. I need to understand where they're coming from and what sorts of things are important to them. Some people have a greater belief in the spiritual aspect of life than others and it will vary person by person ... I would always ask them if there's any aspect of their spirituality they want included in the ceremony. (Sheryl 5/7/06)*

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<sup>53</sup> To give some context on how relevant this theme is to New Zealanders in general, in the 2009 *International Social Survey Programme* of 1,000 New Zealanders, 57 per cent of respondents reported believing in life after death, 51 per cent believing in heaven, and 36 per cent believing in hell. (NZPA, 2009)

In my discussions of spirituality with Pinky, she maintained that one of the reasons people have embraced civil celebrancy so strongly in New Zealand is because civil celebrants are tolerant of, and happy to reflect, include, and affirm through ceremony, the diverse lives of clients – socially, spiritually, and culturally:

*People at the same time want to reflect the social changes that are apparent in their lives, for example, blended families. One bride who had her mother, her mother's new partner, her father, her father's new partner, and you know all stand up. So she had these four parents stand up with her and walk her in to her ceremony. You know people want that kind of thing. They want their real lives reflected. They'll have their own children there as their attendants.*

*One wedding I did recently where the groom's mother and her lesbian partner were there and came up and gave a blessing, the two of them together. You know people want that reality reflected. Churches, as is evidenced recently by the Presbyterian Church banning their ministers from having gay or de facto relationships, churches are becoming more conservative and people's lives aren't. But what it has meant is that people want to have ceremonies, whether they're funerals or name-giving ceremonies, or weddings, or civil unions, that reflect their real lives.*

*Often there are spiritual beliefs in there, and much more often than I had expected, people have beliefs, people still have spiritual beliefs. People still think there's a God. People still think that there are forces at work in their lives and in their relationships that are something to do with God. People still think that there's going to be some kind of afterlife. They want to celebrate and embrace that, but they find the church too stifling or unreal a context for it. So, you know, we'll have Bible readings, or we'll have spiritual readings of some kind and we'll still be standing in a garden somewhere. (Pinky 30/8/06)*

The meaning of spirituality to Pinky in relation to her celebrant work incorporated tolerance and commitment to a practice of being able to 'celebrate and embrace' all aspects of people's lives including their beliefs. In her view this was something which differentiated her work as an independent celebrant from that of religious celebrants, whom she described as becoming more conservative when people's lives were not. Marie, too, described the importance to her of knowing about clients' expectations around spirituality in the ceremonies she creates for them:

*One of the things I do say is: do you know what you would like in your ceremony, and it's important for me to know what you don't want in your ceremony. That certainly raises the issue about whether they want God, the word God, the essence of the spirituality in their ceremony. I mean it comes out quite quickly. (Marie 28/3/06)*

As her comments indicate, Marie is among those celebrants who believe that if aspects of a client's spiritual beliefs are important, then it is the celebrant's task to create a space for these to emerge in the context of the discussion. The way they go about exploring a client's spiritual beliefs is at once explicit (they are aware of the importance and potential need for this territory to be addressed in the planning stages) and implicit (they wait and listen, and then take their lead and their language for engaging on the issues from the clients). Celebrants regard clients' spiritualities as integrated into their overall identity and attempt to be open to embracing spiritual aspects of clients' expectations of the ritual.

Celebrants' own spiritualities can also be relevant to their work of ritual-making. As with so many aspects of ritual-making, personal spirituality was an area where many different perspectives emerged from the diverse mix of celebrants I spent time with. Ruth, for instance, explained that while she would not use the word 'spirituality' when talking with her clients about their ceremony, for her spirituality referred to her Buddhist beliefs, which taught her the 'sacredness and preciousness ... and ... importance of the moment'. It also referred to her respect for the value of the important decision people were making when they chose to wed. Spiritually sensitive practice, for Ruth, included how her Christian background taught her an 'embracing kind of love'. In her celebrant role, Ruth tried to 'stay totally present to them all the time' when she was with clients, out of respect and admiration for the 'profound goodness' of what they were doing: committing to marriage where the institution is faced with many pressures and challenges. Ruth tried to 'tune into them and imagine them and visualise them, wishing them well and within them love and happiness'.

*I was brought up a Presbyterian and then when I was about 28 I encountered Buddhism and it was like a homecoming. But in a way I still regard Jesus as one of my main teachers. So these two, the traditions of these two great faiths are a big part of me. I suppose the fusion of the Buddhist and the Christian in me is this bringing together of the clarity of mind that comes from the Buddhist tradition of savouring the moment, being in the moment, seeing the moment and experiencing it with clarity, fusing that with the love that I got through my teachings from Christ. (Ruth 17/3/06)*

For Ruth, spirituality and religion are discernible and intertwined in how they impact on her world-view, including how she approaches and articulates her role as a celebrant. She herself used the word 'fusion' to describe how Presbyterianism and Buddhism compatibly co-exist for her. This co-existence is mirrored in the way she

comfortably creates ceremonies for clients which combine the expression of multiple spiritual, cultural, and religious traditions beyond the two she happens to embrace personally (see case study in Chapter Seven).

Celebrants spend time with their clients, getting to know what they want. They listen, and they enquire, aiming to do this in a sensitive way, and tuning in to the language of their clients. They incorporate clients' world-views, for example around issues of life after death in funerals. Examples of ways celebrants go about this include the following example from my talk with Sheryl, who described how some clients may equate spirituality with religion. When clients tell her they do not want anything 'spiritual' in their ceremony, she remains open and continues to explore whether they may want a spiritual component, broader than, or different from, religion:

*Some people have a greater belief in the spiritual aspect of life than others and it will vary person by person ... I would always ask them if there's any aspect of their spirituality they want included in the ceremony. Sometimes they're not quite sure what you mean by that. Because for some people that means a religious content, as opposed to, you know, religious versus secular as opposed to something else that could be there in terms of the spiritual aspect. (Sheryl, 5/7/06)*

This comment suggests that there can be degree of indeterminacy around the meanings of the terms 'spirituality' and 'religion'. Neither the celebrant nor the client is clear about how the other interprets these terms. Mary indicated the importance she places on dealing with issues of spirituality carefully with her clients, aiming to simultaneously understand their desires but not delve deeply into these personal issues until she has built up trust with them and they are comfortable with her need to know:

*Sometimes I specifically ask questions. And one of the key questions right at the beginning of most ceremonies, apart from a funeral because it's very obvious what they're doing there, although I will ask it in those as well: 'What do you know you want and what do you know you don't want?'*

*Usually I won't follow that up at that point until the people I'm working with get to know me better and I'm working on whatever they're working with and then I will begin to talk to them more about how they might express that spirituality. I'm very careful with the word, I often won't use it. (Mary 2/11/05)*

Mary's approach is very different from that of religious specialists who traditionally wanted to be assured that the person or people going through a ritual fully understand

its religious context, and the ritual would not proceed until they did. For example, Catholic couples, prior to marrying, still have a long and stringent set of instructional procedures they have to go through to ensure they understand the wider religious context of their marriage, and they cannot get married by a Catholic priest unless they conform to those beliefs. The situation with celebrants is the opposite: they take a tentative approach to spirituality, fear treading on the toes of clients and have a desire to please them. Whilst I have referred to the certificate course in celebrant studies which included training on contemporary spiritual and religious practices and skills relevant to spiritually sensitive practice, it needs to be remembered there are currently no minimum requirements for celebrants to undertake any training and most of the celebrants practising in New Zealand at present have not trained specifically for celebrancy work. Nor are there any other processes to ensure that celebrants have awareness and skills in this area. We have seen that many celebrants find matters of spirituality sensitive to discuss. The spiritual landscape of New Zealand society has changed considerably over recent years, which could partly explain why this is: celebrants are working at the leading edge of social change and are motivated to be open to hearing and reflecting the spiritualities of their clients and therefore do not wish to appear judgemental. Also, because celebrants work in isolation from each other, their opportunities to share and learn from collective experiences are limited. Nor is there yet a strong field of theory to give guidance on these issues, or mandatory competencies to attain entry into the work.

In social work there is clear, growing recognition that spirituality is inseparable from the helping relationship; that if practitioners have knowledge about spirituality and competence in spiritually-sensitive practice this can assist them to respond sensitively (by listening, finding empathy and acceptance) to the diverse needs and forms of expression of their clients. Based on this study, I have observed there is a similar growing recognition amongst some celebrants that spirituality is inseparable from the ritual-making relationship, and that it is important for them to be spiritually sensitive in their practice. This view is not, however, shared by all celebrants. Opportunities for celebrants to gain awareness and competencies in these areas do exist. Places where celebrants can get information and training around contemporary society and ceremony, multicultural practices, communication and ethics include: professional body conferences and educational courses, a private training

establishment, celebrant studies professional development course, and master classes. Additional new sources are emerging, including, for example, CANZ professional accreditation processes commenced in 2009, a new polytechnic-based training diploma course in ceremony and celebration commenced in 2009, a website targeted at celebrants offering resources for use in secular/humanist and faith-based ceremonies and services launched in 2009.<sup>54</sup> Gaining competencies in spiritually sensitive practice, including participation in training and professional development, remains entirely voluntary. It is this which represents the greatest limiting factor in relation to how clients can be assured that any celebrant they choose has a minimum, consistent level of competency in this aspect of their practice.

### **Spirituality in celebrant-led ceremonies**

Some celebrants explicitly include Christian spirituality in the services they offer. Bernie, for example, described his ceremonies as blending the ‘modern with a spiritual and Biblical underpinning’. For him, it was ‘fundamental that our creator has purposed for us the union of man and woman and the family flows from that. He is pleased to bless those that seek to marry’. This celebrant always had in mind ‘the holiness of God and the special event that is taking place as a couple are joined in marriage’. Other celebrants said that they ‘offered spirituality’ in their ceremonies if this was what their clients wanted, although from my observations of their work and discussions with them, I gained the impression that what they mostly offered were versions of religious ceremonies that bore a close resemblance to Christian services. These ceremonies, whilst conducted outside of places of Christian worship, contained reference to the ceremony taking place in a non-denominational Christian context. For example, instead of referring to ‘Jesus’, the celebrant would always refer to ‘God’, which in their view broadened the relevance of the ceremony they were

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<sup>54</sup> CANZ, conference and educational courses, [www.celebranz.org.nz](http://www.celebranz.org.nz), Accessed 30 May 2009.

‘The Celebrant School’, Professional Development Course and Master Classes, [www.celebrant.school.nz](http://www.celebrant.school.nz), Accessed 8 July 2009.

CANZ, Professional Accreditation, ‘CANZ Professional Standards Recognition Of Prior Learning (RPL) 2009’, pers. comm., CANZ Secretary, 13 May 2009.

WELTEC, polytechnic-based training, Diploma Course, <http://www.weltec.ac.nz/SubjectAreas/HealthWellbeing/DiplomainCeremonyandCelebration/tabid/315/Default.aspx>, Accessed 12 July 2009.

‘Words of spirit and faith’ website, [www.simplesite.com/tempo](http://www.simplesite.com/tempo), Accessed 12 July 2009.

leading to others who were not Christian. Some always included Christian prayers and blessings in their ceremonies, as these were forms of service they were familiar with, and they believed they fitted with the expectations and beliefs of their clients. Christian forms of ritual seemed so familiar and intrinsic to their world-view that they did not consider the possibility that these elements could be separated out from, or not be part of, the ceremony.

Christianity has been, and is still, a strong part of Pakeha culture, and many mainly British denominational traditions have mingled in, as well as been adapted to, the New Zealand context. To this extent New Zealand has always been, religiously, a relatively pluralist society. So it is to be expected that influences of Christian ritual traditions are still evident in what celebrants offer and clients expect and accept.

Mary referred to this:

*Pakeha Kiwis generally will say, 'keep it simple, informal, and no God.' Now that 'No God' is meaning a whole range of things. But I've learned over time it particularly means we are no longer active within institutionalised religion – and for most Pakeha that was Christianity – but that doesn't mean to say that they've not still got a ... quite a strong spiritual dynamic that might have quite a good resonance with Christianity, but is probably much bigger and wider than that. (Mary 2/11/05)*

Christian heritage may be deeply implicated in Pakeha cultural approaches to making ceremony, yet some people's contemporary ambivalence towards Christianity can lead them to claim to want nothing to do with it. Many celebrants openly explain their links with Christianity in their own upbringing and their own beliefs. This familiarity with Christian traditions enables them to lead in situations where clients ask for these same ritual traditions. Christian elements may also be included in ceremonies as part of the familiar, folk heritage of New Zealand rather than as a direct expression of the religious beliefs of the participants. I have experienced this myself in marriage celebrant work. For example, in ceremonies which are otherwise non-religious, clients have chosen to include well-known Christian hymns because they can be confident that everyone will join in and give a strong, uplifting vocal performance. The performative function of ritual is taking precedence here over its communicative function. Several celebrants talked about including the Lord's Prayer and the Twenty-Third Psalm in funerals, because mourners know these, expect them, and are comforted by them. Heather and Eddie refer to this:

*I just say to them, 'Would you like the Prayer of Comfort, The Lord's Prayer?' ... At least if they've got something to say, to verbalise, it gets rid of the hurt a bit, just gives a bit of relief. Usually they say that's a good idea. Of all the hundreds of funerals I've done, probably in all that time, maybe I've had perhaps five that have said no. (Heather 2/11/05)*

*'Well, let's be quite clear about something, a funeral is for the living, it's not for the dead, they've gone, he's not going to hear a word of what you're saying. It's for the living, and you have to take that into account, what do they need to get through this situation they've found themselves in. If they need a prayer they need a prayer, but at the end of the day it's still the family's decision, and if they don't want one, then that's fine.*

*You see, religion, like politics, it's a very personal thing, and most people shy away from it ... it's something that I never go in too deeply to. If people say to me they definitely don't want any religion, I won't ask them why. If they're unsure, I'll usually say, well generally speaking – not under all circumstances – people like the 'Lord's Prayer'. It's a prayer they've grown up with, it's something that we know, and it's something that gives them comfort and they expect it to be part of a funeral. But that's only because it's a traditional thing to do ... is to say a prayer. So, if you still don't want it, that's fine, and if you want to give it a wee bit of thought, that's fine, too.*

*I actually don't look on the Lord's Prayer as something religious, I just look on the Lord's Prayer as it's a traditional prayer that everybody knows, everybody grew up with it ... everybody knows it. And saying the Lord's Prayer or the Twenty-Third Psalm can bring people a hell of a lot of comfort ... members of the congregation who may have religious leanings and things and they're there to support the family, it gives them comfort because that's part of a funeral service to them, is the prayer or the hymn.' (Eddie 3/11/05)*

Here, again, an important principle is that the ritual is composed of elements which, because of their familiar and 'traditional' properties, are perceived as being of most assistance for the mourners. Also, choices around what a funeral should comprise belong strongly to the mourners who are the primary clients and this is how celebrants understand their role. This theme is consistent with the findings of Jean Hera in her study of women and after-death policy and practices and beliefs in Aotearoa New Zealand (Hera, 1995). Hera found that 'active participation' was identified by many women as a key component in achieving a less alienating, and more meaningful, after-death experience and gives examples of where women achieved this in their experiences with religious celebrants. The types of active participation women in Hera's study raised as important included: wanting choice over whether it was appropriate for religious services to be presided over by priests, and the need for alternatives to this 'mainstream' religious type of funeral service to

be developed; instances of dissatisfaction where ministers had taken over funeral arrangements from families; and examples of women calling for change and becoming involved in changing funeral rituals to reflect deceased people's cultural and spiritual beliefs (Hera, 1995: 272-275).

Eddie gave an example of how independent celebrants' work accommodates the notion of the ritual expression of the religious beliefs for clients' who do not belong to an institutionalised religion or attend religious services. For these clients, celebration of rites of passage can occur outside of institutional settings, be officiated at by a layperson whose own beliefs are not highly important to the clients, and incorporate expressions of religious faith which mean no less to the clients than if expressed by clergy or other religious officials. Eddie started funeral work at a time when most funerals were still conducted by religious celebrants. He was thus breaking new ground, in the sense of performing funerals outside of a church setting. He describes how tentative he felt working in this way; he worried about it from the perspective of having been brought up Catholic himself, as he wasn't sure how he was going to 'commend someone into God's keeping' if there was no religion involved in the service. He described how he battled with this in his own mind, whether there would be negative consequences for him if he performed funerals outside of the Church. He decided to not let his religious faith 'interfere' with his work and he proceeded to perform funerals outside of the Church in his new role as a funeral officiant. Early on, when people said they wanted 'a couple of prayers and a couple of hymns', for instance, he checked with them to see if they would prefer a minister to officiate at the service. The reasons people wanted him, he explains, were that they did not have connections with the Church and they regarded him as 'the next best thing'. Respecting their wishes, and taking into account that they regarded religion as important, he happily incorporated their requests. Clients said to him afterwards that their experience of those ceremonies were 'great' and that, in hindsight, they 'didn't need the hymns and prayers'. Whilst respectfully including people's requests for expressions of their religious faith in funerals, he felt that the emphasis of what he felt he was delivering, and what his clients seem to have been satisfied with participating in, was to include something that they perceived had been lacking in other funeral services at that time: strongly emphasising the significance of the life lived by the deceased and assisting mourners with their loss.

Spirituality in Eddie's case, then, is important to him as a celebrant because it is one way in which he can give clients what they are asking for in the ritual he performs for them. If it is their desire to have an expression of their religious belief in the funeral service, then he will provide this. At first Eddie was uncertain about whether this fitted comfortably with his own Catholic faith, as he had previously believed that it was the role of a priest to commend somebody into God's keeping. Through his own convictions that funerals needed to do more to honour the person who had died and help families cope with the death of a loved one, he was willing to set aside his own belief about whose territory it was to perform funeral rites:

*I mean, some people will ask for a specific reading from the Gospels, you know, and that's fine, and I'm quite happy to do that, too. Whatever people need, you do, because you're delivering something to them that's going to uplift them and help them through, which really is a very difficult time in their lives. (Eddie/3/11/05)*

Eddie's story does not offer evidence of the decline of religious faith. However, it does support the thesis that people's relationship with religion was changing in the 1980s and that they were moving towards less institutionalised forms of religious affiliation. The trend toward life-centred funerals is the hallmark of celebrant-led funerals, and has also occurred with religious funerals. Eddie, and several other celebrants I spoke with, perceived a lack in the religious funerals of the day, in that such funerals were not as helpful to those participants as they could have been. This prompted their belief and confidence that they could do something better and led them to offer an alternative. One outcome was that the expression of religious belief became less central to what many funerals were about. Barrie, similarly, described himself as 'versatile'. He 'has no problems putting religion in if they [clients] want it', but equally no problems leaving it out. The examples he gave of 'putting religion in' were similar to those described by Eddie (and similar to many of the examples given by other celebrants I spoke to) such as 'singing one or two hymns, doing readings from the Bible, and leading people in prayers'. This is another example of people finding relevance religious meaning through celebrant-led ceremonies, without these necessarily taking place in religious settings, or being led by a member of the clergy. The religion people are experiencing is within themselves, and they are choosing to experience it elsewhere than in a traditional church environment.

Schäfer's work (2005), which explores the dynamics of the contemporary funeral industry in New Zealand, includes identifying factors which influenced why people were beginning to choose secular funeral celebrants in the 1980s. Schäfer explains that 'many families, particularly those without church affiliation ... were finding it increasingly difficult to find an 'appropriate' venue for the funeral and an individual to conduct the service', and also that funeral directors played an important role in matching celebrants with families (Schäfer 2005: 121-124). In response to the shortage of funeral venues in the 1970s, city councils built crematoria that included funeral chapels (thus providing an alternative venue to churches). Then the funeral directing industry, concerned that they were losing control over the format of funerals to councils, began building their own multi-purpose funeral premises which were used for religious and non-religious funerals. Funeral directors took on a function of recommending and matching particular celebrants with their client families. This, in combination with the control they had as owners of the funeral premises, meant funeral directors had a significant degree of control over who officiated at funerals for their clients (Schäfer 2005: 121-124). Funeral directors, then, partly influence whether celebrants become established offering client-centred (religious and non-religious) ceremonies.

Next I discuss some broad observations about what constitutes spirituality, based on my own experience as a celebrant and my discussions with celebrants. The themes here are New Zealanders of European descent reclaiming the spiritual traditions of their European ancestors, and New Zealanders' spiritual connections with the land, and with New Zealand specifically. There is some evidence of a trend towards New Zealanders of European descent strengthening their knowledge of and participation in spiritual traditions of their European ancestors. Some of this has been inspired by publications such as Juliet Batten's *Celebrations for the Southern Seasons: Rituals for Aotearoa* (1995, 2005), which gives suggestions for rituals for New Zealanders today that are based on pagan European and Christian traditions. Where once cultural differences within the Pakeha community were minimised, reduced, concealed, and denied (Belich, 2001:216), in recent decades Pakeha have taken an increasing interest in the divergent groups of European migrants and the cultural and spiritual traditions which were celebrated in their countries and cultures of origin (Clarke, 2007:4). Ceremonies I have conducted illustrate this, where as an independent

celebrant I was involved in reviving European spiritual traditions linked to the ancestry or life experiences of my clients. Examples included honouring the earth and the four cardinal directions at the outset of many ceremonies; Celtic hand-fasting to symbolise union and balance in ceremonies of marriage, civil union, and commitment; inclusion of poetry and blessings written by Irish, Scottish, and English authors; and gifting of poems written specifically for a couple's wedding (epithalamion), more recently an English tradition which can be traced back to ancient Greek times.

What does this situation, where New Zealanders of European descent are more consciously celebrating aspects of their European heritage, tell us about how people are now constructing their identities? It suggests that for some people, their ethnic and cultural ancestors are perhaps becoming more relevant and important in their expressions of their identities. Māori culture has, and continues to be, strongly ancestor-oriented, as described by Joan Metge (1995) in the context of her work on the changing meaning of whanau in the latter part of the 20th century. Ancestors are included as part of the extended family group, and therefore remain important to Māori families today. Through common roots and shared belonging, kin groups can derive strength and stability. Similar processes whereby European New Zealanders experience a sense of belonging and derive strength and stability from knowing about and acknowledging the cultures of their ancestors may be related to why some Pakeha are overtly identifying with this aspect of their heritage at times of life transition too. This may relate to how some Pakeha are coming to understand more about Māori culture as well. Claudia Bell described Pakeha in the 1980s and 1990s as having a strong awareness of their own cultural distinctiveness as well as a 'growing uncertainty about destiny and identity' (1996: 191-192). That some Pakeha now consider the identities and culture of their ancestors as more relevant to who they are and how they mark significant life changes may be linked with New Zealand society becoming increasingly culturally diverse through migration. Bell (1996) pointed out that New Zealanders of European descent are seeking expression of the cultural distinctiveness through attachment to the ancestors with whom they share lineages, beliefs and values. Those New Zealanders who are reviving links with historical identities and are choosing to celebrate this aspect of their cultural identity

include recent migrants and New Zealanders whose ancestors shifted here generations ago.

Another point of view is that non-Māori New Zealanders are experiencing a contemporary interest in place and context, in ‘the local and the particular’, as a way to ‘offset’ the effects of globalisation (Darragh in Bergin & Smith, 2004:2-3). In relation to spirituality, this could mean that the threat perceived as arising from the forces of globalisation, whereby what is unique to a culture or society is altered or lost, and this leads some people to react by countering the universalising forces. They want to keep control and strongly express what is personal, local, and unique to them, in terms of the places they inhabit and how these shape and inspire their spiritualities and rituals.

I now turn to what I learned about some New Zealanders’ spiritual connections with the land from examining rites of passage from the perspective of celebrants. Some of the important themes include:

- appropriation of land and living-off-the-land as central to the establishment of a European way of life in New Zealand,
- the motifs built up around the relationship with the land (the land of milk and honey, emphasising beauty and fertility of the natural environment) which mask some of the harms related to European colonisation and confiscation of Māori land and the capitalist, industrial exploitation of it;
- continuation of historical European trends of the romanticising of landscapes as sublime, and associated spiritual beliefs around the idealisation of lifestyles in nature;
- tangata whenua and Māori notions of spirituality;
- how New Zealanders (and visitors from abroad who come to New Zealand for their weddings) identify with the spiritual beliefs and ritual practices of Māori,
- the centrality of land-based spirituality to Paganism and women’s spirituality which have both been influential to the development of independent-celebrant based rituals in New Zealand; and
- emerging distinctive Southern Hemisphere based concepts of spirituality where Māori and European-based spiritualities meet, blend, and interrelate.

Here, my aim is not to address each of these comprehensively; rather I intend to discuss the themes which emerged as being shared across the experiences of the mainly Pakeha celebrants I spoke with in the course of this study. From my own experiences as a marriage and civil union celebrant I became curious about the meanings associated with people's frequent choice of outdoor venues for ceremonies such as namings and weddings. I was also intrigued by people's desire to incorporate into their ceremonies words about the New Zealand coast, landscape, land, and nature. Both of these themes have recurred in my own interactions with clients as a celebrant and in ceremonies by, and discussions with, other celebrants. To begin with, in New Zealand it has become common to have weddings outside. Some people choose outdoor weddings because it is common to do so, rather than because they have made conscious, personal decisions around the spiritual connotations or significance of the land, or want to make a deliberate statement against previous religious traditions of marriage in a church. The experience of being 'in' nature can be, but is not necessarily, spiritual. New Zealanders have, and exercise, the freedom to choose where to hold ceremonies. In contrast to capitalist views of early European settlers, being outdoors for some people, is associated more with leisure, rather than exploitation, and many New Zealanders value the outdoors for lifestyle reasons: as a place where they have fun and adventures, where they can enjoy socialising and relaxing. In summertime especially, wedding parties gather and stage their ceremonies in beautiful, dramatic, large open spaces in public and private gardens and reserves and coastal settings, which also allow opportunities to create great visual records of the occasions. Visual records are important and apparently highly valued aspects of contemporary ceremony planning, with people paying substantially for it (hundreds and extending to thousands of dollars is common for wedding photography and videography).

Outdoor settings also represent opportunities for people to create unique wedding experiences which are personally meaningful – the theme of individualism showing through again. In my experience as a celebrant, for example, clients' choice of an outdoor setting often involves an element of seeking somewhere original in the sense of being different from where other family or friends have recently held their ceremonies. It is also somewhere which is 'grandier' than where they live their

everyday lives. Western, romanticist (early 18th century) concepts of people's spiritual connections with nature, which is pure, idyllic, beautiful, and intrinsically valuable, are relevant too. One element of this apparent connection some New Zealanders have with nature involves 'simple romanticism, or mysticism of place but more often a generic and abiding love of the bush as a living link with the primordial and settler culture' (Morris, Ricketts, & Grimshaw, 2004: 187). Some people seek to express a link with the land, spiritual or otherwise, through contemporary rite of passage ceremonies. This ritual expression includes being situated in the outdoors which, in addition to being aesthetically pleasurable, can also have (symbolic or other) spiritual power derived from being in nature where there is the sense of being close to something larger, a sense of wholeness, abundance, and a deep sense of satisfaction with being somewhere inherently familiar when a life-changing transformation is being ritually marked. Celebrants' understanding is that, for some people, being outdoors represents a place which is culturally inspirational and powerful, a place of revelation and contemplation – where people feel can connected with nature, the land, the coast, the lakes, and other aspects of nature important to their individual and communal identities and sense of belonging.

The historian Michael King wrote that Pakeha New Zealanders 'identify intimately with this land' (King, 1999: 239). *Land and Place: He Whenua, He Waahi: Spiritualities from Aotearoa* (Bergin & Smith, 2004) collates essays deriving from the spirituality of the tangata whenua, from geographical features of the land, spiritualities linked to transformation, renewal and the cycles of earth, Christian spiritualities, and from the ancestries of New Zealand migrants. In it, Elizabeth Julian described how 'many New Zealanders find evidence of the divine in the natural world ... landscape plays a formative role in our spirituality' (Julian in Bergin & Smith, 2004: 99). Julian described how the connection between landscape and spirituality is evident in New Zealand arts, literature, and popular culture (Julian, in Bergin & Smith 2004: 100-103). The works of poets Joy Cowley and Ann Powell are examples mentioned by Julian, which I found to be popular choices by clients of mine, too. Neil Darragh, in *Land and Place*, commented on the diversity of relationships revealed and the diversity of reflections on what these relationships mean (Darragh in Bergin & Smith, 2004: 3). Diversity can encompass the phenomenon of there being aspects of people's spiritualities specific to New Zealand

and shared by New Zealanders, whilst at the same time allowing for varying spiritualities based on people's cultures, religions, contexts, and individual beliefs. This flexibility to incorporate diverse spiritual beliefs and expectations of where and how these are enacted and expressed ritually is a characteristic of how celebrants perceived they are expected to work in contemporary ritual-making settings. Sometimes celebrants described their knowledge of explicit spiritual significance in people's choice of an outdoor setting and sometimes there are other aspects of this spirituality in the ritual itself, such as talking about, and including readings related to, the importance of the land and nature, which are clearly and deliberately linked to spirituality. This can be seen to be an expression of some New Zealanders' self-images as people appreciative of nature, who live active outdoor lives, close to nature (Durr, 2007: 64), even though this view is arguably more mythical than it is realistic (Bell, 1996: 28-40).

Connections and engagement with people, places, and cultural knowledge are ways in which 'belonging' can be revealed (Cohen in Robinson, 2005). Meaningful places in a contemporary New Zealand context were described by Robinson (2005) as including 'birth places, areas of ancestral and personal residence, and travel locations' (2005: 148). Practices of belonging for New Zealand women in one region (Whanganui) derived from 'active practices in everyday life, shared and common experiences, place attachment through inscription, environmental engagement and emotion, and belonging to communities, collectives and individuals through embodiment, performativity and narrative; knowledge of and engagement in cultural codes of conduct; and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge' (Robinson, 2005: 213). I found ritual practices are another way in which celebrants felt some Pakeha men and women expressed belonging to New Zealand, and the land in particular. For some this was through their choice of outdoor venue for rite of passage ceremonies. It was also recognisable through the inclusion of symbols and references to the emotional and spiritual meanings of the land in such ceremonies.

As well as acknowledging that in contemporary western society people have a 'multitude of views and lifestyles' (Nash & Stewart, 2002:12), these views and lifestyles also change during people's lives. People's spiritualities are not necessarily cohesive or static. Peter Donovan acknowledged this when he described the roles

memory and habit play in how New Zealanders ‘follow their various paths of morality and spirituality in a haphazard way, influenced more by upbringing and schooling than by the lively effects of a current religious affiliation’ (Donovan 1996: 258). New Zealanders are not alone in this respect. Rachael Kohn, too, notes the vague, eclectic beliefs held by many contemporary westerners and how people are ‘uncertain of the boundaries’ of their spiritual beliefs, constantly ‘exploring the territory and expanding their field of vision or paring it down to size’ (Kohn, 2003:1-7). I found the detailed components of what Kohn describes as the characteristics of ‘new believers’ to be relevant to New Zealanders, although casting groups of people into discrete, mutually exclusive groups with distinct typologies seemed too simplistic. Firstly, the fact that people are not certain of the boundaries of their spiritual beliefs was confirmed by celebrants who described how many people who come to them are uncertain and unable to articulate at the outset of the ritual design process what forms of spiritual and religious expression they desire. These characteristics are accurately understood only when they are considered alongside the importance of the personal and social functional roles of rite of passage ritual, since expression of religious and spiritual beliefs are not necessarily a central focus of the rites of passage performed.<sup>55</sup> Like the ‘new believers’ described by Kohn, celebrants conveyed that they were comfortable to reshape received traditions and mint new spiritual practices with, and for, clients. Celebrants expect to have to create a relationship and take time to work at seeking to understand their clients’ wishes and expectations about how spirituality is reflected in ceremonies. And they understand that what is important is what the clients want ‘now’, as this might be different from spiritualities they have grown up with or particular ceremonies they have taken part in at other times in their lives. Paul Morris et al. (2004) described New Zealanders’ spiritualities as being based on ‘multiple memories, our varieties of heritage, our communal experiences of hope and despair, peace and death, triumph and tragedy, our magpies’ nest of collected cultures that make us who we are and what we are’ (Morris, et al., 2004: 17-18). Drawing on analysis of New Zealanders’ spiritual verse, Morris explains how spiritualities need to be viewed as ‘complex, plural, and dynamic’, to capture the sense of a unique New Zealand spirituality and

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<sup>55</sup> Harvey regarded it as invidious to assume universal applicability of the notion that belief, as inner affirmations of affiliation, as always taking precedence over actions (2005: 14). For discussions on the contested and complicated notion of belief, see Fuchs (2009) and Lindquist and Coleman (2008).

within this, diverse spiritual identities which are constantly being reworked and contested.

Another important issue in the discussion of New Zealanders' spiritualities is that independent marriage celebrants often find themselves in the role of working to cater for the needs of intercultural or interfaith couples marrying. Ritual elements which can be inclusive of multiple spiritual beliefs can be useful in these situations. A good example is including a time of silence during a ceremony for people to pray or contemplate (which may or may not be guided by the words of the celebrant). People of different faiths and spiritual beliefs then have an opportunity to enact something private or reflect in ways meaningful to them without everyone gathered being led through the same thing, which could feel inappropriate to some of them. Barrie, a funeral celebrant, described such a situation:

*In a funeral service, where there would be no religious component in that ceremony, I generally always have a period for reflection time. A few moments of silence and generally listen to a piece of music afterwards. I preface that by generally saying "This is an opportunity for those who are believers to pray and for those who are not just to quietly listen and think of John or Suzy". Frequently people will come up and say just how much they appreciated, they wanted a religious service, but they appreciated that invitation to pray. (Barrie, 1/11/05 )*

In relation to funeral work, decision-making around whose spiritualities are reflected in ceremonies is left to the family who are the clients of the celebrant concerned. Where possible, celebrants select ritual components which are as inclusive as possible, reflecting the spiritual beliefs of significant family members alive as well as those of the deceased (when the family chooses this), and often also incorporating respectfully the broad spiritual (often Christian religious) beliefs relating to the older generation gathered. Celebrants' inclusion of a 'time of reflection' in ceremonies is one example of how they achieve inclusion. As a way of coping with different, possibly conflicting, beliefs, celebrants can be seen not to attempt to harness and bring these together, but rather to leave space for them to be apart.

Another example is when celebrants introduce something from a particular cultural, religious, or spiritual tradition. The significance of this to the main ritual participants is explained in anticipation of everyone affirming and respecting it. The wedding example in Chapter Seven includes an illustration of this, where near the beginning

of the ceremony the celebrant explains the spiritual traditions which converge in it. As the ceremony proceeds, the celebrant explains how she wishes everyone gathered to participate. For example, guests are asked to join in reciting a Buddhist prayer and later a Christian prayer, and the celebrant explains the significance of the gifts – bookmarks created from woven coloured threads which symbolise the various Buddhist, Native American, and Christian elements of the faiths of the couple. Rituals are thereby inclusive in that they generate an appearance, at least, of everyone gathered being tolerant of the beliefs of the chosen tradition because they are aware of its meaning whilst they are attending or participating. Celebrants tend not to regard these occasions as appropriate times for highlighting differences in beliefs amongst people gathered. New Zealand society is made up of people from a wide range of diverse ethnic, cultural and spiritual traditions and here I have shown that celebrants in such a context no longer perpetuate religious beliefs or ritual traditions. They must fit in with people's changing beliefs, lifestyles, and preferences whilst navigating a safe, respectful path that honours the diversity and satisfies clients. While they respond to clients, celebrants as ritual-makers also play an active role in creating change in ritual traditions, adding to the diversity, and facilitating for those who want to ritualise in their own distinctive ways.

## **9 Conclusions**

This thesis has examined how one group of contemporary ritual-makers in New Zealand work for clients to reflect the significance and meanings those clients attribute to particular life transitions that they choose to mark ritually. I have shown that independent celebrants are actively engaged in changing ritual traditions. Their understanding of their role is one of creating rituals that satisfy the demands and honour the diversity of their clients' personal spiritualities, so prioritising the values and preferences of the individuals who are their direct clients. In the course of this work, these ritual-makers are further destabilising the theoretical distinctions between what is secular, spiritual, and religious.

Ritual is not a distinct type of activity separate from other aspects of how people interact, communicate, and express themselves. Its nature is dynamic: people adapt and reinterpret it in response to their changing lives and beliefs. Rites of passage are a particular subset of ritual expressive of people's culturally specific beliefs and values around important life transitions. Dramatic, expressive, embodied performances of sacred moments and transitions, rites of passage are one way in which people mark and traditionalise important transformations and other occasions. These rituals are expressive and symbolic of the cultures, communities, values and beliefs of the individuals most closely involved in commissioning and planning the ritual, as well as the values and beliefs of the ritual-makers concerned. One way of examining how rituals and societies change is to consider how individuals' lives and beliefs become connected and entangled with one another's. It is within the fluidity of social and cultural life that rituals take place. Ritual theory, to date, has emphasised the technology of ritual more than ritual-makers and the processes of ritual change and does not adequately explain the nature of what this particular group of contemporary ritual-makers – independent celebrants – do. This study sharpens the focus on the people who are ritual-makers, how they work, and the rituals they perform. In it, I have looked predominantly at life transition rituals which are ritual-marking of transformations and significant life changes, whereby individuals, communities and societies communicate, celebrate, and commemorate changing social roles, relationships, and identities. Providing a contemporary New Zealand

ritual-makers' perspective to ritual theory, this study examines ritual-making from the perspective of the ritual-makers themselves, explaining their perspectives on how they create and adapt rites of passage.

There are around two thousand independent celebrants in New Zealand. What characterises independent celebrants' approach is the primary importance they place on client-centred ritual-making. Independent celebrants developed their ceremonies foremost around their clients' desires and meanings. Unlike members of the church and other organisations, independent celebrants are appointed as named individuals, and work directly for their clients, not as representatives of the church or other organisation. This distinction was important historically, in explaining the client-focused nature of the rituals independent celebrants perform. Their specific roles, which are often broader than ritual enactment, are negotiated in each situation, reflecting the variations of what individual celebrants offer and taking into account the differing needs of each client. A range of motivations and styles and ways of working make up the *modus operandi* of this community of ritual-makers. Within their various ritual-making processes celebrants can be seen as advocates for both tradition and for change. A sense of calling, whereby they were both fulfilling roles important to them personally and serving the ritual needs of their communities and clients was evident across most celebrants.

Celebrants bring experiences from a range of backgrounds, in areas emphasising interpersonal and communication skills, performance and public speaking, care, support and human service work, and community and civic work. Celebrants are a diverse group which is reflective, to an extent, of the diversity of cultural and spiritual traditions held by contemporary New Zealanders. Reasons celebrants stated for why they were involved in the work included community service, opportunities to undertake paid work, interest and competencies in communications, belief in the power of ritual to help people cope with change and loss, and opportunities for creative expression. These motivations varied between celebrants and tended to be associated with the type of ceremonies they provided, and in many instances factors motivating celebrants in their roles changed over time.

Increased secularism, individualism, pluralism, and eclecticism were key socio-cultural themes and processes impacting on how New Zealanders live and how we marked rites of passage which influenced the emergence in the late 1970s of independent celebrant-led ritual in New Zealand. The changing and diversifying cultural and spiritual world-views of New Zealanders are reflected in the choices some people make about whether and how to ritualise life transitions. Historically, Christianity has been a strong part of the social and religious history of New Zealanders. Most Pakeha are descendents of British migrants of various Christian denominations: Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist, and Baptist. Many Māori were converted to Christianity in the early years of European settlement. Rites of passage for Pakeha up until 1970s were typically celebrated or commemorated in a Christian church. Over time the nature of religious affiliation has changed and now there is more religious diversity, nominal affiliations to Christian denominations, secularism, and other emerging spiritualities.

The considerable homogeneity, stability, and conformity, which had characterised Pakeha society up until the 1960s, was followed by rapid cultural change from the 1970s onwards. The roots of this change were in the counterculture movements, and in the processes of secularisation and diversification of beliefs and lifestyles. The relative homogeneity of non-Māori society was superseded by more multicultural, diverse, individual-based values and practices. Immigration, particularly from various parts of Asia and the Middle East, has broadened the range of religions and the number of adherents. Sikh, Hindu, Moslem, Buddhist, and Orthodox communities have grown. For rites of passage, people have gained more freedom of choice about whether to mark life transitions such as births and marriages ritually. And for those people who did choose ritual, variety emerged in the nature of the rituals practised. Reflecting and driving this innovation were new types of celebrants who began to gain popularity. Alternatives to religious celebrants emerged in the form of secular funeral celebrants. Civil marriage celebrants (who later became known also as independent celebrants) began to operate alongside the traditional religious celebrants and registrars who had previously shared the task of officiating at marriages. Likewise, independent celebrants became involved in other ceremonies which clergy had been deeply involved in, such as funerals and ceremonies associated with birth and welcoming children.

Some of the diverse range of approaches and beliefs independent celebrants brought to their ritual-making included earth-based spiritualities, feminism, Christianity, social work, grief counselling, and civil rights philosophies. Prior to the establishment of professional bodies and training, celebrants were largely self-taught, and operated quite independently of one another. Some celebrants struggled because of this isolation from others and lack of guidance on how to fulfil their independent celebrant roles. Some, however, claim to have relished this freedom, as it meant that they could bring their own creativity and innovation and beliefs to their ritual-making relatively easily, albeit that they needed to be in agreement with their clients about ritual content and meaning. In the late 1990s, the nature of the celebrant community altered with the emergence of entirely voluntary training courses and opportunities for membership of professional organisations which offered celebrants ways of preparing for their roles, connecting with peers, and ongoing development of their practice.

In a passive sense, celebrants claim to respond to the requests of their clients. In an active sense, they claim to advocate for the role of ritual and proactively suggest elements and symbols to include in it to support people in times of loss and celebrate or mark appropriately other life transitions or occasions. Celebrants perceive their role as exploring with, and adapting and personalising ritual to the needs and expectations of clients. They regard their ritual-making practices as dynamic; celebrants adapt their working processes according to the situations they are working in. Participants' intentions inform the format and scripted meaning of what will happen in the ceremony, prior to their enactment. Celebrants have been instrumental in supporting ritual participants' choice to mark an increasingly wide range of rituals through encouraging people in their desires to mark life transitions ritually, bringing ritual-making expertise and resources which have allowed people to fulfil their needs and expectations around ritual-making and ritual participation. Some of the diversity and complexity in ritual situations which celebrants negotiate includes:

- adapting rituals to reflect clients' particular meanings shaped by their various cultures, spiritualities, and religions;
- expressions of 'hybrid' identities;

- negotiating complexities of ritual situations which bring together people who hold different beliefs and wish these to be expressed in ceremonies;
- new events which people are giving ritual recognition to;
- life events previously kept private but now being shared and ritualised with the involvement of ritual-makers in planning and facilitation;
- reclamation and retrieval of ritual elements and cultural traditions from European ancestors;
- diverse, personal and changing spiritualities; and
- rituals made up of a pastiche of eclectic ritual elements from a multiple of different cultural and spiritual contexts.

Unlike in traditional contexts where ritual-makers work on behalf of the collective / community, contemporary ritual-makers are accountable, foremost, to their individual clients. The specific meanings conveyed in any one ritual are individually determined, rather than determined by community. Celebrants assert that clients have considerable influence over the meanings expressed in the rituals celebrants create for them. In a contemporary western context, people hold a diverse range of spiritual beliefs and world-views, and can choose to express these through ritual if they wish. The picture this study gives of what is actually going on with regard to some 'secular' ritual is a fascinating one. On one hand there is substantial freedom around whether to ritualise at all, and for those who do choose to ritualise life transitions and other important occasions, celebrants demonstrate that there is flexibility in the nature of the ritual performed.

There has been a broadening in the types of ritual-markings taking place and independent celebrants can be seen in leading roles in this regard. As well as responding to client demands for ritual-marking of important occasions, celebrants claim to advocate for the role of ritual commemoration and celebration at times when people find this beneficial and supportive. Attitudes have changed so that there is a greater tolerance for people's freedom to legitimately 'make' ritual. For many New Zealanders, authority to determine the need for ritual and the nature and form of the ritual practised is something they have greater control of at an individual level than in the past, and is no longer the domain of religious celebrants. People's knowledge and understanding of rituals from multiple cultural traditions is growing, and this is

strongly evident in celebrants' descriptions of their clients knowing and requesting some of the ritual components they want celebrants to combine for them in effective and meaningful ways. Clients choose whether they wish to ritualise life transitions and other significant life events and they commission celebrants on a ritual-by-ritual basis when they do. What I can conclude from this qualitative study with celebrants is that independent celebrants in particular, and some more than others, regard themselves as being at the leading edge of this trend towards exploring and innovating in two particular areas. The first is in terms of their willing response to curiosity and demand from clients for something different, new, or out of the ordinary. The second is in terms of advocating for where there might be a role for ritual and making known what they offer and why they think people might find it appropriate, beneficial, healing, or meaningful.

Instead of being experts in the rites of a shared religion or world-view, contemporary ritual-makers display expertise in processes of ritual-making. They use their ritual-making skills to construct and adapt rituals which reflect the views, beliefs, and desires of particular individuals or other specified small groups of ritual participants. The rituals do not necessarily reflect the views of the ritual-makers themselves (but they can) nor are they intended to bring about broader social order to the groups of ritual participants with whom they are shared. Ritual-making is the domain of many, in contemporary western contexts. The ritual-making expertise of the ritual-maker is recognised, and rewarded. However, this knowledge is not held exclusively by the ritual-makers. In contemporary contexts, many people who are interested in ritual can easily find out about how to do it more easily, how it has been done historically, and what rituals are like in other cultures. Some contemporary ritual-makers describe co-creating rituals with their clients. Others construct rituals on behalf of their clients, and according to celebrants, clients typically bring to this process requests for ritual elements that are personally meaningful to them.

Celebrants regard clients' spiritualities as integrated into their overall identity and attempt to be open to embracing spiritual aspects of clients' expectations of the ritual. The diversity of personal spiritualities means that where ceremonies are focused around the needs and participation of more than one individual, a task for ritual-makers is negotiating how to reflect or respect multiple spiritual perspectives

within the ritual framework. Van Gennep's (1960) view of rites of passage was as a structuring device that everyone, across all societies, participate in in various ways, to mark individual or collective life transitions which could be changes in status or people, or seasons. The three-part ritual structure identified one hundred years ago has been embraced in a popular sense by contemporary western ritual-makers including independent celebrants in New Zealand and is used as a structuring device for ritual design in contemporary settings. The eclectic mix of ritual elements, symbols, and traditions selected from a variety of cultural contexts and remade into pastiche contemporary ceremonies celebrants describe were often built around van Gennep's three-part ritual framework.

From a celebrant's point of view, the 'rightness' of ritual lies with the individuals who sponsor it and participate in it. It is not a straightforward task to identify any type or style of ritual which is typical, normal, or right and could therefore be applied across the whole of society. New Zealand society comprises people from a wide range of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious traditions with diverse spiritual preferences and beliefs, and these are pertinent to their expectations for personalised rituals. The function of contemporary ritual is more than an expression of shared belief. Celebrants accept that spirituality means different things to different people, and claim to try carefully not to assume what it means for their clients but to explore this openly. In relation to spirituality in ritual, the role of the celebrant as a functionary rather than a religious specialist is reinforced by this study, however it must be noted that this study relies strongly on the views of celebrants themselves. This would seem to be different from the traditional role of ritual-maker, which is one of leading ritual participants through the ritual form and at the same time conveying to them, through the ritual form, important shared meanings relating to the occasion, the individuals' identities, and their belonging to the particular culture or faith.

Amongst some celebrants there are claims towards a growing recognition of spirituality being inseparable from the ritual-making relationship and of the importance of celebrants being knowledgeable and spiritually sensitive in their practice. Celebrants' described aspects of peoples' spiritualities which were specific to New Zealand. They felt they were tolerant of people's different spiritualities from

their cultures, religions, contexts, and individual beliefs, which meant they needed to find ways of enacting and expressing these diverse spiritualities ritually. Many celebrant-led rituals are richly spiritual. Processes of personalisation extend to the expression of clients' personal spiritualities in ritual. People's desires that their personal spiritualities were reflected meant that ritual-makers claimed to need to be sensitive to this and described processes by which they sought to understand and incorporate spiritual aspects with other elements of ritual-making. In some ritual-making, celebrants described incorporating, in collaboration with and on behalf of, clients of European descent, elements of European ritual traditions as a way of acknowledging these clients' life experiences, travels, and identities, and their links with their ancestors. Celebrants explained how some clients also wanted ritual elements and cultural traditions from other cultures to be included in their rites of passage; celebrants' responses to such requests varied and were based on their own values and ethics on cultural borrowing and appropriation.

Christian heritage is deeply implicated in Pakeha cultural approaches to making ceremony and so Christian elements are included in ceremonies sometimes as part of the familiar, religious and folk heritage of New Zealand. Some celebrants are familiar with Christian ritual traditions from their own upbringing or affiliation, and therefore can lead in situations where clients ask for these same ritual traditions. Ritual practices are one way in which some Pakeha men and women expressed belonging to New Zealand, and the land in particular. For some this was through their choice of an outdoor venue for rite of passage ceremonies. It was also recognisable through the inclusion of symbols and references to the emotional and spiritual meanings of the land in rite of passage ceremonies. Processes of secularism, individualism, personalisation, globalism, localism, and eclecticism can be seen to be impacting on contemporary ritual when it is viewed from the perspective of these ritual-makers. Rituals express a combination of beliefs that reflect celebrants' own social and cultural contexts, as well as their clients'. In this way spirituality in celebrant-led ritual is linked with the changing role and ever-changing expression of ritual. These ritual-makers' role is no longer one of upholding and perpetuating traditions in terms of religious beliefs or ritual forms. They must fit in with the changes whilst navigating safe, respectful paths that they believe honours the diversity and satisfies their clients. Now it is the clients' personal spiritualities which

predominate, and so the role of ritual is less about reinforcing collectively held norms and more about expressing individual values and preferences.

Looking to the future, there remain many celebrants whose untold stories I would love to hear and preserve as oral histories. It is my view that this information is valuable to the celebrant community and the feedback I received from celebrants during this study on how rewarding they found the experience of making the recordings fuels my continued enthusiasm. Given that one aspect of celebrant-led ritual which I have focused on in my findings has been highlighting the role independent celebrants have played in supporting ritual participants' choice to mark an increasingly wide range of rituals, quantifying the number and changes in ways many New Zealanders mark rites of passage and to be able to numerically assess the changes and trends over time would be useful. This is something I explored with one of the celebrant professional bodies, and whilst they were interested, they were unable to dedicate the necessary resources to it. Another possible avenue by which a survey of people's ritual-making might occur is by including questions about it in a lifestyle and values survey (an approach which was taken in the UK in the mid 1990s, but not continued). Potential sponsors of such research might be a university, or a government agency such as Department of Statistics, or a commercial sponsor (e.g. a consortium of service providers).

It would have been more satisfying to include more of the material I gathered on a wider variety of rituals, especially newer ones such as civil unions, in this thesis. The reason I could not do so was because the nature of a thesis required that I delve into the theoretical aspects of the material in an in-depth manner and the best way to do this meant focusing one type of ritual. I selected marriage, a ceremony which most independent celebrants perform and so one where most participants could contribute. This meant I had a rich pool of material, including my own experience as a marriage celebrant, on which to base my analysis. Within the parameters of a thesis, it would not have been practical to do this for several rituals in a sufficiently in-depth manner. I have identified different types of rituals as well, to demonstrate some of the variety of newer and changing rituals celebrants get involved in, but further analysis of these will need to be the subject of later studies.

Deeper exploration of civil unions, naming ceremonies, and public ceremonies of remembrance would complement this study. Civil unions are relatively new to New Zealand, the evolution of civil union ceremonies into the repertoire of ritual would be interesting from the perspective of how ritual is invented and adapted. From my discussions with a few marriage celebrants who are also civil union celebrants (only a small number of whom had performed civil union ceremonies at the time I spoke with them as so few civil unions had taken place at that stage), and also based on my own two civil union ceremonies, there are several processes in play. These include creativity around the civil union ceremony, drawing from civil ceremonies of commitment and from gay ceremonies of commitment, and adopting aspects of heterosexual wedding ceremonies into civil union ceremonies. An additional dynamic in exploring the development of civil union ceremonies would be to compare the types of rituals and ways of working of civil union celebrants who came to the work from different backgrounds. Some were already ritual-makers or marriage celebrants when they were appointed civil union celebrants, whereas others were new to ritual-making, being selected on the basis of their interest in performing ceremonies for same-sex clients. Professional celebrant networks are paying attention to a need identified by civil union celebrants for more information on what civil union ceremonies could or should be. The contribution of professional bodies on civil unions might result in more standardised ritual forms emerging, which would be in contrast to the self-taught methods for devising ceremonies independent marriage celebrants utilised devising marriage ceremonies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Naming ceremonies (which are becoming more common to replace christenings and baptisms) is another area where I believe further research would be valuable. As with the rituals I have focused on in this study, Christianity strongly influences naming ceremonies and there are similarities between Christian baptism services and naming ceremonies. In my observation, creativity and innovation are strong characteristics of contemporary naming ceremonies – these joyous celebrations are times when celebrants and clients feel most able to do something different, and the rituals are often a rich eclectic mix of traditional ritual components and other symbols and elements to reflect contemporary lives, challenges, and aspirations for children. They offer a window onto the processes of ritual syncretism whereby diverse ethnic and spiritual ritual traditions of family members are revived, adapted, and blended. And

finally, international comparisons with other contemporary celebrants could also prove fruitful in highlighting particularly New Zealand aspects of the ritual and ritual-making.

## **Appendix 1: Oral History Interviews Information Sheet**

### **Research into what celebrants do and why**

My name is Julie Macdonald. I am a celebrant and I am a student researching civil celebrancy, towards a PhD in social anthropology at Massey University. I believe that what celebrants do is unique and important work. I would like to honour this work by writing it up in a way which explores some of the diverse range of ritual and ceremony celebrants are involved in, and acknowledge the contributions of the pioneers and innovators and leaders in this field.

Currently there is very little written about celebrants in New Zealand or anywhere. Through this research I aim to:

- understand the people who work as celebrants;
- discover the rituals and ceremonies conducted by celebrants;
- examine meanings and significance celebrants attribute to their work and rituals;
- understand celebrants' perspectives on spirituality; and
- explore the cultural context of civil celebrancy in New Zealand.

To build an understanding of the ideas and ways of working from a range of different celebrants' perspectives, I am carrying out a series of recorded oral history interviews with celebrants. I am not seeking to interview any clients of celebrants in this research.

### **Oral history interviews with celebrants**

I would like to invite you to take part in a recorded oral history interview. Before I record the oral history interview we would agree the areas for discussion and I would write up an interview guide to reflect this. We can carry out the interview over more than one session if you would like this. I anticipate that 1-3 sessions would be needed, and each of these would take around 1.5 to 2 hours, at a time and place convenient to you. I will tape record the interview and then transcribe our discussion.

### **Participation is voluntary**

Taking part is voluntary. You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study any time up to December 2006;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview; and
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

This study is independent from my work as a research consultant. I am carrying out this research as a student of the School of Social and Cultural Studies at Massey University. Whilst I am a member of the Celebrants Association of New Zealand (CANZ) and I am on the Wellington Branch Committee, this research is completely independent from CANZ or any professional celebrancy organisation.

### **Opportunity to see transcripts**

You will have a chance to see the transcript of the interview and make corrections or withdraw any part of the information from the study if you wish.

At any time before, during, or after the interview up until December 2006 you can withdraw any or all of your interview information and this will not be included.

The information from the transcribed recordings will be combined with information from all oral history interviews and included in my research report. I intend that you will be identifiable in this research report – the nature of this study is to reflect the diversity of perspectives and contributions of the people who are involved in celebrancy and so I am not aiming to generate anonymous information.

### **Publication for this study**

A copy will be made of the recording of your interview which will be stored at my home office at 69 Nottingham Street, Karori, Wellington. I will generate transcripts and excerpts for analysis and inclusion in the research report from this copy. After five years the copy will be destroyed.

### **Publication for future use**

With your agreement, the original recording of your interview(s) will be submitted to the Oral History Centre at the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington. Prior to this placement you will have the opportunity to state in writing if you would like to restrict access to these recordings so that there is no access to them, or no publication of them until a particular release date, if you prefer. Alternatively, tape(s) can be returned to you if you wish.

### **The research report will be available**

When the research is completed you are welcome to receive a copy of the summary report or the full report. I will also be sharing the results through the Celebrants' Association, via a conference paper or seminar presentation, and submitting a summary article to the Celebrants' Association and Celebrants' Guild newsletters.

My thesis will be publicly available in libraries and I will be seeking to publish academic papers on aspects of the research.

### **Contacts for further information**

If you have any questions please contact me, Julie, or my supervisors, Kathryn and Mary.

Researcher: Julie Macdonald [julie.macdonald@paradise.net.nz](mailto:julie.macdonald@paradise.net.nz)

Supervisors: Dr Kathryn Rountree [k.e.rountree@massey.ac.nz](mailto:k.e.rountree@massey.ac.nz)

Dr Mary Nash [m.nash@massey.ac.nz](mailto:m.nash@massey.ac.nz)

### **Ethics Committee Approval**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, ALB Application 05/033. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Kerry Chamberlain, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Albany, telephone 09 414 0800 x9078, email [humanethicsalb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsalb@massey.ac.nz). Thank you very much.

## Appendix 2: Privacy Rights and Responsibilities Information Sheet

### INFORMATION PRIVACY PRINCIPLES

#### NOTE

In some cases agencies are authorised or required by other legislation to collect, use, retain, or make available, personal information, and in most cases where an agency collects, uses, retains or makes available personal information in accordance with such legislation this will not amount to a breach of the Privacy Act. (section 7 of the Privacy Act 1993).

#### PRINCIPLE 1

##### Purpose of collection of personal information

Personal information shall not be collected by any agency unless-

- (a) The information is collected for a lawful purpose connected with a function or activity of the agency; and
- (b) The collection of the information is necessary for that purpose.

#### PRINCIPLE 2

##### Source of personal information

(1) Where an agency collects personal information, the agency shall collect the information directly from the individual concerned.

(2) It is not necessary for an agency to comply with subclause (1) of this principle if the agency believes, on reasonable grounds,-

- (a) That the information is publicly available information; or
- (b) That the individual concerned authorises collection of the information from someone else; or
- (c) That non-compliance would not prejudice the interests of the individual concerned; or
- (d) That non-compliance is necessary --
  - (i) To avoid prejudice to the maintenance of the law by any public sector agency, including the prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution, and punishment of offences; or
  - (ii) For the enforcement of a law imposing a pecuniary penalty; or
  - (iii) For the protection of the public revenue; or
  - (iv) For the conduct of proceedings before any court or Tribunal (being proceedings that have been commenced or are reasonably in contemplation); or
- (e) That compliance would prejudice the purposes of the collection; or
- (f) That compliance is not reasonably practicable in the circumstances of the particular case; or
- (g) That the information-
  - (i) Will not be used in a form in which the individual concerned is identified; or
  - (ii) Will be used for statistical or research purposes and will not be published in a form that could reasonably be expected to identify the individual concerned; or
- (h) That the collection of the information is in accordance with an authority granted under section 54 of this Act.

**PRINCIPLE 3**

**Collection of information from subject**

(1) Where an agency collects personal information directly from the individual concerned, the agency shall take such steps (if any) as are, in the circumstances, reasonable to ensure that the individual concerned is aware of -

- (a) The fact that the information is being collected; and
- (b) The purpose for which the information is being collected; and
- (c) The intended recipients of the information; and
- (d) The name and address of -
  - (i) The agency that is collecting the information; and
  - (ii) The agency that will hold the information; and
- (e) If the collection of the information is authorised or required by or under law -
  - (i) The particular law by or under which the collection of the information is so authorised or required; and
  - (ii) Whether or not the supply of the information by that individual is voluntary or mandatory; and
- (f) The consequences (if any) for that individual if all or any part of the requested information is not provided; and
- (g) The rights of access to, and correction of, personal information provided by these principles.

(2) The steps referred to in subclause (1) of this principle shall be taken before the information is collected or, if that is not practicable, as soon as practicable after the information is collected.

(3) An agency is not required to take the steps referred to in subclause (1) of this principle in relation to the collection of information from an individual if that agency has taken those steps in relation to the collection, from that individual, of the same information or information of the same kind, on a recent previous occasion.

(4) It is not necessary for an agency to comply with subclause (1) of this principle if the agency believes, on reasonable grounds -

- (a) That non-compliance is authorised by the individual concerned; or
- (b) That non-compliance would not prejudice the interests of the individual concerned; or
- (c) That non-compliance is necessary -
  - (i) To avoid prejudice to the maintenance of the law by any public sector agency, including the prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution, and punishment -of offences; or
  - (ii) For the enforcement of a law imposing a pecuniary penalty; or
  - (iii) For the protection of the public revenue; or
  - (iv) For the conduct of proceedings before any court or Tribunal being proceedings that have been commenced or are reasonably in contemplation); or
- (d) That compliance would prejudice the purposes of the collection; or
- (e) That compliance is not reasonably practicable in the circumstances of the particular case; or

(f) That the information -

- (i) Will not be used in a form in which the individual concerned is identified; or
- (ii) Will be used for statistical or research purposes and will not be published in a form that could reasonably be expected to identify the individual concerned.

**PRINCIPLE 4**

**Manner of collection of personal information**

Personal information shall not be collected by an agency-

- (a) By unlawful means; or
- (b) By means that, in the circumstances of the case, -
  - (i) Are unfair; or
  - (ii) Intrude to an unreasonable extent upon the personal affairs of the individual concerned.

**PRINCIPLE 5**

**Storage and security of personal information**

An agency that holds personal information shall ensure -

- (a) That the information is protected, by such security safeguards as it is reasonable in the circumstances to take, against -
  - (i) Loss; and
  - (ii) Access, use, modification or disclosure, except with the authority of the agency that holds the information; and
  - (iii) Other misuse; and
- (b) That if it is necessary for the information to be given to a person in connection with the provision of a service to the agency, everything reasonably within the power of the agency is done to prevent unauthorised use or unauthorised disclosure of the information.

**PRINCIPLE 6**

**Access to personal information**

(1) Where an agency holds personal information in such a way that it can be readily be retrieved, the individual concerned shall be entitled -

- (a) To obtain from the agency confirmation of whether or not the agency holds such personal information; and
  - (b) To have access to that information.
- (2) Where, in accordance with subclause (1)(b) of this principle, an individual is given access to personal information, the individual shall be advised that, under principle 7, the individual may request the correction of that information.
- (3) The application of this principle is subject to the provisions of Parts IV and V of this Act.

#### PRINCIPLE 7

##### Correction of personal information

(1) Where an agency holds personal information, the individual concerned shall be entitled

- (a) To request correction of the information; and
- (b) To request that there be attached to the information a statement of the correction sought but not made.

(2) An agency that holds personal information shall, if so requested by the individual concerned or on its own initiative, take such steps (if any) to correct that information as are, in the circumstances, reasonable to ensure that, having regard to the purposes for which the information may lawfully be used, the information is accurate, up to date, complete, and not misleading.

(3) Where an agency that holds personal information is not willing to correct that information in accordance with a request by the individual concerned, the agency shall, if so requested by the individual concerned, take such steps (if any) as are reasonable in the circumstances to attach to the information, in such a manner that it will always be read with the information, any statement provided by that individual of the correction sought.

(4) Where the agency has taken steps under subclause (2) or subclause (3) of this principle, the agency shall, if reasonably practicable, inform each person or body or agency to whom the personal information has been disclosed of these steps.

(5) Where an agency receives a request made pursuant to subclause (1) of this principle, the agency shall inform the individual concerned of the action taken as a result of the request.

#### PRINCIPLE 8

##### Accuracy, etc., of personal information to be checked before use

An agency that holds information shall not use that information without taking such steps (if any) as are, in the circumstances, reasonable to ensure that, having regard to the purpose for which the information is proposed to be used, the information is accurate, up to date, complete, relevant, and not misleading.

#### PRINCIPLE 9

##### Agency not to keep personal information for longer than necessary

An agency that holds personal information shall not keep that information for longer than is required for the purposes for which the information may lawfully be used.

## PRINCIPLE 10

### Limits on use of personal information

An agency that holds personal information that was obtained in connection with one purpose shall not use the information for any other purpose unless the agency believes, on reasonable grounds:-

- (a) That the source of the information is a publicly available publication; or
- (b) That the use of the information for that other purpose is authorised by the individual concerned; or
- (c) That non-compliance is necessary -
  - (i) To avoid prejudice to the maintenance of the law by any public sector agency, including the prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution, and punishment of offences; or
  - (ii) For the enforcement of a law imposing a pecuniary penalty; or
  - (iii) For the protection of the public revenue; or
  - (iv) For the conduct of proceedings before any Court or Tribunal (being proceedings that have been commenced or are reasonably in contemplation); or
- (d) That the use of the information for that other purpose is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to-
  - (i) Public health or public safety; or
  - (ii) The life or health of the individual concerned or another individual; or
- (e) That the purpose for which the information is used directly related to the purpose in connection with which the information was obtained; or
- (f) That the information-
  - (i) Is used in a form in which the individual concerned is not identified; or
  - (ii) Is used for statistical or research purposes and will not be published in a form that could reasonably be expected to identify the individual concerned or;
- (g) That the use of the information is in accordance with an authority granted under section 54 of this Act.

## PRINCIPLE 11

### Limits on disclosure of personal information

An agency that holds personal information shall not disclose the information to a person or body or agency unless the agency believes, on reasonable grounds -

- (a) That the disclosure of the information is one of the purposes in connection with which the information was obtained or is directly related to the purposes in connection with which the information was obtained; or
- (b) That the source of the information is a publicly available publication; or
- (c) That the disclosure is to the individual concerned; or
- (d) That the disclosure is authorised by the individual concerned; or
- (e) That non-compliance is necessary -
  - (i) To avoid prejudice to the maintenance of the law by any public

## Appendix 3: Code of Ethical and Technical Practice

### ORIGINS

The National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ) Te Kete Kōrero-a-Waha o te Motu was established as a result of the first national oral history seminar organised in April 1986.

### OBJECTIVES

- to promote the practice and methods of oral history
- to promote standards in oral history interviewing techniques, and in recording and preservation methods.
- to act as a resource of information and to advise on practical and technical problems involved in making oral history recordings.
- to act as a co-ordinator of oral history activities throughout New Zealand.
- to produce an annual oral history journal and regular newsletters.
- to promote regular oral history meetings, talks, seminars, workshops and demonstrations.
- to encourage the establishment of NOHANZ branches throughout New Zealand.
- to improve access to oral history collections held in libraries, archives and museums.

# CODE OF ETHICAL AND TECHNICAL PRACTICE

National Oral History Association of New Zealand  
Te Kete Kōrero-a-Waha o Te Motu  
P.O. Box 3819  
WELLINGTON  
2001

*This Code exists to promote ethical, professional and technical standards in the collection, preservation and use of sound and video oral history material.*

### **Archives, sponsors and organisers of oral history projects have the following responsibilities:**

- To inform interviewees and people interviewed of the importance of this Code for the successful creation and use of oral history material
- To select interviewees on the basis of professional competence and interviewing skill, endeavouring to assign appropriate interviewees to people interviewed
- To see that records of the creation and processing of each interview are kept
- To ensure that each interview is properly indexed and catalogued
- To ensure that preservation conditions for recordings and accompanying material are of the highest possible standard
- To ensure that placement of and access to recordings and accompanying material comply with a signed or recorded agreement with the person interviewed
- To ensure that people interviewed are informed of issues such as copyright, ownership, privacy legislation, and how the interview and accompanying material may be used
- To make the existence of available interviews known through public information channels
- To guard against possible social injury to, or exploitation of people interviewed

### **Interviewers have the following responsibilities:**

- To inform the person interviewed of the purposes and procedures of oral history in general and of the particular project in which they are involved
- To inform the person interviewed of issues such as copyright, ownership, privacy legislation, and how the material and accompanying material may be used
- To develop sufficient skills and knowledge in interviewing and equipment operation, e.g. through reading and training, to ensure a result of the highest possible standard
- To use equipment that will produce recordings of the highest possible standard
- To encourage informative dialogue based on thorough research
- To conduct interviews with integrity
- To conduct interviews with an awareness of cultural or individual sensibilities
- To treat every interview as a confidential conversation, the contents of which are available only as determined by written or recorded agreement with the person interviewed
- To place each recording and all accompanying material in an archive to be available for research, subject to any conditions placed on it by the person interviewed
  - to inform the person interviewed of where the material will be held
- To respect all agreements made with the person interviewed

## Appendix 4: Participant Consent and Oral History Recording Agreement

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

FULL NAME OF PERSON INTERVIEWED .....

NAME OF INTERVIEWER .....

DATE OF INTERVIEW .....

COMMISSIONING ORGANISATION/PERSON .....

COPYRIGHT HOLDER .....

### THIS STUDY

1. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

### FOR FUTURE USE

2. **PLACEMENT** I, the person interviewed, agree that the original recording of my interview and accompanying material, prepared for archival purposes, will be held at.....

3. **ACCESS** I agree that the original recording of my interview and accompanying material may be made available for research, at the above location, subject to any restrictions in paragraph 5.

4. **PUBLICATION** I agree that the original recording of my interview and accompanying material may be quoted in published works in full or in part and that the recording may be broadcast or used in public performances in full or in part (including electronic publication on the internet), with the written consent of the copyright holder, subject to any restrictions in paragraph 5.

5. I require that there will be NO access to  (tick box)

I require that there be NO publication of

I require that there be NO electronic publication on the internet of

the following sections of my interview and accompanying material before the review/release date indicated **WITHOUT MY PRIOR WRITTEN PERMISSION.**

SIDE NUMBERS: \_\_\_\_\_ REVIEW / RELEASE DATE:

\_\_\_\_\_

6. PRIVACY ACT: I understand that this Agreement Form does not affect my rights and responsibilities under the Privacy Act 1993.

7. COMMENTS

\_\_\_\_\_

Person interviewed \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5: Interviewee information Form

### Interviewee Information Form

NAME:

PROJECT:

ADDRESS:

HOURS RECORDED:

PHONE NUMBER:

DATE(S)  
RECORDED:

DATE OF BIRTH:

PLACE OF BIRTH:

ETHNIC ORIGIN:

IWI/HAPU:

MARAE:

VILLAGE:

FATHER'S NAME:

FATHER'S DOB/DOD:

FATHER'S OCCUPATION:

MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME:

MOTHER'S DOB/DOD:

MOTHER'S OCCUPATION:

SISTERS (DOB/DOD):

BROTHERS (DOB/DOD):

EDUCATION:

EMPLOYMENT:

COMMUNITY WORK:

POLITICS:

RELIGION:

LIVED AT:

SPOUSE/PARTNER

NAME/DOB:

SPOUSE/PARTNER

OCCUPATION:

DATE OF MARRIAGE:

CHILDREN (DOB):

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL:

HEALTH:

TECHNICAL REPORT:

EQUIPMENT USED:

SUMMARY:

INTERVIEWER:

ABSTRACTER:

Interview Information Form

PROJECT

NAME

HOURS RECORDED

ADDRESS

DATE(S)  
RECORDED

PHONE NUMBER

DATE OF BIRTH

PLACE OF BIRTH

ETHNIC ORIGIN

TWENTY

MARRIAGE

VILLAGE

FATHER'S NAME

FATHER'S DOB/DOB

FATHER'S OCCUPATION

MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME

MOTHER'S DOB/DOB

MOTHER'S OCCUPATION

SISTERS (DOB/DOB)

BROTHERS (DOB/DOB)

EDUCATION

EMPLOYMENT

## Appendix 6: Interview Guide

### Introduction

This is a guide to the sorts of questions and areas I'd like to talk about in our interview, towards my aims of understanding the people who work as celebrants, the rituals and ceremonies conducted by them, the meanings celebrants attribute to their work, celebrants' perspectives on spirituality, and the cultural context of civil celebrancy in New Zealand.

These areas are starting points for discussion. I am also interested to hear about other areas you feel are important to this study.

### Areas for discussion:

The people who are celebrants

- How did you come to be working as a celebrant? (the processes of preparing, becoming, learning, training to be a celebrant)
- What are your reasons for being involved in celebrancy?
- How does celebrancy fit with (or remain separate from) other aspects of your life/work?

The rituals and ceremonies and what they mean

- What rituals and ceremonies do you 'do' for your clients? (range, examples, new)
- Would you like to describe one (or more) of the rituals / ceremonies you have done?
- How do you put together the ritual? What influences what you do/say/include?
- Do you set out to deliberately change rituals / create new ones?
- How is what you do as a celebrant different from similar ceremonial work done by others?

Perspectives on spirituality, beliefs and values

- Are your beliefs and values (e.g. spiritual, religious, secular) relevant to the rituals you conduct? If so, how ?
- What about clients' beliefs and values – how do these fit with the ritual and ceremonies you conduct for them?

Explore the cultural context of civil celebrancy in New Zealand

- How does what you do as a celebrant say about us in New Zealand?
- Why is there such a demand for celebrancy? What is changing?

Are there other areas you would like to add? Explore

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