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**TAKING THE SPIRITS SERIOUSLY:
NEO-SHAMANISM AND CONTEMPORARY SHAMANIC
HEALING IN NEW ZEALAND**

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of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a phenomenological and comparative study of contemporary shamanic healing and neo-Shamans in New Zealand. It considers neo-Shamanism as a complex of spiritual practices situated within a broad but identifiable cosmological sensibility, and as variable systems of healing. The relationships between neo-Shamans and some other new religious movements in New Zealand, and the similarities or differences between the practices of other neo- and indigenous shamans within a global context are examined. The discussion sits within a larger health and healing discourse about the relationships between neo-Shamanism, complementary and alternative medicine, and biomedicine amongst the medically pluralistic culture of New Zealand. It describes contemporary Māori healing as a possible variant of shamanism within local and global contexts; in particular, it examines the relationships between (some) neo-Shamans in New Zealand and (some) Māori healers.

I argue that modern Western shamans are synthesising and creating multiple 21st century forms of neo-Shamanisms, and that neo-Shamans in New Zealand are part of this emerging (re)construction process. However, neo-Shamans in New Zealand are also unique in that they live and practise in this land, which has led to them creating new spiritual identities as neo-Shamanic practitioners in New Zealand. I suggest that neo-Shamans in New Zealand do many of the things that indigenous shamans have always done and continue to do (such as entering altered states of consciousness), albeit within a particular modern Western cultural context. Moreover, I contend that neo-Shamans are challenging orthodox Western science as they engage in a sacred science that ‘takes the spirits seriously’ (Blain, 2002:74).

Secondly, I argue that many practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine consciously or unconsciously incorporate what might be regarded as shamanistic techniques and tools into their work, creating fusion models of healing. My observation is that the importation of shamanic healing practices into the West has contributed to these processes. I suggest that while at least some contemporary healers might be considered ‘shamans’ in disguise, nomenclature issues around whether or not they should be defined as shamans are less important than the fact that their healing practices have widened to include implicitly or explicitly a spiritual dimension.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although modernism has nearly persuaded too many of us that it generates the best of all possible ways of being human, to date at least, it cannot succeed because our bodies and our material surroundings are resistant. Just as our ordinary, sensual, phenomenological experience still makes it meaningful to talk of “sunrise”, whatever we may intellectually acknowledge the objective truth to be, so too we have far too many experiences of the aliveness of the world and the importance of a diversity of life to fall in step completely with Cartesian modernity (Harvey, 2005:207).

* * * *

I’m called ‘a shaman’ – maybe by people who do not know any better – or even by those who should. But since none of us seem to be able to define exactly what makes the shaman, maybe when people feel the term is the right one, that is enough of a decision and that will have to do (MacLellan, 2003:365).

* * * *

Archaeological evidence suggests that shamans have practised since the earliest Palaeolithic communities evolved, judging by Upper Palaeolithic cave art apparently depicting drug-induced shamanic visions (Lewis-Williams, 2002; Aldhouse-Green & Aldhouse-Green, 2005). Phenomena associated with shamans have intrigued Westerners ever since travellers and traders began to return with shocking but fascinating tales about their experiences amongst indigenous peoples (Narby & Huxley, 2001). The term ‘shaman’, originally used by the Tungus-speaking people of Siberia, has become a general term for practitioners utilising numerous healing and spiritual practices derived from a diverse range of cultures. ‘Shamanism’ as a religious category was invented by Western academics who either romanticised or demonised indigenous healers and religious practitioners as they analysed, labelled and categorised them, tactics that kept shamans firmly ‘other’. Shamanism remains a focus

of interest and curiosity, and academic publications theorising about shamanism and its various guises continue to proliferate. Amongst many traditional societies, shamanic practices are being revitalised and reinvented.

Additionally, grassroots movements throughout the Western world (including New Zealand) have popularised shamanism, particularly over the last thirty or forty years. This attention has occurred during a period of increased interest in nature religions and neo-Paganism, the emergence of the New Age movement, and as the result of publications by people such as Mircea Eliade (1972), Carlos Casteneda (1970) and Michael Harner (1990).¹ Information about shamanism is freely available on the internet, which has created a new category of cyberspace shamans (Harvey, 2003a:16). Neo-Shamans (contemporary Western shamans) learn drumming to induce an altered state of consciousness and enable them to journey to other worlds; they undertake soul retrieval journeys during shamanic workshops, and experience sweatlodges and other healing rituals. In view of the academic and popular interest in shamans and shamanism, it is unsurprising that 'shaman' has become an overworked and contestable word, one riddled with misconceptions and contradictions.

In this thesis, I argue that contemporary Western shamans are synthesising and creating multiple 21st century forms of neo-Shamanisms, and that neo-Shamans in New Zealand are part of this emerging (re)construction process. They are developing new ways of interacting with the worlds (seen and unseen) around them, and healing themselves and others in their communities. I contend that neo-Shamans take the spirits seriously, and that some of their experiences are equivalent to those of many indigenous shamans, as reported in the academic literature. However, neo-Shamans in New Zealand are also unique in that they live and practise in this land with its

¹ Neo-Paganism has been described as an ecological, earth-based spirituality that celebrates fully embodied humans living in the mundane world, in reciprocal relationships with all other beings, including other-than-human persons (Harvey, 1997:vii-viii). The *Pagan Federation* lists three principles of Paganism: love for and kinship with nature, a positive morality, and recognition of the Divine. See <http://www.paganfederation.org/pfinfo.htm#Principles> (accessed 8 Feb 2011). There are a number of correlations between neo-Pagan and neo-Shamanic cosmologies, such as relationships with the spirits (other-than-human persons) and nature. 'New Age' is an amorphous term used to cover an array of philosophies and esoteric European traditions, with an emphasis on self-responsibility, spirituality and healing (Heelas, 1996; see also Harvey & Wallis, 2007:152).

distinctive landscape, its history of immigration and colonisation, shaped by the New Zealand 'do-it-yourself' pioneering ethos, unavoidably influenced by Māori spiritual values and global consciousness shifts, all of which contribute to their forging of new spiritual identities as neo-Shamanic practitioners. Definitions pre-occupy throughout this thesis; shamans remain slippery, liminal beings. Nonetheless, I argue that neo-Shamans in New Zealand live and practise, and do many of the things that indigenous shamans have always done and continue to do, albeit within a particular modern Western cultural context.

Furthermore, I argue that many practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine consciously or instinctively (and unconsciously) incorporate what might be regarded as shamanic techniques and tools into their work, creating fusion models of healing. They are highly intuitive and, working with extra-sensory perceptions and (on occasions) altered states of consciousness, they have the ability to heal by transforming energy. My observation is that the importation of shamanic healing practices into the West has contributed to these processes. I argue that while at least some contemporary healers might be considered 'shamans' in disguise, nomenclature issues around whether or not they should be defined as shamans are less important than the fact that their healing practices have widened to include implicitly or explicitly a spiritual dimension. The ecstatic shamanic soul journey to the spirits has become the defining feature of so-called classical shamanism ever since Eliade (1972) popularised this notion. However, enstatic states in which the shamanic practitioner goes within to receive power and knowledge appear to be as important as ecstasy, and I suggest that some healers work from enstatic states of consciousness.²

Contextualising Neo-Shamanism Globally: Re-Enchantment and Paradigm Shifts

Interest in shamanism and shamanic healing within the Western world has grown during a period of major social and political changes worldwide; I outline some of

² Enstasis has been defined as 'standing within', a state of inner wisdom. It was originally used by a Dutch philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd, and taken up by Eliade twenty years later. See <http://www.members.shaw.ca/jgfriesen/Definitions/Enstasy.html> (accessed 21 July 2010).

these global shifts as a means of positioning neo-Shamans in New Zealand amongst these mobile and variable fields. One of several inter-linked influences that have contributed to the popularity of neo-Shamanism throughout the Western world is the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s, a period that saw a heady mix of rebellion, questioning of authority and search for alternatives. New social movements, such as environmentalism, feminism and alternative healing, often with humanistic, naturalistic or spiritual aspects evolved out of this period (Heelas, 1996:56). Since this era, increased interest in spirituality in the West has contributed to a groundswell shift in consciousness that has weakened such traditional boundaries as those between the profane and the sacred, culture and nature. This is a trans-cultural movement that is now making its presence felt within mainstream Western culture. In an age of DIY (Do-it-Yourself) spirituality (Gibson, 2006:63), millions of Westerners are exploring a myriad of spiritual paths, mixing and matching to create their own individual sacred practices. Post-modern re-enchantment has seen a blending of traditional and non-traditional elements within established religions (Hume & McPhillips, 2006:xv), New Age philosophies and activities such as channelling along with the creation of countless new religious movements.³

Modernity it seems can only ever be partial as people search for deeper meanings and answers to large existential questions in their lives (Harvey, 2005:207, in the 1st epigraph of this chapter; McPhillips, 2006:153-154). An apparently secular and rational world has paradoxically spawned a popular drive towards re-sacralisation, reflecting 'a deep, inner hunger for meaning and connectedness' (Murchu, 2000:192, cited in Hume & McPhillips, 2006:xvi). Heelas's and Woodward's (2005) 'subjectivization thesis' points to the co-existence of the processes of secularisation and sacralisation in modern Western society, with observable positive spin-offs through social changes within education, health and other public sectors, all of which now tend towards being more people-focused rather than rule bound and hierarchical in structure.

Accompanying the secularisation and sacralisation processes identified by Heelas and Woodward (2005), a paradigm shift has occurred within some areas of the health sector. The human potential movement grew out of humanistic psychology and has a

³ Brown (1997) provides a detailed overview of contemporary channelling in the United States.

spiritual or transpersonal orientation (Heelas, 1996:53, 57), while holistic health models have questioned the limits of the biomedical paradigm, based as it is on a Cartesian dualistic model of a positivist, quantitative and objective science. Dissatisfaction with biomedicine with its tendency to standardise and generalise has resulted in different expectations of healing as an individual, inner process that embraces the whole person (body, mind and soul), leading to numerous complementary and alternative healing systems (Baer, 2003:233-235; Micozzi, 1996:3-8). Contemporary alternative healers, trained in orthodox health sciences, move between the worlds of science and traditional healing systems such as herbal medicine.⁴

It is true too that still other insightful healers work within the orthodox health system, and a number of medical doctors are exploring the interfaces between science, spirituality, consciousness and medicine, including shamanism (see, for example, Dossey, 1999, 2001; also issues of *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing*).⁵ American Alan Davis, President and co-founder of the *Society for Shamanic Practitioners* (SSP), is a medical doctor whose dream is to integrate shamanic work into orthodox healthcare: ‘Can I get away with this?’ he rhetorically asked when delivering the closing keynote speech at the 2008 SSP Conference I attended in England. Others are less willing to put themselves at risk professionally and do not publicly acknowledge apparently anomalous healings when they witness them, preferring to label them as ‘spontaneous remissions’. Numerous healing systems such as healing by prayer, absent (non-local) healing, dozens of forms of energy or vibrational medicine, laying on of hands, or shamanic healing confound Western biomedical rational perspectives (Krippner & Achterberg, 2000:356-357).

In addition, re-enchantment in the West is coupled with a growing attraction to the natural world, and awareness about global ecological values, issues of sustainability, environmental degradation and climate change. Modern environmentalists come in varying shades of green, ranging from human-centred ecologists, through to depth

⁴ The webpage for the *South Pacific College of Natural Therapies* in Auckland, for example, says the College degree programme ‘integrates wisdom traditions with scientific knowledge’. See <http://www.spcnt.ac.nz/page/bachelor-of-natural-medicine> (accessed 1 Sep 2010).

⁵ These trends should not be overrated, however. Baer, for example, interprets biomedical interest in complementary and alternative medicine as a move towards ‘integrated medicine’, a process that is ‘cherry-picking’ and co-opting selected holistic health perspectives into the mainstream (2003:245; 2008:53). I do not address these political issues in this thesis.

ecologists who adopt an animistic perspective, identifying with the earth and all 'other-than-human cohabitants' (Harvey, 2005:180-182). Ecofeminists, neo-Pagans, eco-Pagans and neo-Shamans all offer a spiritual perspective on environmental matters, one that has much in common with indigenous worldviews (Rountree & Christ, 2006).

Indeed, an increased valuing of, and understanding of, indigeneity is another factor contributing to the interest in shamanism amongst Westerners. Without falling into the trap of romanticising and creating essentialised, stereotypical 'noble savages', indigenous or First World standpoints have much to offer the West, as Watson-Verran and Turnbull (1995) show in their discussion about science and indigenous knowledge systems. Harvey (2003a:5-8) outlines some of the complexities of Western perceptions of indigenous people in general, and shamans in particular, including such considerations as community, traditions, spirituality, subsistence, boundedness and integration. Rather than imagined timeless traditions, Hornborg (2008:152-159) suggests 'Native wisdom' is best re-framed, as contemporary indigenous people weave together science, ethics and spirituality to develop concepts of 'sacred ecology' appropriate for a modern context. In addition, some indigenous people are emerging as a political force in a post-colonial world, their spokespeople empowered to bring attention to other ways of knowing, calling for a re-assessment and re-valuing of their worldviews in the light of current global ecological crises.⁶ The United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, adopted in the General Assembly in September 2007, is perhaps indicative of wide international political acceptance of indigenous rights, in principle at least.⁷

These factors – the 1960s counter-cultural movement, the spiritual re-enchantment of Westerners, paradigm shifts within the health and healing sector, a desire to contact

⁶ It is important not to over-state this 'indigenous revival'. However, one example of indigenous-inspired global political action is the Bolivian hosted *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* in April 2010, following the perceived failure of the Copenhagen Climate Conference in December 2009. See <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/support/> (accessed 2 Sep 2010).

⁷ The *Declaration* was not accepted by Australia, Canada, New Zealand or the United States, although Australia and New Zealand have since endorsed it, and Canada and the United States have indicated they will re-consider their position. See <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html> (accessed 5 July 2010).

the natural world and embrace ecological values, interest in indigenous spiritualities and healing practices – have combined to create a fertile milieu for neo-Shamanisms to emerge. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand form a small but distinctive group amongst these emerging global spirituality and healing practices.

Altered States, Ontological Shock and Other Ways of Knowing

Shamans are people who apparently enter altered states of consciousness (ASCs) and journey to the spirit world to gather information from their spirit helpers (Eliade, 1972). However, altered states are accessible to all people, and are not the sole province of shamans, or people from non-Western traditions; the seemingly universal nature of altered states of consciousness has prompted some writers to postulate that humans have ‘a species-wide innate drive to experience ASCs’ (Price-Williams & Hughes, 1994:2). Extensive research by Bourguignon and Evascu (1977, cited in Budden, 2003:31), for example, has shown that almost ninety percent of any given population displays potential altered state activity. Drawing on Schumaker (1991, cited in Budden, 2003:33), Budden suggests that humans appear to have an inherent ability to dissociate, demonstrated in normal sleeping and dreaming patterns and many ‘behaviours such as clinical hypnosis, meditation, drug-induced states including shamanic soul-flight, glossolalia, and spirit mediumship’, which is not to say that these people are all shamans.⁸

Nonetheless, in spite of the seemingly innate and universal human abilities to experience altered states of consciousness and anomalous phenomena, for many Westerners spontaneous experiences of other realities are frequently shocking as there is no cultural context for them to make meaning of their experiences, and often no-one they can talk to about them. My research suggests this is the case for many neo-Shamans, the draw to explore altered states and shamanism triggered by their experiences of unsolicited and unusual phenomena. Jane Kent, an Australian naturopath, medical herbalist and homeopath, psychotherapist and educationalist

⁸ Earlier anthropologists used terms such as awe, trance and ecstasy to describe the altered states of consciousness they observed amongst many different religious traditions (Winkleman, 2000:6); I use these terms inter-changeably.

underwent spontaneous unusual events for many years.⁹ Her doctoral thesis is a personal exploration of the 'ontological shock' she lived through as she, a seemingly 'rational, capable and functional' woman, continued to experience ASCs (2007:iv). She eventually made sense of them when she discovered a model that reflected her reality, in the hidden Western mystical (shamanic) traditions. Kent asks the question, 'If thousands, or possibly millions, of modern Western people, who claim to have had unmediated contact with the Elphame,¹⁰ are not demonstrably delusional, diseased, psychotic, fantasising or lying about their encounters, how do we accommodate that uncomfortable data within the present dominant discourse?' (2007:277). Nothing less than a 'new cultural discourse model' is required (2007:vi), she suggests, one that not only embraces the numinous but also honours it as relevant and valid in a contemporary Western world. This new model is one that pushes the boundaries of Western rationality, and requires an epistemological shift. Kent (2007:27-35) surmised that there were four options for her to cope with the ontological shock and shamanic initiatory crisis she experienced: denial of her experiences; undertaking an heuristic exploration to search for an explanation; acknowledging that she was indeed psychotic; compartmentalising it through 'deliberate forgetting' until she slowly integrated the different realities. She chose the second option, hence her doctoral journey.

I have encountered groups of people in New Zealand who also adopt an heuristic approach towards spirituality, a modern participatory spirituality (Heron, 1996, 1998, 2006; see also Ferrer, 2002). They explore transpersonal realms in a very directed and conscious process through co-operative inquiry groups, where participants share their personal spiritual discoveries, and develop and expand their experience of the numinous within the group. These people are searching to create a direct experiential connection with other realities variously called 'spirit', 'presence', 'entities' in much the same way as neo-Shamans, although they do not generally consider themselves shamans, and they do not align themselves with any one spiritual tradition. Other groups have a healing focus, not unlike the one Edith Turner was a member of during

⁹ See Appendix III for a glossary of complementary and alternative medicine modalities.

¹⁰ Kent (2007:64) uses the Old Norse term 'Elphame' to describe the subtle realities of other worlds or Faerie realms.

the 1990s; the group met monthly at her home in Virginia and explored various alternative healing methods. Many healers want to examine their practices reflexively, Turner writes, and she came to see the group as ‘part of a huge unofficial laboratory of spiritual healing across the nation’ (2005:387, 394-399).

It is not my intention to engage with the complex and sometimes-contentious discourse regarding the relationships between science and spirituality in this thesis.¹¹ However, I argue that, by overtly bringing shamanic practices into Western society, neo-Shamans are embracing shamanism as a form of subjective sacred science, a science underpinned by a mystical/spiritual worldview, a sacred inquiry in which the experiential is valued as legitimate knowledge. Alan Wallace (2000), physicist, Buddhist and religious studies academic advocates in his book, *The Taboo of Subjectivity*, a new contemplative science that draws on the collective spiritual and scientific heritages of humanity, a science that does not fragment and polarise the sacred and profane, the subjective and objective. Shamans and other adepts have always extended the boundaries of consciousness, threatening notions of perceived ‘reality’. Quantum theories possibly verify or make shamanic realities less improbable, as Mae-Wan Ho, biochemist and geneticist, has written:

[w]hen coherence is established between the knowing self and all that can be known, the self partakes of no-space-no-time and all-space-all-time. This sublime aesthetic experience is therefore also the highest form of knowledge (Ho, 1998:8; also Ho, 1993).

I contend that neo-Shamans are challenging mainstream Western science and thereby contributing to the ‘new cultural discourse’ Kent calls for (2007:vi). The *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*, based in San Francisco, has a long-standing project to develop a cross-cultural database from accounts of shamanic journeys, near-death, and other non-ordinary experiences with the aim of mapping the hidden realms of consciousness (*Shamanism*, 2000). Over the last thirty years, there has been increasing interest in transpersonal epistemologies, and other scholars have also attempted to

¹¹ The literature is extensive; see, for example, Ferngren (2002), Sweet & Feist (2007).

describe, map and compare ASCs such as those experienced during shamanic journeying, Buddhist *vipassana* (insight) meditation, or yoga (Walsh, 1993; also see Mack, 1993). These explorations into other realms all constitute 'other ways of knowing' (Broomfield, 1997) and neo-Shamans in New Zealand play a small role in these processes.

Neo-Shamanic Cosmologies

Neo-Shamanic cosmologies and their engagement with the spirits are central to this thesis. Amongst traditional or indigenous shamanisms multiple cosmological variations exist, both within and between cultures (see, for example, Vitebsky, 1995:15-17); however, according to Eliade (whose writing has influenced many neo-Shamans), the universe is often characterised as having three layers – sky, earth, and the underworld – connected by a central axis sometimes visualised as the Tree of Life or the World Pillar (1972:259-274). Following Eliade, core shamanism courses (a form of neo-Shamanism developed by the anthropologist, Michael Harner, and taught through the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*) teach that there are three worlds, the upper, middle and lower, and course participants learn to enter an ASC using techniques such as repetitive drumming, to journey to these other worlds to meet their spirit helpers. The middle world is a hidden world of shifting spirits and energies contactable only under special circumstances such as during ASCs. Many European neo-Shamans are initially introduced to this cosmological map (Gredig, 2009:121-122), and this is the cosmology most neo-Shamans exposed to core shamanism are introduced to, including those in New Zealand.

Neo-Shamans are people who take the spirits seriously. Spirits whom neo-Shamans meet and interact with while in ASCs may be embodied or disembodied, and include animals, plants, nature spirits, devas and elementals, fairies and other little people, natural landforms, weather spirits, land spirits and guardians, ancestors, dead people, guardian spirits, warrior spirits, deities, spirit guides or teachers, angels and galactic beings. Neo-Shamans are therefore animists, but to state this implies a coherent system of theological thought; this is not necessarily the case (as Harvey [2009:393-394] has also observed for neo-Pagans). Neo-Shamans' worldviews vary widely in response to

their personal spiritual explorations and experiences, as well as external influences but, nonetheless, their general worldview is one in which all is imbued with 'spirit' (however that may be conceptualised). Long regarded as primitive thinking by social evolutionists such as Edward Tylor and James Frazer, animism requires belief in souls or spirits, an 'inspired' natural world (Greenwood, 2005:ix), and are shared by all nature religions including shamanism. More recently, some scholars have identified this worldview as the 'old animism', while others have articulated a 'new animism' that examines alternate explanations of how humans interact with other beings, both seen and unseen (Harvey, 2009:394-395). Contemporary Pagans exhibit both versions of animism (2009:408), and this is true too for neo-Shamanic participants in my study. Animism in a Tyloean sense is observable in their discourses about spirits, while new animistic thinking is evident in the ways that they perceive of 'nature'. The latter might manifest through neo-Shamans seeking to extend their sensory perceptions to 'merge with nature', going beyond object/subject dualisms towards a relational spirituality (Buber, 1970, cited in Ferrer, 2002:119).

Personal Background

During the 1970s, reading the New Zealand alternative magazine, *Mushroom*, initiated my exposure to unorthodox worldviews, and led to me living in various communities throughout the Coromandel and Northland with my husband and two small children in the early 1980s. My metamorphosis from an intrigued but very conventional pharmacist to naturopath began with my introduction to notions of holistic health, the use of herbs and a modality called 'touch for health' (kinesiology), which seemingly miraculously solved my husband's chronic back pain. I was exposed to an entirely new language, where 'energies' were high or low, good or bad, and everything was in a state of balance or imbalance. Later we moved to Auckland and my curiosity led me to undertake a three-year naturopathic training at the *South Pacific College of Natural Therapeutics*. More than twenty-five years involvement as a naturopath, medical herbalist and bodyworker within the complementary and alternative medicine culture in New Zealand followed. On a daily practical and clinical level, I continue to be

curious about healing: what heals, why do some people heal and others do not, how do they heal?

In my naturopathic practice, I use a variety of models and explanations at different times, tailored for each client and their circumstances. I might explain core naturopathic theories about vital force, detoxification, the importance of good nutrition, and the need to balance the mind-body-spirit.¹² For other clients, I sometimes draw on a version of Selye's stress and general adaptation theory to explain psychoneuroimmunological processes, or the functions of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems in their body.¹³ I may request standard biomedical blood tests in some cases, and prescribe nutritional supplements or herbal medicines. If I am carrying out craniosacral therapy, I might talk about the cranial rhythmic impulse or the breath of life, to release fascia tissue tension and balance the cerebral spinal fluid. I do not call myself a shamanic practitioner, and I do not journey to the spirit world on behalf of my clients, but I frequently raise the concept of energy as I balance their meridians, chakras or aura. My explanations of healing are very mobile and depend on the relationship between the client and me (as practitioner). Much of the initial consultation with a new client involves an assessment on a subtle, intuitive level of where each client 'is at' to ascertain which explanation is likely to be the most meaningful for them, and therefore most easily received to facilitate their healing. Far from being cynically manipulative, I do this in a serious way that seeks to honour the client and their process.¹⁴ In response to the question, 'What do I *do*?' I often reply by saying that I think the best thing I do for my clients is to provide a safe place in which to fully attend to them for an hour, and in that space and time (sometimes) 'something happens' that is bigger than either of us. Synergy occurs and the mystery of healing takes place in the spaces between us and within each of us. The client may leave with suggestions about actions they could try implementing in their life, or they may take

¹² See Pizzorno (1996) for an outline of the history and principles of naturopathic medicine.

¹³ For a discussion on Selye's theory see Janzen (2002:165-167). Winkelman (2000:201-209) examines the inter-relationships between stress and the autonomic nervous system.

¹⁴ Csordas (2000:472) observes that Navajo healers typically say, when caring for their patients, that they 'must talk to them so they understand', and this resonates with my own clinical experiences.

home a bottle of herbal medicine I have mixed specifically for them (a ritual in its own right). My sense though is that their healing is more nebulous than this and that my performance as practitioner is an essential element in a delicate process. Remaining grounded within myself, and focused with a strong presence has therapeutic qualities in itself.

Some of my complementary and alternative medicine colleagues suggest that naturopaths serve as a bridge between shamanism and orthodox medicine. I do not think I am a shaman but – maybe like MacLellan (in the 2nd epigraph heading this chapter) – those who perhaps do not know any better, sometimes call me one. I make no claims to dramatic initiatory events and do not have a history of experiencing unusual psychic events. However, over years of working with clients and through engaging with my personal healing journey, I have become increasingly aware of subtle energies, the power of the presence of the healer, and the spiritual mysteries of healing. These experiences provide a container that has allowed me to listen to the shamanic stories of my participants, and to embark on a personal exploration of shamanism.

Research Aims and Goals

This research is a phenomenological and comparative study of neo-Shamans in New Zealand and those in other Western countries: in what ways are neo-Shamans in New Zealand different from, or similar to, those in other parts of the globe? What are the differences and similarities between neo-Shamans in New Zealand and indigenous shamans (in their historical and contemporary forms), as described in the literature? I began with three broad aims: firstly, I wanted to explore the praxis of New Zealand practitioners and healers who self-identify as shamans; I wanted to investigate the meanings these practitioners attach to shamanism and the nature of their shamanic practices. Secondly, my experiences as a naturopath have led me to conclude that other healers, who do not overtly label themselves as shamans, incorporate shamanistic techniques within their work. I wanted to examine the intersections between shamanic healing and other systems of healing. Finally, since this is a New Zealand-based study, I wanted to study the similarities and differences between contemporary Māori healing

and what might be described elsewhere as shamanism. Māori have their own traditional healing systems (rongoā Māori) encompassing the use of plants (rongoā), massage (mirimiri and romiromi), prayers (karakia) and spiritual healing. This thesis considers present-day Māori healers as indigenous healers within a local and global context, and their relationships with neo-Shamans against the backdrop of their rich and complex spiritual and cosmological worlds.¹⁵

Significance of this study

The humanities and social sciences, amongst other concerns, seek to explain and comprehend human suffering, illness and disease in relation to individual belief systems and life experiences, and their socio-cultural environment. Given the large existential questions underlying these human endeavours, it is understandable that the boundaries between spirituality and healing are varied and complex. Some scholars have criticised neo-Shamans for privileging healing (Wallis, 2003:69), compared with indigenous shamans who are perceived as being responsible for many activities within their communities besides 'healing'. However, I have chosen to focus on neo-Shamanic healing practices because of my personal background and interest in healing, but also because all shamanic practices are ultimately about healing in an expansive sense of the word, be it healing an individual or a community and its environs. My research examines neo-Shamanism as a complex of spiritual practices situated within a broad but identifiable cosmological sensibility, and as diverse and blended systems of healing. The analysis sits within a larger health and healing discourse in New Zealand, about the relationships between neo-Shamanism, complementary and alternative medicine, and biomedicine.

This study is significant in theoretical terms because the shamanic revival, so evident throughout the Western world, is observable in New Zealand too. Little has been written about neo-Shamanism in New Zealand, and it is timely for these social processes to be analysed in a scholarly manner. The thesis maps a genealogy of neo-

¹⁵ 'Rongoā' is used in two ways, as traditional Māori healing in general and, secondly, more specifically to mean Māori herbal medicines. When a Māori word is first used, I give a simple definition as a footnote or within the body of the text. As with all languages and cultures, however, subtle meanings are dependent on their context. See Appendix IV for a glossary of Māori words used in this thesis.

Shamans in New Zealand, their identities and spiritual paths, locating them within New Zealand society as a whole, and amongst other spiritualities and healing systems. Theoretical considerations include discussion of neo-Shamanic initiation processes, their shamanic lineages, the roles neo-Shamans might play within modern Western communities that do not recognise the purpose or functions of the shaman, the performance and practice of neo-Shamanism, ecstatic and enstatic altered states of consciousness. This is an experiential ethnography that has demanded an examination of my multiple roles and perspectives within a discourse of 'taking the spirits seriously' (Blain, 2002:74), with the aim of producing 'valid local knowledge' (Wilkes, 2006:53). Nonetheless, the inter-play of local and global influences constitutes an important thread throughout the study.

In one sense, this is a small, locally-based study about contemporary shamanic healing and neo-Shamanism in New Zealand. I aspire to normalise the term 'shaman' and to anchor neo-Shamans in this land. It has been important that I take my neo-Shamanic participants' stories as seriously as I would have, had I travelled to exotic places and attempted to understand the local customs and cosmologies of 'others'. I have no desire either to privilege indigenous experience, or to deny the reality of neo-Shamanic experiences. I take inspiration from anthropologist Anna Tsing's discussion of marginality and eclectic 'locally engaged theory' (1993:13-37). Tsing describes the lives and perspectives of the Meratus Dayaks of southeast Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), shaped by power imbalances between central government and local politics of the periphery, ethnic and regional identity, gender. Research of this nature relies as much on the telling of the story as the conclusions reached; she observes that 'Third World detail is often classified by metropolitan readers as "description" that can be skipped as one searches for "theory"' (1993:31), whereas she prefers a cultural dialogue that collapses the distinction between theory and ethnography. I too focus on a marginal group within a larger (New Zealand) culture. The issues are different – neo-Shamans lead modern Western lives and (most of the time) are not necessarily visible within everyday society, neither are they geographically marginalised – but, nonetheless, I find myself in a similar situation to Tsing, struggling with murky boundaries between theoretical analysis and ethnography, balancing the analytical and

experiential. Much of this thesis is therefore descriptive in an attempt to convey accurately the practices of my participants; to paraphrase Rountree (2010:10) it is a neo-Shaman-centred text.

On the other hand, evidence of extensive global cultural and spiritual influences is apparent throughout this ethnography. Many neo-Shamans in New Zealand have travelled and lived in other countries; some have studied with neo-Shamans or indigenous shamans while overseas. Others have been born overseas and immigrated to New Zealand as young children or as adults, bringing their own particular shamanic understandings and experiences with them. Some neo-Shamans in New Zealand are working with contemporary Māori healers, forging new relationships and creating unique fusion healing practices. Likewise, contemporary Māori healers live and interact within a global sphere as they export their healing practices, and interact with other indigenous peoples.

The literature on neo-Shamans focuses primarily on core shamanism or reconstructed shamanisms as practised in parts of Britain, the United States, Northern or Western Europe, South Africa and Australia. There is a need for other perspectives, and analysis of neo-Shamanism from other areas of the globe, to avoid the methodological traps of assuming all neo-Shamanisms are the same (Wallis, 2003:230). The academic world tends to view neo-Shamans with scepticism, responses ranging from a 'biased tone' (von Stuckrad, 2002:774), to 'cynicism' (Harvey, 2003a:12) or 'neo-Shamanophobia' (Wallis, 1999:46), and maybe just plain indifference: after all neo-Shamans are not 'exotic others'. Whatever the reasons, I trust that my exploration of neo-Shamans in New Zealand makes a modest contribution towards rectifying at least some of the gaps within the academic discourse, bringing together the differing landscapes of academic understandings of shamanism and neo-Shamanism, my personal exploration of neo-Shamanic practices, and the shamanic worlds of this land.

Thesis Structure

Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 is an analysis of the shamanic literature. It draws attention to on-going definitional confusion around the term 'shaman', describes so-called classical Arctic shamanism and other variants, and examines contemporary

indigenous shamans who have adapted to a modern and post-modern world. I discuss the history and features of neo-Shamanism, and critiques of neo-Shamanic practices to provide a comparative framework for the following chapters.

Chapter 3 is a methodology chapter in which I position myself as an experiential researcher, outline my fieldwork research, discuss ethical issues and introduce key participants. In Chapter 4, I map the neo-Shamanic landscape in New Zealand. I describe the geographical spaces and the spatial interior maps occupied by neo-Shamanic practitioners in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the demographics and lineages of New Zealand neo-Shamans, their spiritual paths, how they construct their identities and cosmologies, locating them within New Zealand society as a whole, and amongst other spiritualities and healing systems.

Shamans are people who take the spirits seriously; in Chapter 5, I chart the ways in which this is demonstrated by neo-Shamans in New Zealand, beginning with an outline of four possible ontological schemas for spirits. Neo-Shamans are practical, however, and for many, spirits are simply a practical reality. Chapter 6 describes the practices of some neo-Shamans in New Zealand. Although these contemporary shamans practise in a variety of ways, many use core shamanic methods, developed from the teachings of Michael Harner (1990). I analyse the characteristic tropes of core neo-Shamanism – the shamanic journey to the spirit world, and connection to nature as they inform the shamanic practices of my participants.

In Chapter 7, I contextualise shamanism as a system of healing, comparing classical and contemporary shamanic healing as described in the literature, the healing practices of neo-Shamans in New Zealand, and the healing practices of others who work within the New Zealand alternative healing and biomedical milieu. I examine sexual and gender roles in shamanism, and argue that some healers draw on enstatic states of consciousness rather than the ecstatic soul flight, as described by Eliade (1972). The following chapter, Chapter 8, addresses contemporary Māori healing as a local variant of shamanism, examining the unique and rich cosmological heritage of Māori spirituality that underpins their healing traditions. I outline Māori healing traditions, and argue that contemporary Māori healers are eclectic and creative innovators who have adapted their practices within a global context.

Chapter 9 addresses issues concerning traditions and authenticity, appropriation, syncretism and eclecticism in relation to neo-Shamanic practices in New Zealand, in particular examining the relationships between (some) Māori healers and (some) neo-Shamans. Using Lévi-Strauss's (1966:16-33) concept of bricolage, I argue that neo-Shamans in New Zealand, as with neo-Shamans in other Western countries, are eclectic bricoleurs who skilfully adapt, adopt, and work with whatever tools they have on hand. This discussion then leads into a portrayal of multiple neo-Shamanisms as a system of spiritual healing pertinent for survival in the 21st century.

Chapter 10 summarises the research findings and the ways in which neo-Shamans in New Zealand, while similar in many respects to neo-Shamans in other Western countries, are also unique in their practices. Throughout this thesis, the slippery definition of the term 'shaman' recurs amidst the global emergence of multiple 21st century forms of indigenous and contemporary Western shamanisms, processes in which neo-Shamans in New Zealand play a small role. I argue that some contemporary complementary and alternative healers, and biomedical practitioners, who work to heal while in enstatic states of consciousness might be considered shamans in disguise. I position neo-Shamanic practices within the New Zealand context of the alternate spiritual and healing milieux, and in relation to contemporary Māori healers.

CHAPTER 2

SHAMANS AND NEO-SHAMANS: SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHIC EXPLORERS

[T]he terms 'shaman', 'shamanism', and 'shamanic' correspond neither to agreed conceptual categories nor to precise intellectual tools so much as materials upon an artist's palette, with which academics create compositions of emotive and polemical power (Hutton, 2001:147).

* * * *

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise some of the extensive theoretical and popular discourses about shamanism and neo-Shamanism, providing a comparative background for my study of neo-Shamans in New Zealand. An investigation into the eclectic, diffuse and elusive nature of shamans reveals widespread definitional confusion: who may or may not be included under the rubric 'shaman'? I begin by addressing this semantic dilemma before outlining the key features of a generalised and apparently universal shamanic complex that manifests in numerous locally specific forms. Three categories of shamanic practices are identified: historical, and contemporary traditional or indigenous forms of shamanism, and neo-Shamanisms. Shamanic phenomena continue to be observable in multiple forms as traditional people adapt their spiritual and healing practices amidst changing circumstances in a global modern and post-modern world. Concurrently, some Westerners are exploring and (re)constructing new categories of contemporary Western shamanism in the wake of widespread and heightened interest in non-orthodox systems of healing and spirituality. I describe the emergence of neo-Shamanisms, and academic critiques of their practices, and conclude the chapter with an examination of neo-Shamanic literature in New Zealand.

From Shamans to Shamanism: The Dilemma of Definitions

Shamans are tricksters: everything about them is contestable, including the origins of the name 'shaman', what shamans actually do, and how they are perceived by

academics and the general public alike (Harvey, 2003a:1-23). The etymology of the word 'shaman' is traced in detail by Eliade (1972:496) who, following Shirokogoroff, concludes that although derived from Tungus-speaking people of Siberia, *šaman* is foreign to their language and appears to exhibit influences from Buddhism and Lamaism. Hultkrantz (1993, cited in Bowie, 2000:197) says 'shaman' is a Tungus word for magician or conjurer, probably derived from Pali, Sanskrit or Chinese, referring to someone who is 'excited', 'moved, or 'raised'. Palaeo-Oriental influences are also suggested by Blacker (1975, cited in Halifax, 1991:3) who writes that 'shaman' is derived from 'the Vedic *śram*, meaning "to heat oneself or practice austerities"'. Lewis (2003b:35) provides a further variation: the root word *sam*, he writes, 'signifies the idea of violent movement and dancing exuberantly, [and] throwing one's body about' as displayed during an ecstatic shamanic séance.

Whatever the origins of the word, scholars are agreed that shamans and shamanic phenomena are likely to be thousands of years old (Hayden, 2003; Aldhouse-Green & Aldhouse-Green, 2005). However, although there is ample evidence suggestive of ritual activity from artefacts discovered, archaeologists tend to be wary of drawing conclusive interpretations about the purpose of particular objects or the meanings ancient people may have attached to them. Instead, they have aimed to uncover the 'shadow language' or 'residue' of ritual behaviour that could indicate shamanic practices and beliefs (Aldhouse-Green & Aldhouse-Green, 2005:10). In the more recent past, phenomena associated with shamans have intrigued Westerners ever since travellers and traders began to return with captivating and seemingly bizarre tales about their experiences amongst indigenous peoples (Harvey, 2003a:5; Langdon, 1992:3). Shamans and their activities have been observed and documented for more than five hundred years, as illustrated in Jeremy Narby and Francis Huxley's (2001) edited collection of reports from Western observers of shamans. Responses have ranged from vilification and demonisation, to the incredulous and derisive, to awe or sympathetic empathy and (in a few instances) a willingness to learn.

Unlike Wallis (2003:239), who writes that his ethnographic account of 'neo-Shamanisms' need not engage with the 'exhaustive argument' regarding definitions of 'shamanism', I choose to map the historic and geographic shamanic landscapes as a

starting point for my study of neo-Shamans in New Zealand. If these neo-Shamans trace their lineages from traditions other than their own predominantly Pākehā or European heritage (as some apparently do), it seems to me pertinent that this landscape be examined. I therefore begin by grappling with definitions: 'Who or what are "shamans"?' while also acknowledging that it is possibly easier to establish a negative definition regarding those who *might not* qualify to be called 'shamans', perhaps magicians or sorcerers (according to Eliade, 1972:3). Who then legitimates and bestows the honorific 'shaman' on someone? Is there an essential, core-identity that might be universally recognisable or agreed upon as 'shaman'? How do *I* define 'shaman'? Some neo-Shamans I have met in New Zealand incorporate what might be regarded as New Age ideas and practices (such as millenarian thinking and the use of channelled material) into their shamanic work: 'This is not "real" shamanism', I caught myself thinking when I first encountered it. It seems that I *do* have some prior internal mental constructs or beliefs about what a 'shaman' is (or isn't) after all but, at the same time, I find myself shape-shifting,¹⁶ sliding away, and reluctant to formulate a definitive statement. An authoritative declaration along the lines of 'a "shaman" is this...or that...' denies the rich diversity of shamans, and will inevitably exclude some (Blain, 2002:145-147). Conversely, still others who have different names for their spiritual or healing practices, might not identify as 'shaman' but are called this by academics anyway; I enlarge on this point shortly.

Some scholars would prefer to restrict the title 'shaman' to certain practices of people from the Northern Arctic regions (Bowie, 2000:191). Hultkrantz (1996:2) has observed that the name 'shaman' has been used to include any medicine man or woman, whereas others subscribe to the original Tungus meaning, that is, the shaman is 'a particular, ecstatic diviner, healer and mediator between humans and the spirit world'. Shirokogoroff (1982, cited in Bowie, 2000:196; Jakobsen, 1999) hoped that it might be possible to save the term 'shaman' to this category of religious practitioners from the Arctic regions, thus retaining its original and more specialised connotations. It seems to me that the importation of the word 'shaman' into the West from its original

¹⁶ Shape-shifting refers to the chameleon-like ability of shamans and other magical practitioners to hide and create illusions, sometimes by taking on the shape or characteristics of an animal or bird (Blain, 2002:91).

geographic and culturally-specific region has contributed to the current semantic dilemma regarding how to define a 'shaman'.¹⁷

Moreover, as Bowie (2000:196) somewhat wryly notes, while some academics would like to limit the use of the word 'shaman', '[s]o handy a term, which...[has come to] mean almost whatever you want it to mean, has achieved a broad currency in popular literature and in the popular imagination', not to mention its widely accepted usage within the academy. Religious studies scholar, Graham Harvey, has pointed out that many Western philosophies and individual personal experiences (such as neo-Pagan communications with devas and nature spirits), along with Freudian or Jungian maps of the inner worlds of consciousness, have correspondences with some shamanic practices. As a result, when anthropologists provided the name 'shamanism', many people adopted this word to label their unusual experiences (Harvey, 1997:110). 'Shamanism' quickly became a convenient shorthand descriptor for previously unnamed phenomena. It is not uncommon for Westerners to have spontaneous experiences, which they later identify as 'shamanic' once the word comes into their lexicon, and these experiences may have similarities to a traditional shamanic initiatory calling (Wallis, 1999:42-43; see also Kent, 2007, cited in Chapter 1). This is the case for several participants in my study too.

Eliade's (1972) seminal work on shamanism describes shamans as a particular category of religious practitioners, who are best known for their intense ecstatic experiences and special skills, particularly their ability to travel to other worlds. His description of shamanism begins with the simple premise 'shamanism = *technique of ecstasy*' (1972:4, emphasis in original), suggesting that he privileged ecstasy and the heavenly flight, perhaps allowing his personal Christian beliefs to overly influence his interpretation of other peoples' data (Wallis, 2003:36). Lewis argues that 'witchcraft, spirit-possession, cannibalism, and shamanism are all closely-related expressions of charismatic, mystical power' (1986, cited in Bowie, 2000:192), and criticises Eliade for drawing an 'erroneous distinction between possession and shamanism' (Lewis, 2003b:33; see also Lewis, 2003a:43-45). For Lewis (2003a:48), shamanism is a form of

¹⁷ Having said this, however, the English historian Ronald Hutton, has argued that a unitary 'Siberian shamanism' is the product of the Western imagination, and has been a 'contested phenomenon' ever since records began in the 16th century (2001:27).

'controlled spirit possession'. Mastery or control of the spirits is considered an important defining feature for shamans by several observers (for example, see Jakobsen, 1999), although as Blain (2002:149) says, this is more likely to be an outsider's perspective. The reality for many shamans is that working with the spirits is a lifelong and often demanding journey, a theme I return to in Chapter 5.

Atwood Gaines (1987) employs the term 'shaman' as a generic cross-cultural term, but suggests that, instead of endeavouring to establish a universal definition, anthropologists should take a psychocultural, person-centred perspective. Shamans are liminal, creative individuals and adaptive bricoleurs, he writes. Such an approach would view shamans as individuals with particular and idiosyncratic features deriving from their personal life situation and experiences, and allow for differences within a single culture as well as cross-culturally. While there is merit in Gaines' approach – 'shaman' as an individual - in order to speak about 'shamans' as a group, it is necessary to develop some common understandings about what this shamanic entity might (or might not) encompass.

The discussion thus far has addressed shamans as individuals, but any definition also needs to consider their social context. While Langdon (1992:4) recognises the importance of Eliade's book, she suggests that his shamanic studies have focused too narrowly on the dramatic and ecstatic aspects of individual shamans, without taking into account their changing global and socio-cultural contexts. Studies of shamanism, she writes, need to consider both social and creative or expressive manifestations: '[s]hamanism is an enduring institution that must be comprehended holistically' (1992:20). Shamans live and work in their communities, situated within a particular location and era, and the inter-play between an individual shaman, his or her community and the wider global community is a constantly changing dynamic (Blain, 2002:48). An analysis of shamanism must take into account the perspective of individual shamans, their social status, how shamanism affects their lives, and the social and political implications of their practice (Lewis, 2003a:xii-xiii). Michael Forbes Brown (1988) illustrates this in his observation of a curing session amongst Aguaruna Jivaro people of Peru. Anthropological literature tends to paint shamanism in a Janus-like manner, he says, representing shamans as either charismatic-protectors-and-

helpers of their people, or (less commonly) as ambiguous-and-distrusted-sorcerers. During this particular session he observed, illness in the physical body of an individual was only vanquished by 'shifting the locus of uncertainty to the body politic' and, in a society that finely-balances shamanism and sorcery, shamanism thus becomes a 'robust instrument of social control' (1988:117).

Instead of attempting to describe an imagined generalised 'shaman' definitively, a more fruitful enterprise might be to embrace 'shamanism' as a term representing a broad discursive complex that has no central authority or doctrine, but nonetheless displays 'astonishing similarities' across very diverse cultures worldwide (Vitebsky, 1995:11). Such a perspective allows for multiplicity, and echoes the standpoint Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis adopt when they write that 'the endurance of the term "shamanism" espouses its potential for careful application, in an approach to shamanism rather than according to globalising definitions' (Blain & Wallis, 2000:398; Blain, 2002:115-147). Shamanism is considered by many to be an ancient and universal phenomenon (an *ur* religion) with common shamanic motifs found amongst numerous indigenous cultures (Bowie, 2000:191). Rather than a 'single, unified religion [shamanism is]...a cross-cultural form of religious sensibility and practice' (Vitebsky, 1995:11). The shamanic complex comprises a cluster of characteristic and distinctive features including communication with the spirits. It is these apparently universal shamanic features that neo-Shamans have adopted, or are seeking to re-claim from their (perceived) lost heritage.

'Shamanism' then becomes one form of religious expression amongst a worldwide spectrum of mystical traditions all seeking to express seemingly universal spiritual experiences, framed according to the culture they are embedded within. Such a view still begs the question: what distinguishes shamanism from other spiritual paths? Wallis (2003:11), following Dowson, proposes that shamanism incorporates the following three elements: the consistent use of altered consciousness; that the altered states be accepted as ritual practices by the shaman's community; and that knowledge concerning altered consciousness is controlled and used for socially sanctioned

purposes within their community.¹⁸ While I largely concur with Wallis's list, so open a description could include such groups as charismatic Christians, who most certainly do not regard themselves as shamans. Jenny Blain writes that 'shamanism' is a 'Westernism' that exoticises and decontextualises the spiritual practices of 'other people' (2002:48). On occasions, groups of Christians have perhaps been 'othered' and categorised in ways they may well object to; Horwatt (1988:128), for example, has proposed that Pentecostal faith healers, who use oral-formulaic techniques to produce trance states, display characteristics typical of those found within a shamanic environment. As I noted earlier, whatever definition is used the terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism' will inevitably exclude some who would prefer to be categorised under those labels; on the other hand, some who do not wish to be included will be labelled as such. Labelling some groups as 'shamanic' depends on the perceptions and interpretation of the language used (with its underlying doctrinal premises) of the person doing the labelling. Jack Forbes (n.d.), Professor of Native American Studies (University of California), makes this point when he notes that in fact, when viewed less Eurocentrically, all world religions use tools that might be considered shamanic such as 'liturgy (ritual), songs, incantations (recited prayers or formulas)' to contact the unseen spiritual world.

The Shamanic Complex

Some key features contribute to a generalised shamanic landscape, although there are many cultural variations and exceptions. Vitebsky's (1995) book, *The Shaman*, presents a wide-ranging overview of shamans from around the world, abundantly illustrated with black and white, and colour photographs documenting their diversity (and perhaps also inadvertently enhancing the colourful and exotic romanticism many

¹⁸ A group of researchers exploring the potential of altered states of consciousness in psychotherapy has arrived at a similar three-fold list of key shamanic criteria. A shaman is someone who '(1) can access alternate states of consciousness at will; (2) fulfills needs of their community which otherwise are not met; and (3) mediates between the sacred and the profane' (Heinze, 1987:3, cited in Langdon, 1992:7). This list and Wallis's both require a re-consideration of what 'community' might mean for neo-Shamans, since shamanism as practised by Westerners over the last thirty years places less emphasis on small community-based practices, and more on personal development and individual healing (Bowie, 2000:196).

Westerners cloak shamanism with). Hultkrantz (1996:4-29) categorises shamanism as a complex that may co-exist with other religions, and itemises four general features:

- The shaman contacts the supernatural world frequently via the world tree (the *axis mundi*) or, in some cases, the world-river;
- The shaman serves as intermediary between humans and the supernatural worlds encompassing roles of doctor, diviner, psychopomp, hunting magician and sacrificial priest;
- The shaman is inspired by his or her helping spirits;
- The shaman experiences ecstasy or trance.

These are the motifs of so-called classic 'Arctic shamanism' but they also found in locally specific forms throughout South and East Asia, the Americas, parts of Africa, New Guinea and Australia (Vitebsky, 1995:25-51). The shaman need not always travel to other worlds to communicate with the spirits. An example of an exception to this is found in Korea where female shamans control the spirits who enter them, but they do not journey to the spirit world (Vitebsky, 1995:38). Nonetheless, the shaman's particular relationship with the spirit world is integral to their practice, in whatever form this manifests.

Shamanic initiations may be unsolicited and frequently extreme (Djarvoskin, 2003; Halifax, 1991:4 -18). Some shamans struggle to avoid their calling (Vitebsky, 1995:22). The shamanic calling may occur after illness, initiation, death and re-birth. Lewis (1986, cited in Bowie, 2000:207; Lewis, 2003a) describes three stages in a shamanic career, from an initial uncontrolled and involuntary spirit possession to a transformative harnessing of the spirits often involving self-healing and, finally, using the powers thus acquired to heal (or harm) others - the 'healed healer' (Halifax, 1991:18). Shamans seek to control or communicate with spirits through trance séances. However, issues of control or mastery of the spirits are not necessarily as straightforward as Lewis outlines here (see Blain's comments [2002:149], as previously cited). The initiatory psychotic crisis of Tamang shamans is both a 'creative illness' and a 'hereditary disease' or psychopathology (Peters, 1982:21-23).

In other cases, the spirit worlds are consciously sought, often over a period of many years, as the apprentice gathers spirit helpers or power animals (Halifax, 1991; Jakobsen, 1999:52). As a young boy, the Oglala healer, Black Elk, experienced voices calling him, and when he was nine years old he received his Great Vision, aspects of which he re-enacted for his people at certain times throughout his lifetime; after each performance his healing powers grew (Neihardt, 1972:173). In some Native American traditions 'crying for a vision' or 'lamenting' is performed by men and women for purification, thanksgiving or for other reasons. Not all receive a great vision but some may continue trying over several years (Brown, 1992). Over time, it appears that there is a risk for some shamans: the more powerful a shaman becomes the greater his terror, as he faces bigger and bigger challenges from the spirit world, to the point that he may begin to lose his power (Lyon, 1991:23).

Once ecstasy has been achieved, shamans travel via the world axis to the upper, middle or lower worlds, the 'pre-eminently shamanic technique...the passage from one cosmic region to another – from earth to sky or from earth to the underworld' (Eliade, 1972:259). This implies that the shaman has knowledge about the 'cosmic geography of non-ordinary reality' (Harner, 1990:21) and is able to bring back information from these realms. The received information then becomes absorbed into his or her culture and concretised in such physical manifestations as the central pillar of dwelling places that represents the world axis (Eliade, 1972:261-262). For the Beaver people of British Columbia and Alberta, Canada, for example, each person has a subjective understanding of the symbols and mythical meanings of their culture, but only the shaman follows the *axis mundi* to the furthest reaches, bringing back and sharing the knowledge gained with his people through ceremonies, song, story-telling and ritual (Ridington & Ridington, 1992).

In some shamanic traditions, gender roles are blurred, ambiguous or androgynous (Balzer, 2003a; Elwin, 2001; Gaines, 1987:65; Halifax, 1991:22-28, 120-123; Lewis, 2003a:52). Sexual imagery frequently describes the intimate relationship, sometimes a 'marriage', between a shaman and his or her spirit helpers (Vitebsky, 1995:56-58). However, confusion about gender and gender roles in shamanism is one reason (amongst several) that the roles of women shamans from many cultures around the

world have been almost erased from the archaeological and historical records, according to anthropologist and initiated shaman, Barbara Tedlock (2005:40-59). Tedlock argues that women have always practised a wide range of shamanic arts that have been less visible than the ecstatic shamanic traditions portrayed by Eliade (1972) and other male scholars; I return to questions of gender, sexuality and the role of women as shamanic healers in Chapter 7.

Shamans and shamanism are multidimensional, covering vast spectra of phenomena both intra- and inter-culturally. I have presented here a brief overview of the richness and diversity of some aspects of the shamanic complex that continues to fascinate Westerners, and forms a backdrop that influences and inspires neo-Shamans. A shaman is a creative individual practitioner of shamanism. The shamanic complex comprises universal and culturally specific features that are influenced by global processes, as illustrated in the following section.

Cultures in Transition: A New Category of Shamans

In addition to the shamanisms described thus far – universal and generic versus locally specific varieties of shamanism – I identify another category of shamans in those societies who have adapted their shamanic traditions within a modern or post-modern world. These modified forms may include elements of past traditions combined with modern Western influences. Hoppál (1996:xiv) documents societal shifts from modernism over the last thirty or more years, with all its attendant negative effects on traditional cultures and the environment, to post-modern or post-traditional shamanism, cultures where shamanism as ‘an autochthonous phenomenon has survived more or less continuously’ as a living tradition albeit in an altered form.

Cultures have always been subject to changes because of social and historical influences, and the current era has magnified these normal human processes. Syncretic blending of traditions and belief systems are not new either, although contemporary global flows have accentuated and accelerated these developments. The ‘deterritorialization’ of cultures through ‘mass migrations and transnational culture flows’ has led to a ‘world in creolization’ (Gupta & Ferguson, 2001:3-4). This is as true for the ‘spiritual marketplace’ as it is for the corporate business face of the post-modern

world, and is reflected in pluralistic systems of healing, shamanic healing included as shamans deftly move between their worlds. I offer here a (far from comprehensive) *pastiche*, a brief medley selected from a number of cultures to illustrate these processes, as a prelude for further discussion in Chapters 8 and 9, when I examine how global influences, appropriation and syncretic issues play out amongst contemporary Māori healers and neo-Shamans in New Zealand.

By the mid-20th century shamanism amongst the Siberian people was thought to no longer exist, destroyed by the communist regime. However, a re-emergence or revival of shamanistic practices is occurring throughout Manchuria, Siberia, and amongst Northern peoples such as the Khanty (Hoppál, 1996; see also Balzer, 2003a, 2003b; Fridman, 2004; Vitebsky, 2003). Revival may, in some cases, extend to performances at folkloric festivals and perhaps 'it is in this way that tradition finds a means of surviving' (Hoppál, 1996:xviii). Wallis (2003:222-225) discusses Tuva and Sakha shamanic revivals as part of the post-communist ethnic revival in terms of neo-Shamanic influences. In Tuva, shamanic healing practices have changed since pre-Soviet times, and 'even the shamans themselves say they are not as powerful as their ancestors'; however, they are 're-honing their skills', using a combination of traditional practices and alternative healing methods or psychotherapeutic techniques learned from Westerners (Fridman, 2004:164). Shifting local and global influences have led to changing perspectives of shamanism, as Vitebsky (2003) illustrates with two comparative studies from Siberia and India. In the Siberian case young urban Sakha (Yakut) are re-claiming their ethnic and shamanic identity as they embrace New Age shamanism, while the Sora in India are renouncing their shamans in favour of Christianity as changing economic realities make beliefs about the soul-force of their ancestors less viable.

In contemporary Asia, modernity is influencing indigenous healing practices that have adapted and continue to flourish in new guises (Connor, 2001:3). Korean shamanistic practices, for example, are changing within a modern capitalistic environment because of their clients' shifting concerns that are now more likely to be about wealth and social advancement within their society:

A system of religious practices oriented toward the health, harmony, and prosperity of the small family farm has been adapted to a world in which these concerns still apply but where the fate of the family, for good and ill, is seen as dangling on volatile external forces in a moment of intense opportunity and danger (Kendall, 1996:52).

Far from needing to search out shamans in isolated country areas (as she had imagined she might need to at the start of her fieldwork), Kendall found them thriving and vital in urban areas of Seoul. Korean shamans appear to have survived romantic idealisations that would have banished them to the countryside and a nostalgic past, just 'as they have survived antisuperstition campaigns' (Kendall, 2001:37).

The situation is rather different for Lao Hmong shamans living and working in the United States since the 1970s, who have had to negotiate relationships between Western biomedicine and their Hmong community. This has frequently been difficult, resulting in 'enduring misunderstandings'. In spite of this, and along with acculturation into the dominant American culture, the shamans' role has remained important, restoring connection between individuals, their families and communities (Helsel, Mochel & Bauer, 2004:934). The result is a re-contextualisation and re-forming of very old traditions, rather than decontextualisation, and it seems the only changes in practice have been physical ones to do with availability of materials and appropriate ritual spaces (Xiong et al, 2005).

I conclude this section with a few brief vignettes of contemporary indigenous shamans, as examples of the human ability to adapt innovatively and creatively, incorporating changes into their practice as circumstances alter in ways that are often beyond their personal control (and, by contrast, the final example, where this was not possible for one young woman):

- Eduardo Calderón, a Peruvian shaman, moves apparently effortlessly between 'traditional' healing to meet the needs of local Peruvians and adapting his methods and explanatory terminology to suit visiting neo-Shamans. He negotiates complex (real and spirit) worlds and boundaries between indigenous Peruvians and neo-Shamans, 'adapting to new social and cultural

circumstances...[as]...countless other shamans have been doing with their “traditions” for generations’ (Wallis, 2003:199-200). Donald Joralemon (1990:117), in his analysis of the evolving work of Calderón after his ‘discovery’ by neo-Shamans, concludes that ‘obsession [by academics] with the “traditional” obfuscates the actual dynamic quality of culture’.

- Wallace Black Elk, an Oglala medicine man aims to merge Native American healing traditions with modern biomedicine, with the view to legitimating his traditions. Hultkrantz (1992:153-154) documents a remarkable case of a healing conducted by Wallace Black Elk within a hospital.
- Malidoma Somé is a *boburo*, a fully initiated medicine man or diviner of the Dagara tribe, West Central Africa. He also has two doctorates from the Sorbonne in Paris and Brandeis University in Boston, and presently lives in the United States conducting workshops, personal divinations and healings (Somé, 2000; Somé, 2001; see also www.malidoma.com).
- Bacigalupo (1995) writes of the conflicts experienced by a young Mapuche woman in Chile who, after a series of illnesses and dreams, had been identified by her community as a potential *machi* or healer when thirteen years old. Three years after her initiation, she renounced her shamanistic training and fled her family and village. Bacigalupo argues that because the young woman had not fully internalised the teachings they were irrelevant to her, and her only perceived solution was to escape to the city. Mapuche people are undergoing modernisation changes, but many *machi* are able to adapt their traditions within those changes and still practice as healers, unlike this woman.

This short discussion is intended to provide an indication of some of the ways that, in a modern or post-modern ‘global village’, indigenous shamanisms and individual shamans are being challenged to change and adapt. In this respect, they may not be so very far removed from many contemporary Western shamans who are creatively (re)constructing, or reviving and reclaiming their past to form 21st century neo-Shamanic practices that support them individually, and their communities. As Wallis (2003:78) observes, ‘[w]hile it is essential to recognise that neo-Shamanists are different

from their traditional counterparts, it is also plausible...to argue that their close similarity to shamanisms is beyond dispute.' Wallis's observation, along with my research findings, supports my argument that neo-Shamans in New Zealand form one thread in the emergence of multiple 21st century forms of neo-Shamanisms that are comparable to but, at the same time different from, traditional shamanisms.

New Spiritualities in the West: Neo-Shamans and Neo-Shamanism

I think 'neo-Shamanism' is a decent enough term provided it is not used as a sneer term. I think it's useful to have a term for people who have not inherited a shamanic role but perhaps come to it through academia or something like that, and are creating new practitioners or are spreading shamanism in Western society (Jack, research participant).

* * * *

The foregoing discussion about shamans and shamanism historically and in post-modern traditional forms, as documented in the literature, has laid a foundation for the following description of neo-Shamans and neo-Shamanism. Categorising neo-Shamans and neo-Shamanic phenomena is as complex and challenging a task as it is for shamans and shamanism. My research aims to establish the definitions and meanings my research participants, who self-identify as shamans, bring to Langdon's 'enduring institution' of shamanism (1992:20). Very little of the academic literature reviewed in the previous sections includes accounts of the subjective experiences of 'real' self-identified shamans. Csordas notes that frequently anthropological accounts of ritual healing are about what is 'done to' ritual participants rather than what it 'means for' them (1996:94, emphasis in original). Kathryn Rountree (1993) also found this to be the case in her study of feminist witches. Scholars have persistently viewed witches as 'other', focusing on what societies have thought or written about them rather than the lived subjective experiences of witches themselves. Using a feminist perspective, Rountree chose to place self-identified witches at the centre of her study 'as a symbol of woman's independent knowledge and power' (1993:54) and, although she began her research as an interested and curious outsider, identifying herself as a feminist witch

over the course of her fieldwork provided a deeper experiential level to her understandings. In Australia, Robert Boyle (2007) included himself as one of seven participants in his doctoral exploration of neo-Shamanism and how modern shamanic practitioners understand their journeys into shamanic altered states of consciousness for the explicit purpose of psycho-spiritual healing, with its 'shadow manifestations', a 'soul's journey'. The following commentary includes material from scholars, academic researchers who self-identify as neo-Shamans, and other neo-Shamans.

Robert Wallis (2003) is an academic and self-identified neo-Shaman who offers a sympathetic but not uncritical account of the diversity of neo-Shamanisms, drawing on the shamanic practices of contemporary Pagans in the United Kingdom and North America (such as Celtic and Northern shamanisms, seidr, Heathenism and Druidry),¹⁹ and core shamanism as taught internationally by Michael Harner and the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies* (FSS). He discards descriptors applied to neo-Shamans by other scholars – 'crisis cults', 'revitalisation movements', 'marginal religious movements', 'subculture' or 'counterculture movements, or 'New Age' amongst others – on the grounds that neo-Shamans are too numerous, too diffuse, and diverse in their practices (2003:29). Neo-Shamans, he says:

...embody a number of socio-political locations, including counter-cultural, being socially integrated, modern and post-modern. In this diversity, neo-Shamanisms reject attempts at simplistic classification...we might rather speak less pejoratively, plurally and simply, of 'neo-Shamanisms' (2003:30).

¹⁹ As the scope of his book suggests, Wallis places neo-Pagan practices under a neo-Shamanic umbrella, saying that he is 'perplexed' that 'Paganism' has become the term commonly used by researchers and writers studying neo-Shamanism and neo-Paganism. He considers that 'shamanism' is the term that better describes the situation since shamanism is a more global expression while paganism is 'originally located...in Classical antiquity.' Moreover, he continues, 'Paganisms are permeated by neo-Shamanisms...more than neo-Shamanisms are influenced by Paganisms' (2003:33). Wallis makes some valid points; however, I have chosen to follow the dominant convention amongst other scholars in locating neo-Shamanism under the neo-Pagan rubric (see, for example, Harvey, 1997; Rountree, 2010:6). My research addresses those practitioners identifying as, or identified by others as, 'shaman' and does not include neo-Pagans other than a brief mention in Chapter 4, when I examine the interfaces between neo-Shamans and neo-Pagans in New Zealand. Seidr (pronounced 'sayth' or 'say-thur') is defined by Blain as a re-constructed shamanistic practice derived from ancient Icelandic sagas, a product of the modern 'urban shaman' movement (2002:x, 6).

Wallis (2003:50) therefore suggests that the Danish anthropologist, Merete Jakobsen (1999:147-205), who labels neo-Shamanism as a New Age activity, made an 'error' in choosing to focus her research solely on Harner's core shamanism as the only example of what neo-Shamans do, and in failing to recognise the plurality and variety of neo-Shamanisms.

Nonetheless, and in spite of Wallis's (2003:29) and some other neo-Shamans' rejection, there is a tendency for outsiders to continue to link neo-Shamanism with New Age thinking (and indeed some neo-Shamanic or neo-Pagan practices can look 'New Age' to outsiders). A brief browse amongst New Age bookshops in Auckland reveals numerous popular books about shamanic healing, many of them based on Harner's core shamanism principles or Native American spirituality whose authors are all keen to establish the legitimacy and authenticity of their teaching lineages (see, for example, Tom Brown, Jr, 1991). The 1960s counter-culture movements, with their dismissal of mainstream values and politics, and attraction to New Age spirituality and values, healing and personal growth, environmental concerns, drug experimentation and pop music, certainly provided fertile ground for modern shamanic movements to emerge during the 1970s (Heelas, 1996; Vitebsky, 1995:150-151). Harner (1990:xi) puts forward several reasons for the 'shamanic renaissance' in the Western world: the end of an Age of Faith and a corresponding search for an experiential spirituality, along with an increased interest in holistic health and spiritual ecology. Romantic and idealised notions about 'exotic others' perceived as being in touch with a pristine nature have possibly also contributed to these trends (Vitebsky, 2003:285-290; von Stuckrad, 2002).

The difficulty with this debate is that 'New Age' is as slippery to categorise as 'neo-Shamanism'. There is no one simple definition of 'New Age'. Hess (1993:4, cited in Jakobsen, 1999:152) identifies seven areas of interest common amongst New Age followers, which overlap with much wider and more general discourses related to 'science, religion, feminism, biomedicine, psychotherapy, environmentalism, and non-Western philosophies'. Several writers compare and contrast the New Age and neo-Pagan movements, noting in particular the tendency for New Age thinking to be more

interested in the transcendent and utopian than that of neo-Pagans (Greenwood, 2000:8-11; Pearson, 1998, 2002; York, 1995). The 'essential *lingua franca*' of New Age thinking is 'self-spirituality' (Heelas,1996:18), but many neo-Pagans or neo-Shamans similarly aspire to create their own spiritual pathway. There are overlaps between neo-Shamanism, Paganism and New Age thinking (von Stuckrad, 2002); some individual neo-Shamans may be more New Age influenced than others, whilst others will reject being categorised as New Age. Susan Greenwood follows Catherine Albanese (1991, cited in Greenwood, 2005:ix) in her use of the expression 'nature religion [that] comprises a number of spiritual ontologies, all of which have different conceptions of nature, but most share the view that there is an interconnected and sacred universe'. Nature religion beliefs and practices also have these same three overlapping strands (paganism, shamanism and New Age), Greenwood suggests (2005:x). I examine these interfaces in more detail in Chapter 4 in relation to the neo-Shamanic landscape in New Zealand.

The term 'neo-Shamanism', coined by Rothenberg (1985, cited in Wallis, 2003:30), has been used primarily by scholars to distinguish indigenous shamanism from Westerners who have embraced shamanism in various forms as their spiritual practice. The term frequently has a derogatory or 'biased tone' (von Stuckrad, 2002:774), and many academics are 'neo-Shamanophobic' (Wallis,1999:46), unwilling to consider potential positive aspects of neo-Shamanic practices. As neo-Shaman, Annette Høst (n.d.a), who co-facilitates shamanic trainings with Jonathan Horwitz at the *Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies*, (perhaps plaintively) observes:

I am standing with both feet in my own time and soil and society. Trying to learn things that were forgotten and forbidden for a long time. Then some people come and call me names. Or they call what I do names.

A selection of other names – 'core shamanism', 'Harner shamanism', 'urban shamanism', 'modern shamanism', 'contemporary shamanism', 'modern Western/European shamanism' - have all been used at different times by various writers and practitioners. I follow the predominant convention amongst scholars in my use of the term 'neo-Shaman', while noting that not all neo-Shamans are happy with this label;

many trained in core shamanism prefer to be called 'shamanic practitioners' as a means of distinguishing their form of shamanism from indigenous practices. Others, however (such as my participant, Jack, quoted in the epigraph heading this section), are tolerant of the term provided it is not a 'sneer term'.

According to Wallis (2003:33), three authors have contributed to the popularity of shamanism amongst Westerners:

- Mircea Eliade with his book *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1972);
- Carlos Castaneda and his series of books about his training with the Yaqui Indian sorcerer don Juan, beginning with *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1970);
- Michael Harner, anthropologist and author of *The Way of the Shaman* (1990), promoter of core shamanism. (I discuss Harner's work and core shamanism in the following section.)

Previously I noted some critiques of Eliade's work that, although written for an academic audience, has gained wide popularity amongst neo-Shamans. Core shamanism in particular subscribes to Eliade's views of ecstatic flight as the defining feature of a shaman, labeled the Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC) by Harner (1990:21); I re-examine the primacy Eliade gives to ecstatic flight in Chapter 7 when discussing ecstatic and enstatic forms of shamanism. While Eliade's binary presentation of 'pure' shamanism versus 'decadent' variants are the result of out-dated cultural evolutionary concepts, Wallis (2003:38) takes a holistic view on Eliade. Eliade's contribution is better balanced when he is considered as 'person, Christian, novelist and scholar', as someone who 'paved the way' for popular concepts of a universal shamanism, and who 'unwittingly...had "great influence on Europe's Pagan revival"' (Henry, 1999:1, cited in Wallis, 2003:38).

Carlos Castaneda's anthropological and writing career has been fraught with controversy. The issues can be crystallised as two-fold: firstly, questions concerning academic rigour and the veracity of his fieldwork and, secondly, the elusive nature of Castaneda himself. His use of 'literary devices to trick his readers' (Narby & Huxley, 2001:148) can perhaps best be interpreted as an allegorical style, almost a game devised

by him in an attempt to 'erase personal history' as he was instructed to do by don Juan, the Yaqui sorcerer to whom he was supposedly apprenticed (Castaneda, 1976:11). Richard de Mille (1976) analysed Castaneda's books in detail in an attempt to verify the truth of Castaneda's claims, and to pin down the elusive 'real' Castaneda. The complex mixture of truth and lies continues to confound scholars, not least the issue of whether UCLA should have granted Castaneda a doctorate based on his writings. Notwithstanding the debate within academia, there is no denying that millions of people world-wide have been influenced by his books, which introduced the possibility that anyone could become a shaman: 'De Mille unmasked the bogus fieldworker but took Castaneda seriously as Trickster-Teacher, a deceptive truth-bringer who taught a new conception of "reality" to millions of readers' (de Mille, 1980: back cover). Wallis (2003:45) suggests that Castaneda's books have led to a polarising of opinions and contributed to the 'academic-shamanophobia' on the one hand, and the popularisation of neo-Shamanism ('neo-Shamania') on the other. Certainly, outside of academia, authenticity issues are irrelevant to Castaneda followers who study Toltec shamanism spawned from the teachings of don Juan as presented by Castaneda. They seek to master the three skills of awareness, transformation and intent, believing also that the sorcerer don Juan initiated a group of three women as well as Castaneda (see Abelar, 1992; Castaneda, 1994; Feather, 2006).

As well as the extensive influence of these three writers (Eliade, Castaneda and Harner), mention must be made here of the vast impact of the internet on dissemination of information about neo-Shamanism and neo-Paganism. Internationally, virtual global communities of neo-Shamans communicate and network through thousands of websites. For several years *Shaman Portal*, for example, has provided information and listings about courses, articles and discussion groups concerning shamanism from around the world.²⁰ According to its September 2010 E-Newsletter, 43,000 people visit the site each month from 168 countries. Many websites are indeed portals to other realities, offering Westerners opportunities to visit exotic

²⁰ See <http://www.shamanportal.org/about.php> (accessed 22 June 2010).

places such as the Amazon and experience *ayahuasca* and other hallucinogenic drugs.²¹ Core shamanism is not the sole representative of neo-Shamanic activities on the internet; however, the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*, founded by Michael Harner features prominently.

Finally, and without wanting to over-state its significance, I speculate that perhaps the first steps of professionalisation of contemporary Western shamanic practitioners are observable with the formation of the *Society for Shamanic Practitioners* (SSP). The SSP was established in 2003 when a group of independent shamanic practitioners came together with a common purpose and vision to integrate shamanic practices into their professional work, and to set down guiding ethical principles. The group comprised people from such professions as medical doctors, teachers, anthropologists, psychotherapists and social workers. A not-for-profit organisation, the SSP now has 850 members worldwide, holds annual conferences in the United States and United Kingdom, and publishes *The Journal of Shamanic Practice* twice yearly.²² The Editorial Board for the journal consists of a number of scholars from various disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, psychology, and religious studies as well as prominent neo-Shamanic practitioners, mostly from the United States.

Core Shamanism

Shamanism, writes anthropologist Michael Harner, is a methodology and a way of life (1990:xii). His book, *The Way of the Shaman*, outlines his version of core shamanism as an ancient universal method primarily used for 'health and healing', a tool and 'strategy for personal learning' (1990:xxiii-xxiv). Not surprisingly, Harner has been criticised for simplifying and de-contextualising his depiction of shamanism as a safe practice freely available to anyone by choice, and I discuss these and other critiques later in this chapter. I think it is important, however, to acknowledge Harner's positive

²¹ *Ayahuasca* is a liquid prepared from *Banisteriopsis caapi* spp., a South American vine, often in combination with other plants. The 6th *International Amazonian Shamanism Conference*, for example, held at Iquitos, Peru, in July 2010, offered conference participants 'at least three opportunities to partake in Ceremony with Shamans'. See <http://www.soga-del-alma.org/> (accessed 5 Sept 2010).

²² <http://www.shamansociety.org/> (accessed 5 Sept 2010).

influence and contribution in providing tools for thousands of people worldwide to empower themselves and to access spiritual realms experientially. Ecofeminist and academic, Gloria Orenstein, writes that:

[Harner's] work...is of immeasurable value, and I fully agree with the importance of familiarizing contemporary Westerners with the possibilities of experiences of the "shamanic journey" or the spirit flight (1994:176).

Nonetheless, she follows this comment with a proviso regarding naïve oversimplification of shamanism, and the dangers of not taking the spirits seriously.

Harner's fieldwork began with Jívaro (Shuar) Indian shamans in the Upper Amazon in the beginning in 1956 and 1957 but it wasn't until he returned to the Amazon to live with the Conibo Indians in 1960 and 1961 that he first took their sacred drink *ayahuasca*. During his shamanic initiation he underwent intense and sometimes terrifying experiences, at times fearing for his safety, and, over a period of years, acquiring *tsentsak* (magical darts or spirit helpers) (Harner, 1990:1-19). Subsequently he lived and worked with indigenous peoples in Mexico, the Canadian Arctic, Samiland and Western North America (Horrigan, 1997). From the Native Americans he learnt that shamanism could be practised without drugs, opening the way for introducing practical core shamanism to Westerners (Harner, 1990:18), at a time when the political climate was not sympathetic towards drug experimentation but many people were hungry for new forms of spirituality. Unlike Castaneda, Harner has maintained his professional anthropological credibility to a certain degree, continuing to present papers at anthropological conferences and to be published in academic journals, although Wallis (2003:45) asserts that by 'going native' he may have lost his academic credibility with some anthropologists. However, in December 2009, scholars belonging to three separate *American Anthropological Association* organisations acknowledged him for his 'pioneering work' in shamanism during a one-day seminar devoted to shamanism, and dedicated to him.²³

²³ The three organisations were the *Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness*, the *Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* and the *Society for Humanistic Anthropology*. (reported

Harner established the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies* (FSS) in 1985, and annually over 5000 students attend courses under the banner of the *Foundation* (formerly the *Center for Shamanic Studies*, founded in 1979),²⁴ and many of them in turn go on to teach thousands of others. Jonathan Horwitz (who worked for the *Foundation* for eight years) and Annette Høst, for example, have formed the *Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies* offering similar courses, covering shamanic journeying to the upper, middle or lower worlds for personal healing, earth healing, shamanic drumming and ritual, shamanic counselling, and Northern European traditions such as seidr. Magazines such as *Shaman's Drum* (published in the USA), and *Sacred Hoop* (published in the UK) have numerous advertisements for shamanic trainings, shamanic journeying and drumming groups, soul retrieval training, workshops to connect with earth spirits, vision quests, sweatlodges and shamanic tours to South America and other countries. Many, but by no means all, of these facilitators have trained with the FSS.

Harner claims that the FSS is a 'laboratory of shamanism pioneering a science of spirits'. Western science, he says, is 'truncated by a major ethnocentric and cognicentric a priori assumption of what is impossible' (Harner, 1999:2). According to Harner, science works from faith that spirits are not real (Horrigan, 1997:3).²⁵ Criticisms of orthodox Western science by Harner are congruent with those put forward by a number of writers who perceive of an 'epistemological crisis of the West' originating from a mechanical worldview that began to emerge in the seventeenth century (Reason, 1993:274).²⁶ Some writers postulate a sacred or 'contemplative science'

in the FSS E-Newsletter January 2010. See <http://shamanism.org/news/2010/01/13/michael-harner-recognized-by-the-american-anthropological-association/> accessed 14 January 2010).

²⁴ See <http://www.shamanism.org/index.html> (accessed 17 April 2005), <http://www.shamanism.org/fssinfo/harnerbio.html> (accessed 8 March 2007), <http://www.shamanism.org/fssinfo/index.html> (accessed 12 Nov 2009).

²⁵ Roger Walsh (2001:257) writes that it is 'not at all clear that it is possible to disprove' the existence of spirits (in much the same way as it is difficult to disprove the existence of God), a case of 'ontological indeterminacy', and thus people generally adopt the position of their ambient culture without questioning its underlying assumptions.

²⁶ Other scholars have identified three 'dethronings' of Western egocentric thinking: geocentric, biocentric, cognicentric, the result of the revolutionary thinking of Copernicus, Darwin and Freud respectively (Puhle & Parker, 2004:7). A fourth, the realisation of the relativity of knowledge to history and culture, has been put forward by German philosopher Michael

(Wallace, 2000), a science underpinned by a mystical/spiritual worldview, a sacred inquiry in which the 'participatory consciousness' of humans becomes a valid starting point with 'images, dream, story, poetry and metaphor' forming a bridge between experiential knowledge and propositional knowledge and understandings (Heron, 1992, cited in Reason, 1993:279). Wallis expresses a similar perspective, writing that by:

...occupying a demonstrably shamanic way of being, with spirit-helpers, "supernatural" forms of healing and sometimes entheogenic²⁷ assistance to enter trance, some neo-Shamans are radically critiquing the received wisdom of objective science all around them (2003:70).

Harner's 'science of spirits', as practiced by neo-Shamans, thus becomes a form of sacred science that validates subjective experiences as an acceptable avenue for acquiring knowledge and exploring the ineffable. By taking the spirits seriously, neo-Shamans are 'paying extra' to shamanism (Harvey, 1997:107)²⁸, and contributing to the 'new cultural discourse' Kent calls for (2007:vi, cited in Chapter 1). Along with Wallis (2003:70) and Kent (2007), I argue that neo-Shamans are critiquing and challenging mainstream science when they engage in alternative methods of obtaining knowledge. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand are playing a small role in these processes as they enter altered states of consciousness to explore other realities and other ways of knowing.

Landmann and, according to Puhle and Parker, taking the paranormal seriously offers a fifth challenge to human intellect (2004:279).

²⁷ Because of the prevailing anti-drug ethos in the West, some scholars and neo-Shamans have adopted the term 'entheogen' (meaning 'god within') as being more neutral and less pejorative than 'psychedelics', 'hallucinogens' or 'psychoactive', terms which are associated with recreational drug-use as opposed to sacramental use (Blain, 2002:53-54; Wallis, 2003:239, n.2; see also the website for the *Council on Spiritual Practices* <http://www.csp.org/practices/entheogens/entheogens.html> accessed 5 Sep 2010).

²⁸ Harvey (1997:107) cites the Lewis Carroll character Humpty Dumpty, who says that words can be used to mean whatever he wants them to mean; such words are then 'paid extra'. Harvey suggests that 'shamanism' has become one such hard-working word that deserves extra pay.

(Re)Constructing Shamanic Practices: Neo-Pagans and Neo-Shamans in Britain and Europe

Some speculate that many European myths featuring trials endured, journeys to the underworld, and death and re-birth are evidence of shamanic traces in the West (Hayden, 2003:86). Clifton (2004) traces various threads that may have contributed to shamanism in the Western world. The pantheon of ancient Greece, according to some scholars, exhibited magico-religious influences possibly derived from Eastern Europe and Hungary, or influences from Central and Northern Asian shamanism from whence came the notion of a soul that could separate from the body in dreams or during a shamanic trance. Practitioners from the Orphic or Dionysian mysteries sought ecstatic journeys, possibly fuelled by a psychoactive substance from ergot. Such speculations serve as legitimization for some neo-Shamans and neo-Pagans seeking to re-claim an authentic and ancient lineage.

In recent years a group of English scholars, who self-identify as neo-Pagan or neo-Shamanic practitioners, have been conducting auto-ethnographic research about neo-Paganisms, including Heathens, Druids, neo-Shamans, seidr, Wiccans, and Goddess followers.²⁹ Jenny Blain, anthropologist and seidrworker, for example, employs multiple, situated narratives that provide richly layered descriptions of one seidr séance, ranging from the viewpoint of an interested observer (the ethnographer) to accounts by several fully participating people, thus building a mosaic of images in an attempt to capture the subtle and ineffable nature of the experience (2002:35-39). She herself is walking between the worlds, negotiating her position 'within the cultural contexts of the discourse of academia and those of seidrworkers' (2002:7), reminiscent of Kathryn Rountree's dilemma which she resolved by positioning herself as the *hag*, one able to 'sit on the fence' and 'inhabit and participate in both worlds' (2004:72). In the following chapter, I describe the tensions inherent in my multiple roles as researcher and naturopathic practitioner seeking to develop and expand my relationship with the spirits.

²⁹ Galina Lindquist (1997:3) likens this situation to that of other areas such as feminist or gay studies where often the leading academic theorists are carrying out self- or auto- research. Robert Wallis (2003:12), for example, uses Queer Theory to explain some aspects of his theoretical stand in his ethnography.

Environmental educator and neo-Shaman, Gordon MacLellan (2003), in his exploration of what it is to be a shaman in modern Britain, situates shamanism within the neo-Pagan movement in modern Britain and describes contemporary shamans as those who continue to fulfill traditional roles - employing ecstatic trance states to bridge the worlds, conveying messages and communicating between the spirit and human worlds. He distinguishes between a shaman who has been 'claimed by the Otherworld' (2003:372) and marked by the spirits, and those who use 'shamanistic' techniques; I return to this distinction in Chapter 7. While the outer appearances and trappings of shamans vary widely and have been modified in modern Western society as new traditions evolve, MacLellan suggests that the roles of shamans are still important:

Modern shamans may be:

personal healers: shamans who help people to listen to themselves

community healers: shamans who help people listen to each other

patterners: shamans who help the community listen to/relate to the world around them (MacLellan, 2003:369).

MacLellan identifies himself as a 'patterner'; however, while his inspiration comes from the spirits, he says he rarely uses traditional shamanic tools of drum, rattle or trance dance in public where his shamanic paraphernalia might not be appropriate for his more orthodox audience. Privately, he is a member of a group of shamanic practitioners called *Mad Shamans*, and takes time most days to meditate or dance to communicate with his 'family of spirits' (Greenwood, 2005:93). Greenwood was present during a Sacred Trance Dance to celebrate spring and observed the 'participatory communication between Gordon and the spirits...the other-than-human³⁰ was coming through in human form' (2005:94) as he embodied his spirit helpers. In common with many contemporary Western shamans (including some of

³⁰ Harvey (2003a:9-11), drawing on the work of Irving Hallowell (2002), uses the term 'other-than-human persons' in preference to 'spirits' with its pejorative and mystical connotations. I discuss this concept further in Chapter 5.

my research participants), MacLellan is dancing between the worlds of spirit and humans; at the same time, he has learnt to modify his practices to gain a wider audience for the messages he conveys from the spirit world. His message is that of bringing increased awareness and enjoyment of the natural world, which people then interpret and act on in whatever manner they choose; his task is done and he surrenders to the outcome (2003:369-370).

Critiques of Neo-Shamans and Neo-Shamanism

A summary of scholarly criticisms of the practices of neo-Shamans follows, in which I draw attention to some of the issues that implicate all neo-Shamans (whether they are aware of them or not). The concerns are complex; moreover, 'monolithic' critiques (Wallis, 2003:225) of neo-Shamans are blunt instruments that do not always identify the nuances of the debates. Much of the criticism assumes that all neo-Shamanisms are the same, and does not recognise their diversity, or make a distinction between neo-Shamans and those who might be considered New Age followers. Other writers compare neo-Shamans with indigenous shamans and criticise them on that basis (for example, Jakobsen's [1999] study makes a comparison between the supposedly 'pristine' shamanic culture of Greenland and core neo-Shamanism). Neither approach identifies or addresses the complexities and inter-relatedness of such socio-political considerations as an examination of indigeneity and the relationships between indigenous peoples and neo-Shamans, the revival of shamanism in indigenous cultures, neo-colonialism and power imbalances, globalisation processes, community identity, or relationship to nature and ecological concerns (Harvey, 2003a:5-8; Wallis, 2003:49-78). The discussion is in general terms, and I re-examine the points raised here more specifically in relation to neo-Shamans in New Zealand later, in Chapter 9.

Critics of neo-Shamanism (and core shamanism in particular) generally accuse practitioners of decontextualising and universalising shamanism; psychologising and individualising shamanism in ways that place self-healing and personal growth central to their practice rather than the good of the community; cultural primitivism that promotes and reifies stereotypes; and, finally, the romanticisation of indigenous shamanisms (Wallis, 2003:49). Wallis (2003:57) argues that by removing the culturally-

specific aspects from traditional shamanisms, core shamanism aligns itself with New Age ideologies. Undoubtedly, for those neo-Shamans perhaps more allied with New Age philosophies, shamanism is part of the 'tribal lore...supermarket...They program computers...by day so that by night they can wrestle with spirit jaguars and search for power spots', thereby reducing lifetimes of discipline to a set of techniques, belittling and denying the embeddedness of indigenous knowledge (Brown, 2001:110-113). Certainly Jakobsen's (1999:148-149) description of a 'modern shaman' from Birmingham, whom she observed at a New Age fair in Oxford, does evoke cynicism. The self-styled shaman's psychic therapies, crystals, 'sacred path cards', astrological and colour therapy skills, together with her supposedly Celtic heritage and Native American shamanic trainings appear to have covered all bases in the range of tools offered, 'a synthesis of the spiritual search' that appeal to her many customers.

Paul Johnson (2003) is critical of Harner's work and his promotion of core shamanism, suggesting that there are issues related to the continuity of shamanic performances; he questions whether they are actually the same ritual when transplanted into different cultural contexts. By comparing traditional Jívaro shamanism with the core shamanism that has evolved from the FSS, Johnson concludes that they are not one-and-the same. The issues are those of Western hegemony he says: neo-Shamans who are unavoidably embedded within their own 'cultural matrix' (2003:335) are practising a form of shamanism whose authority is based on imaginary nostalgic notions of what constitutes the 'natural' or 'indigenous'. He argues that there are contradictions between the stated aims of the FSS, namely respect for indigenous peoples' shamanic knowledge, and its introduction of innovative practices that have resulted in a modernist form of shamanism consisting of a 'quasi-ritual' practice with a psychological base (2003:346). However, this need not necessarily make them invalid as healing practices or negate their significance for individual practitioners, and Johnson concedes that his analysis does not 'preclude' the possibility of 'genuine healing' (2003:337).

Neo-Shamans are frequently critiqued on the grounds of appropriation, the process whereby a dominant culture 'borrows' from minority peoples thereby maintaining or exacerbating power imbalances (Sered & Barnes, 2005:21). Wallis (2003:198-205)

provides examples of widespread neo-Shamanic attraction towards indigenous cultures in Southern Africa, Peru, Mexico, Hawaii, and Australia; he suggests though that neo-Shamanic activities have been most contentious in regard to the appropriation of Native American spiritualities. My examination of the academic literature, and internet searches, points to a similar conclusion: many Native American scholars and writers are angry and take exception with what has been termed the 'growth industry' of American Indian spiritualism by New Age consumers buying spiritual bric-a-brac and attending workshops (see for example Aldred, 2000; Churchill, 2003; Smith, 1994; also Jenkins's [2004] analysis of the popularisation of Native American spirituality). Fascination with the 'exotic savage' and the search for lost ideals have led to Euroamericans yearning for 'instant' spirituality while being sold a tarnished and 'deluded' version of Indian spirituality. New Age 'plastic medicine men' or 'wannabes' both trivialise and commercialise Native American spirituality and, although they might consider themselves to be countercultural, as a result of their uncritical appropriation these New Agers are firmly embedded within their larger consumer and capitalist milieu, the writers say. Numerous websites posted by Native Americans seek to distance themselves from neo-Shamans, declaring vehemently that '[w]e do not have shamans', and that Native American religions are not shamanism.³¹

Piers Vitbesky (2003), in his discussion about global and local knowledge, is critical of the piecemeal appropriation and transmutation of some elements of shamanism into contemporary Western societies, while other locally specific notions (such as ancestor worship) that may not so readily transplant into a Western cosmology, are discarded. He asserts that, as a result, neo-Shamans can 'never authentically recapture the holistic vision' of indigenous knowledge (cited in Wallis, 2003:77). However, Vitebsky's and Johnson's (2003) perspectives are denying any possibility of sensitive exploration of new spiritual practices by those neo-Shamans who seek to create their own meanings and traditions to produce 'a new sort of shamanic local knowledge' (Wallis, 2003:78). At least in some cases these evolving new traditions are based on personal experiential (and sometimes spontaneous) encounters with the spirit world, possibly indicating that

³¹ See, for example, http://www.angelfire.com/electronic/awakening101/not_shamans.html or <http://www.bluecorncomics.com/shaman.htm> (accessed 13 November, 2006).

the gulf between traditional and modern Western epistemologies may not necessarily be as vast as Vitbesky and Johnson are suggesting. The notion of 'magical consciousness' has been offered by Susan Greenwood, defined by her as a particular form of altered consciousness in which a 'participatory and expanded aspect of consciousness' allows reciprocal communication to occur between other-than-human and human persons, thus promoting 'an awareness of holistic interconnections and cosmologies' (Greenwood, 2005:91). Neo-Shamans working with this level of consciousness (such as MacLellan [2003], whose work I described earlier) could be said to be 'paying extra' to shamanism as they develop and evolve contemporary forms of Western shamanism.

Not all neo-Shamans are implicated in unaware cultural theft, as illustrated in the self-reflexive auto-ethnographic writings of the academic-practitioners discussed earlier. In some instances, neo-Shamans (in Europe and Britain, for example) could argue they are no different from indigenous peoples who are reviving old ideas and shamanic practices of their ancestors. They are the 'new-indigenes' (Harvey & Wallis, 2007:153), developing and re-embedding their own neo-Shamanic and spiritual practices appropriate to their own place of birth and ancestral roots. Scandinavian shamanic practitioner Annette Host (n.d.b) observes that when the 'essence' of a particular form of traditional shamanism is supposedly distilled down to its universal residue (as is claimed in the case of 'core shamanism'), this residue is immediately and unavoidably imbued with the cultural values and understandings of the neo-Shamanic practitioner '[a]nd then it is not core anymore (sic)'. Host writes that, while she initially appreciated the Harner training:

...seen now with my Nordic and somewhat shamanically experienced eyes, Harner's way of shamanism seems rather, well, American. That is, it is adapted to the American Christian, spiritual-fast-food culture (Host, n.d.b).

Over time Host has modified what she learnt from her training and developed her own form of shamanism, which she prefers to call Modern Western (or European)

shamanism, shaped out of her own experiences and culture. Her own local form of shamanic knowledge has organically evolved.

There are no simple answers to these challenging issues that are probably best judged on a case-by-case basis. Brown (2003), in his study about disputes regarding access to sacred sites in Australia and the western United States, argues for a balance between the cultural rights of indigenous peoples and public rights to information or access to (sacred) spaces, based on mutual respect, dignity and negotiation. These are worthy aspirations, but as Brown points out, 'technological and social changes are making cultural boundaries ever harder to identify' (2003:252), and in an internet age face-to-face negotiations are generally not an option. The matter is further complicated by the fact that some Native Americans and 'metis' or mixed blood people are willing to teach and share their traditions with Westerners, thus raising queries about what is 'traditional', how traditions are constructed, and who has the authority to sanction them (Wallis, 2003: 204). As Wallis (2003:31) writes, '[t]he question "is neo-Shamanism authentic, or valid?" begs another question: "when does a new religious path or set of paths become traditional and authentic?", or at least, at which point are they perceived to be so?' Ironically, in some circumstances, it is only when indigenous people have taught white Westerners their traditions that the traditions are being kept alive (2003:221), albeit in modified forms.

Literature on Neo-Shamanism in New Zealand

Little has been written about neo-Shamans in New Zealand in the academic literature, although there have been a few studies about neo-Pagans and the New Age movement. Robert Ellwood's (1996) chapter, *Esoteric Religions*, discusses Spiritualists and Theosophists amongst other groups, and includes a short mention of neo-Pagans in New Zealand, while Catherine Benland's (1996) chapter, *Women's Spirituality Movement*, in the same volume describes both neo-Pagan and Christian feminist spirituality movements. Kathryn Rountree (1993, 2004) has extensively researched feminist witches and Goddess spirituality in New Zealand. Studies that are more recent include Stephanie Dobson's (2005) thesis about Wicca and other neo-Pagan spiritualities, and Lynda Hampton's (2008) investigation into the New Age movement

in New Zealand. Hampton includes Wicca and Paganism under her rubric of 'New Age' but there are no neo-Shamans amongst her participants. None of these texts directly addresses shamanism.

The one study I have located that explicitly researches neo-Shamans in New Zealand is Mary Hanson's (2001) research, analysing the transformational benefits of shamanic journeying for twelve neo-Shamans (nine women and three men). All of the neo-Shamans Hanson interviewed spoke of their existential quest that led them to explore shamanism. They all claimed that their shamanic experiences healed their psychological wounds, improved their general health, and that their shamanic journeying had transformational benefits. Hanson examined self-transformation from such psychological and theoretical stances as self-actualisation, spiritual emergence/emergencies, change theory and perspective transformation.³² However, she does not specifically place neo-Shamanism within the wider New Zealand social framework; nor does she attend to the possible similarities and differences between neo-Shamanic phenomena in New Zealand and other parts of the world, or examine neo-Shamanism in relation to contemporary Māori healing practices.

Some popular books have been written about clairvoyants and psychic healing in New Zealand (for example, Allen, 1995; Sims, 1999). One New Zealand woman, Szuson (1996), wrote of her personal experiences during her sixteen-year association with Shaman, a healer who lived in the deserts of Arizona. She underwent an intense initiation process involving fasting for forty-four days, and a series of Rolfing sessions (deep tissue body work) to release emotional wounds and trauma held in her body. Her story is an interesting autobiographical study but it does not include an analysis of her experiences, or place them within a larger sociocultural context.

A New Zealand man and retired school principal, Trevor Campbell (2005), identifying as Pākehā but with distant Māori ancestry, has written about coming to terms with his increasingly frequent and spontaneous psychic experiences. His visions

³² One New Zealand neo-Shaman, John Broomfield (2001), has compared shamanism and transpersonal psychology: both connect people to spirit, and to deep sources of wisdom within themselves, their communities and the earth, he says. Broomfield and the neo-Shamans in Hanson's study appear to be referring to the concept of the 'wounded healer', the shaman initiate who undergoes trauma and is healed (transformed) before commencing his or her shamanising career.

included scenes and people from the past, of both his Māori and Pākehā ancestors that have led him to serve a role as psychopomp, releasing their trapped spirits. Unlike much 'New Age' writing, his account is a modest, careful and factual setting out of his experiences, and he leaves the reader to determine their validity. He traces the threads of confirmation and validation of his experiences in a convincing manner, while making no claims about his abilities. However, his spiritual connections extend from the past into the present-time, as he records the delicate dance of 'coincidences', synchronous events and meetings with a present-day Māori tohuna.³³ His book is not specifically 'shamanic' but is an interesting example of inter-weaving Pākehā and Māori cultural and spiritual explorations.

Conclusion

Arguably, shamans and, more recently, neo-Shamans have provided rich material for social scientists to investigate. This chapter has examined shamanism from an anthropological perspective that generally categorises shamanic phenomena as multifaceted religious and healing practices. In addition, popular publications and the internet provide avenues for millions of people worldwide to access information about, and to explore, shamanism in its numerous guises. Ironically, the interest in shamanism amongst both the academy and the public has created a semantic dilemma about what exactly a 'shaman' is (or is not). For some, shamans remain liminal and mysterious psychic adepts, while a few commentators suggest they are largely products of the Western imagination (see, for example, Hutton, 2001). Shamans and shamanism are therefore multidimensional, covering vast spectra of phenomena both within any one single culture, and between different cultures. Individual shamans are creative bricoleurs who draw on whatever materials are at hand. The shamanic complex comprises universal and culturally specific features that are influenced by global processes impinging on and changing the practices of traditional or indigenous

³³ 'Tohuna' is a Tuhoe dialectical variation of 'tohunga', a priest or skilled spiritual leader (there is an extended discussion about the definitions and roles of tohunga in Chapter 8). The tohuna Dr Pere says that amongst her people (Tuhoe, Ngati Kahungunu, Ruapani and Tahumatua), priests/priestesses are called 'tohuna', derived from "to" [meaning] knowing when and how to plant a seed, and "huna" [meaning] the keeper of the secrets' (<http://www.aiohealing.com/pdf/ROSE-PERE-AIO.pdf> accessed 3 August 2008).

shamanism, all of which have led to the creation of a sociocultural climate conducive to the evolution of neo-Shamanisms in the Western world. This chapter has provided a brief overview of the richness and diversity of the shamanic complex that continues to fascinate Westerners, and forms a backdrop to the practices that influence and inspire neo-Shamans. It lays a comparative and theoretical foundation to support the ethnographic chapters that follow. In the next chapter, I position myself as a researcher of neo-Shamanisms in New Zealand, describe my methodology, discuss ethical issues and introduce key participants.

CHAPTER 3

STEPPING ONTO THE PATH: METHODOLOGY

Ah yes, anthropologists. They come and study us and the next thing I hear is they are [practising as] a shaman (comment by a neo-Shaman attending the Society for Shamanic Practitioners UK Conference, 4-7 September 2008, when I explained my research interest to him).

* * * *

Are you 'just' studying shamans or are you 'doing' it, training as a shaman and learning it? (Question to me by a student taking an undergraduate Ritual and Belief anthropology paper).

* * * *

Journalist Daniel Pinchbeck's personal inquiry into the history of the use of psychedelics and shamanism led him to an epiphanous moment when he suddenly realised what he had been doing: 'I had been working to wake up my spirit. My intellectual drive for understanding was cover for my spiritual development' (2002:223). As several writers have observed, there is a strong human drive to achieve transpersonal or altered states of consciousness (Laughlin, McManus & Shearer, 1993:192; Price-Williams & Hughes, 1994:2);³⁴ moreover, it could be argued that exploration into other realms does not leave the explorer unchanged (Laughlin et al, 1993:194). Reading Pinchbeck's comment sparked my own personal epiphany, as I realised my entire doctoral project has been in no small measure about my own spiritual journey, something I had only dimly been aware of until this point.

My study therefore adopts a heuristic perspective, one where I am deeply immersed in all stages of the research process. Patton defines heuristics as 'a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher' (1990:71). He then expands this definition, writing that the researcher

³⁴ Writing in the *New Scientist* magazine, Phillips and Lawton (2004) argue that this drive is evident in the almost universal use of legal mind-altering substances such as caffeine, nicotine or alcohol, and illegal drug-taking.

must have a passionate personal interest in their topic, and that others involved in the study need to share this interest intensely. Moustakas suggests that heuristic research has six phases: initial engagement with the topic, immersion in the field, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (1990:27-32). Such an approach requires the researcher to begin with following what has called them from their own life experience, and applying an 'unwavering and steady inward gaze' to explore what engages their attention (1990:13). This initial stage lasted several years for me, as I vacillated and processed terror. The terror was twofold: firstly, could I handle the academic requirements? Secondly, and more importantly, the terror was about engaging with the spirits who were calling me. The reading I had already done and the people I talked to all underlined the seriousness of the task I was considering embarking upon.

Other writers have described a radical participatory or experiential methodology in terms analogous to the heuristic model outlined here, one that allows for more 'engaged, experiential and dialogic modes of discourse' (Harvey, 2003b:61; see also Harner, 1999; Turner, 2003:146, 2006). Radical participation implies that the researcher fully embodies the experiences he or she participates in, both during their time in the field and afterwards, leading to integration and internalisation of those experiences. Some would say that complete embodied participation is perhaps the only authentic way of studying spiritual practices, particularly those involving altered states of consciousness. Laughlin, McManus and Shearer (1993:190-191) note that an ethnocentric bias towards 'monophasic' or normal waking consciousness states inhibits experiential understandings of 'polyphasic' shamanic realities. Only when anthropologists enter altered states of reality can they fully appreciate those alternate realities: 'for the monophasic fieldworker there exist severe constraints to vicarious participation in alternate phases of consciousness', they write (1993:192).³⁵ Wallis too considers that it is essential that researchers adopt an experiential methodology when studying neo-Shamanism since it is 'an experiential spirituality whose modes of verification depend on personal insight' (2000:254). Thus, after much deliberation, I

³⁵ Laughlin and his co-workers also warn of the need for adequate training of anthropologists who venture into these transpersonal realms and acknowledge that it may not be appropriate for all (1993:194).

finally began a research project that demanded the highest levels of my own participation that I could bring to it.

* * * *

*I am feeling my way into this, feeling slightly – strange? uncomfortable? artificial?
How do I make this true and meaningful for me, and not just someone else's
teachings or beliefs? How do I internalise these new practices so they are in my
blood?*

With loving intent and practise, the answer comes.

Be patient.

Be consistent.

Trust.

*Go lightly. Go gently. (Fieldnotes 20 Feb 2008, written after time outside in my
'sacred circle' as part of the course homework during the year-long shamanic
training I participated in).*

The following section draws on personal ethnographic material, describing my experiential shamanic explorations. As with other anthropologists who apprenticed to train as shamans or sorcerers the experiences are not always straight-forward (see, for example, Harner, 1990; Stoller & Olkes, 1987). Bearing in mind Ruth-Inge Heinze's warning (cited in Orenstein, 1994:177), that neo-Shamans and other Western psychic explorers need to be aware of the dangers of opening portals without closing them again, coupled with warnings from numerous other people as I embarked on my exploration of shamanism, I have been fearful of exploring the spirit world shamanically. To help me cope with my fears, a number of people have supported me.

The following is an account I wrote after a counselling session:

I felt that I was walking, balancing between the worlds, between the nagual and the tonal.³⁶ G. suggested that I turn and face the nagual world: 'What do you want to say to the nagual world?'

³⁶ I was using the terms 'nagual' and 'tonal' to describe non-ordinary reality and ordinary reality respectively, adopting them on this occasion because I had been talking with two people

This felt too difficult and too risky.

'What do you need for protection?'

I gathered some quartz crystals and feathers, a small pottery bowl filled with water, a sage smudge stick and other special objects, and arranged them in a circle.

I stood in the centre as G. smudged me. I felt very grounded, my feet were strong on the floor. I was ready to address the nagual world.

G.'s voice came from behind me and I felt his presence supporting me. 'What do you want to say to the nagual world?'

'I want to enter you. I am ready. I bring much fear'.

I had a sense of the vast space of the nagual world. It spoke to me, not in the form of words but a knowingness within me, a knowingness that I was right to protect myself and to treat it with great respect, that it could not guarantee my safety and that it was my responsibility to protect myself before I entered... There was a sense of expansion within myself...very potent and rich with possibilities for future explorations...I felt I had crossed an invisible boundary... and reached a new understanding about the purpose of protection rituals (Fieldnotes 4 Nov 2006).

Likewise, Steven Friedson (1996:21) felt himself 'expand, creating a space within..., an opening, a clearing' during a dream when he was possessed by a *vimbuz* spirit while conducting fieldwork amongst the Tumbuka people of Malawi. This is the door opening to the spirits (Turner, 2006:48). We enter the spirit worlds apparently paradoxically, with both an opening out and a going deeply within.

I began searching for ways, when in my garden, at the beach and on the land near where I live, to make contact with, and begin to dialogue with the local spirits. I sensed a waking-up response from them, as if surprised that someone was noticing them and

taught to use these expressions when they undertook extensive shamanic training in England. See <http://www.toltecnagual.com/nagual.htm>, which suggests that the nagual is everything unstructured in the universe, and the tonal is formed, structured energy. It seems that Castaneda adapted the words and gave them his own interpretation (see Harner, 1990:63). For an academic overview and historical perspective on these Aztec terms see http://www.sustainedaction.org/Explorations/academic_overview_of_tonal_and_nagual.htm. For a further explanation see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagual> (both accessed 18 Mar 2009).

prepared to communicate with them.³⁷ Fortunately, the spirits appeared to be benign, unlike the aggressive spirits guarding the land of the Kunhanhaa people of the Gulf of Carpentaria who inflicted illnesses on non-indigenous people entering the area without protection from the local people (Bond, 2006). Some months into my research, a friend asked me what I had learnt from my studies so far. Afterwards I wrote in my field diary:

I commented on my growing connection with nature spirits in the here and now. I have attended shamanic training workshops, and learnt to journey to the upper and lower worlds but the result, for me, has been an increasing awareness of spirit all around me – the birds, the plants, skink moving between the cracks. Signs of spirit all around me - walking on the beach and calling out to spirit, and realising I don't have the language to do this. I need to find or learn a new language (Fieldnotes 25 Nov 2007).

I keenly felt the lack of a rich language and spiritual heritage for ceremony to meet these other-than-human persons. On 10 May 2007, I wrote:

I have been reflecting about how I enter the space as I approach the start of the walkway, feeling the need to call out to the beings seen and unseen, animate and inanimate. But I don't have a chant, karanga or karakia.³⁸ I make noises and sounds, I hum 'aum', I think about European neo-Shamans re-constructing their shamanic practices, or – for me here now, in Aotearoa – wanting to construct or create my own rituals and protocols that feel authentic.

³⁷ I shared this story with a Tibetan Buddhist meditation teacher; she reported a similar response when she unexpectedly began to meet naga, snake-like water beings while on a meditation retreat in Europe. The naga were battered and very distressed from years of environmental degradation and human neglect of their welfare. She said that they were 'pathetically grateful' at being noticed. See http://www.khandro.net/mysterious_naga.htm (accessed 16 March 2009). One neo-Shaman told me the land spirits are 'grateful to be seen; we deny the existence of spirits and when we say "hello" to them, they sparkle'. The sparkling is a communication of the spirit guardian, she said.

³⁸ Karanga = call or shout, karakia = prayer-chant or incantation.

Sounds came through that are sometimes Māori-like, at other times maybe more Native American. How do I find my own language and way to communicate with the spirits?

We have finished lighting the candles and calling in the cardinal directions, offering our prayers of gratitude and blessings. I am standing in the circle next to Shen. In the silence, he encouraged anyone who was moved to, to sound. The sounds were bubbling inside me. I felt the block in my throat and then gave myself permission to allow the sounds to burst forth. Energy flooded into me and I felt overwhelmed with deep reverence for all-that-is. I felt tender love for my daughters and knew that I was doing this for them too. My whole body tingled and vibrated (Fieldnotes 23 Aug 2008).

It seemed that I was on my way to finding my own spirit-language.

* * * *

However, I have no wish to romanticise my experiential exploration into neo-Shamanism; it is challenging to me from both a methodological and personal perspective. There are potential problems and risks inherent in being ‘one’s own informant’ (Salomonsen, 2004:44). Researching and writing about my subjective experiences within an experiential and radical participatory model leaves me feeling exposed before a possibly unsympathetic audience, open to accusations of bias and lack of objectivity from those who come from a perspective that assumes spiritual experiences are non-rational and therefore do not exist, a form of ‘methodological atheism’ (Ezzy, 2004:116).

The notion of an anthropology of experience, formulated by Victor Turner in the early 1980s, has limitations in that, by their very nature, experiences are self-referential (Bruner, 1986:5); in addition, autoethnographic accounts have been critiqued because they can be shallow or self-indulgent. A more sympathetic reading is given by Nicolas Salazar-Sutil who, drawing on Bochner and Ellis (2001, cited in Salazar-Sutil, 2008:3), describes autoethnography ‘as a self-reflexive exploration of performed selfhood that

employs the self as exemplar in order to emphasise embodiment, experiential understanding, participatory ways of knowing, sensuous engagement and intimate encounter' (2008:2-3). Framed in this way, autoethnography opens up the possibility that my personal shamanic experiences do have validity when balanced with an analytical eye, and considered alongside those of my research participants. Post-modern approaches that work within diverse paradigms offer a middle way between being overly analytical or too autobiographical, exemplified by anthropologists such as Brown (1991) and Glass-Coffin (1998) who grappled with these dilemmas. Brown's 'chorus of voices' (1991:20) tell the story of Alourdes, a Haitian Vodou priestess living in Brooklyn, while Glass-Coffin alternates analytical chapters about the ritual healing practices of Northern Peruvian women shamans with personal accounts of her own healing journey. The question is balance, an apt and pertinent shamanic concept (see, for example, Halifax, 1991:18).

By their very presence, anthropologists unavoidably change the field and a radical participatory model possibly magnifies this effect, or at least makes it more overt. During their fieldwork in Guatemala, for example, Barbara Tedlock and her husband observed that by sharing their own dreams with their Quiché-Mayan consultant they were all involved in creating a particular social reality for that time and place. The realisation that researcher and research subjects are both equally engaged in 'helping to create what they [the researchers] are studying' is still 'shocking' for many social anthropologists, Tedlock noted (2003:107). Like Tedlock, I have found that rich understandings have flowed from the wide-ranging conversations I had with my participants when we were exploring, thinking, and making discoveries about our shamanic experiences together. These joint explorations gave us tools for contextualising shamanism within a much larger existential framework. 'The field' becomes shared space (Rountree, 2010:35).

I empathise with Deirdre Meintel (2007) and Sarah Pike (2004), both of whom utilised a 'radical empirical' methodology (after Jackson, 1989) during their ethnographic research. Meintel argues that by losing herself in the research experience, she discovered over time that she had the ability to enter a trance state, to feel the presence of spirit guides and to heal others clairvoyantly, all of which enriched her

study of Spiritualist religious practices in Montreal (2007:125). Pike found that by giving herself over to the process of 'enmeshment' (2004:97), becoming part of her local neo-Pagan community and attending festivals at Pagan nature sanctuaries, she pushed beyond her own vulnerabilities to enhance her intersubjective understandings of neo-Paganism. Nonetheless, as Jackson (1998:8) has highlighted, there are ambiguities and paradoxes within the intersubjectivities of any anthropological project: intersubjectivity is the site of 'constructive, deconstructive, and reconstructive' interactions, one that may well include spirit beings as well as humans. Researchers, as embodied humans studying other similarly embodied humans, can only access insider knowledge if they are willing to meet others as their 'equal, free, autonomous, loving and creative co-researchers' and thus researchers will in turn become 'equal co-subject[s]' over the course of the research period, writes John Heron (1996: 201). It seems to me that such close involvement between 'co-researcher' and 'co-subject' as this must almost inevitably lead to complete experiential immersion on the part of the researcher, and the formation of personal relationships and bonds that do not stop when the research is formally completed. For both Brown (1991) and Bacigalupo (1999), their respective initiations into Vodou, and as a *yegulfe* or young female ritual helper to a Mapuche *machi* or shaman/healer in Southern Chile became a life-long commitment.

Michael Jackson expresses this process, writing that:

...ethnographic fieldwork brings us into direct dialogue with others, affording us opportunities to explore knowledge not as something that grasps inherent and hidden truths but as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground (1996:8).

The 'limits and value of our understanding', he goes on to say, therefore depend on our 'social gumption and social skills' as much as our methodology (1996:8). I partially agree with Jackson's assessment, but it seems to me that more than 'social gumption' is required: the intersubjective process presupposes sincere involvement of the fieldworker in mind, body and spirit. The deep participation of Tedlock (2003), Meintel (2007) and Pike (2004) was possible because they all attended to their own inner experiences and lives. The inner participation of the anthropologist-observer is

particularly crucial during shamanic rituals and ceremonies or séances, to the extent that the healing ritual may not be effective if the inner and outer worlds of the observer are not congruent (Kalweit, 2001:182). The times when my own inner cynic or sceptic were present during neo-Shamanic workshops I attended were the times I distanced myself from the group activities and was most inclined to judge or dismiss other participants as 'flaky New Agers', and this had a subtle effect on the rest of the group. When I was able to give myself fully and utterly over to the process, and to show my own vulnerabilities (to borrow Pike's terminology, 2004:103) or, at the very least, to be honest with the group about my ambivalence, it seemed at those times I gave everyone else permission to share their own experiences more deeply.

On the other hand, this can be a two-way process and, on other occasions, the sincerity of fellow workshop participants enhanced my inner experience. During one group, we journeyed to meet our spirit warrior.³⁹ This is what I recorded afterwards:

There were several questions posed before we began the journey: Who is my spirit warrior? Where did s/he come from? How can we work together? What can s/he teach me? What can I learn? What is the gift the warrior brings for me? The drumming started and I lay down, my eyes covered. My power animal appeared and we quickly journeyed across wide yellow plains and met a tall bird-headed man. His feathers were dark green. His eyes seemed fierce to me, and his beak was hooked. I was taken aback, shocked and immediately my brain sent me a message: Ursula Le Guin!⁴⁰ I was highly sceptical but stayed as open as I could while the drumming continued. My body twitched at times. There seemed to be a tribe, a group or cluster of other birdmen warriors standing silently nearby. I didn't receive any other information.

³⁹ A spirit warrior is a spirit helper who has a role in providing safety while the practitioner is carrying out spiritual work.

⁴⁰ A few months earlier, I read the book *Always Coming Home* by science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin (1985), although Le Guin's Condor warriors wear a removable bird head mask. My 'brain chatter' on this occasion was distracting but over time I have found, like Diana Paxson, that it is possible while in an altered state to move between the 'discourse of "spirits"' and the discourse of "rationality"' (cited in Blain, 2002:156).

On completion there followed a deeply moving round where each participant shared their journey one at a time as they stood in front of the rest of the group, 'holding' or embodying the gift they had received from their spirit warrior. Such was the power of the round, that I couldn't deny the integrity and sincerity of everyone's experience. I had to abandon trying to find refuge in my cynic and this then forced me to concede that my own journey was probably valid also. I spoke last and confessed to my confused inner process and how this had shifted as everyone shared his or her story. I described the birdman I had met.

What was his gift? Shen [the course facilitator] asked.

I was unsure. Shen wondered if it was 'patience' but I felt it was perhaps more about 'presence'. His presence. His eyes. His beak.

Shen also speculated whether his message was about being in two worlds at once.

Later still, another group participant showed me some pictures she had of bird-people, painted by the contemporary New Zealand artist Bill Hammond (Fieldnotes 29 Mar 2008).⁴¹

Now, over a year later, as I remember that journey and my complex emotional responses, I have a sense of shame at my betrayal of the spirits especially to my birdman warrior who has since appeared and supported me on numerous other occasions, sometimes spontaneously or when I have evoked his presence. Learning to trust and take the spirits seriously has been a large factor within my research and personal exploration.

Positioning Myself in 'The Field'

As I considered the issues raised in the previous paragraphs, I became aware of the complexity of my multiple positions and roles, each one informed by and, in turn, informing the others. I am an 'insider' by virtue of being a New Zealander studying neo-Shamans in my own country. My embeddedness within my own culture and my personal lifeway creates a particular and unique individual perspective that is different

⁴¹ See http://www.prints.co.nz/page/fine-art/CTGY/Artists_Hammond_Bill for some examples of Bill Hammond's work. While his images are very different from the birdman I met on my journey, the primordial qualities of his prints do evoke similar feelings of mystery for me.

from that of other researchers, irrespective of whether they are compatriots, or whether they are from another country and culture. In this sense – that of studying ‘one’s own’ – mine is a local study, but both my participants and I are also subject to global influences that are shaping neo-Shamanic practices throughout the Western world.

I am an ‘insider’ on another and more specific level, through my involvement professionally and personally within the complementary and alternative healing sub-culture in New Zealand. From this position, my ‘insider’ status is not something I consciously aspire to: I am unavoidably an ‘opportunistic researcher’ (Roseneil, 1993:188), frequently engaged in informal conversations about healing with friends, clients, acquaintances, colleagues. I speak the language of these people, I ‘belong’ to them; I am ‘at home’ and this gives me an advantage, for example, when it comes to listening to and comprehending ‘energy’ talk. At this level of engagement, the challenge is one of learning to step back and retain a discerning, open awareness and objectivity, echoing the experiences of Colic-Peisker, a Croatian immigrant in Australia researching her own people. She found that she needed to be alert around not extrapolating ‘too liberally from...[her] own experience and accepting biases...[she shared] with...[her] respondents as “objective” truth’ (2004:91).

A third aspect is that of my relationship with the neo-Shamanic participants. The networks of practitioners and people I already knew gave me easy access to the neo-Shamanic world. Superficially, I was amongst my ‘own people’; however, I was not a neo-Shaman and I didn’t automatically feel like an ‘insider’, especially in the early stages of my immersion. Shamans were not ‘my people’ and culture-shock is real, I discovered; it happens even when researching people to whom one is sympathetic in one’s own country. Like Meintel (2007:154), I struggled with the notion of an ‘Other’ who lived just down the road. Although I was welcomed with friendliness and curiosity, there were also some reservations about me being an ‘academic’, and one facilitator at the end of a workshop expressed anxiety about me ‘analysing’ her (we later resolved this issue and she is now very comfortable with and supportive of my research). Margery Wolf has described the first anthropological field trip as a ‘stunning roller coaster of self-doubt, boredom, excitement, disorientation, uncertainty, exhaustion...’ (1999:354). I relate to most of those descriptors, writing in my fieldnotes

on 1 May 2006: 'I have a sense of being in this process up to my neck far too soon, too quickly, being swept along. Far too intense and sudden. And I can't stop it...' By 3 May 2006, I wrote that 'I feel as inundated and confused with information, questions, and new realities as anyone travelling to an exotic "other" place to do fieldwork'. The new realities and my initial confusion arose as much from confronting my own fears about relating to the spirit world, as they were to do with the neo-Shamans I was meeting. As my research progressed, those early confusing and conflicting emotions settled, and shamanic practitioners, workshop facilitators and fellow workshop participants generally welcomed, supported and encouraged me in my project although not without some tensions at times, as I describe shortly.

Because of my identity as a Pākehā, the research participants with whom I felt most 'outsider' were the Māori healers. Harvey's (2004) notion of 'guesthood', in situations where the researcher is neither native nor an objective observer, but a participating and respectful guest seems to approach my position when I was working with Māori healers. Derived from his experiences with the Ngati Ranana Māori diaspora in London, 'guesthood' challenges dichotomies such as insider/outsider or participant/observer, creating a third position for scholars engaging in research amongst indigenous people, Harvey says. My position was still somewhat ambivalent and not as straightforward as Harvey is suggesting here; I did share some 'insider' commonalities as a New Zealander (albeit Pākehā) and as a naturopathic practitioner. The latter position especially helped ease my entry into the world of Māori healing as we found shared ground for some concepts. Nonetheless, it was humbling for me to recognise how little I knew or understood about Māori spirituality and cosmology, in spite of the fact that I am a fifth generation New Zealander, and I was definitely an 'outsider' from this perspective. The opportunities for me to be welcomed formally onto a marae⁴² did not present themselves during my fieldwork since I was meeting and working with individual healers rather than an iwi or hapū,⁴³ but I was received as a guest by the Māori healers I met. 'Guesthood' seems an appropriate term to adopt to describe our relationship, although being a guest did not completely erase my feelings

⁴² A meeting area for whānau (family) or iwi.

⁴³ Iwi = tribe; hapū = sub-tribe.

of discomfort at times, particularly when I was present at the community healing clinic in West Auckland (see Chapter 8).

The most challenging of my multiple and mobile insider/outsider roles, however, is that of balancing and attempting to resolve the (perhaps irresolvable) inherent tensions and contradictions between my intellectual identity as a critical scholar and researcher, and my spiritual/emotional identity as a healer and an engaged student of shamanism. Some neo-Shamanic and neo-Pagan practitioner/academics have depicted themselves as 'walking between the worlds' of academia and Paganism (Wallis, 2004:193-195), as 'brokers' between the groups (Blain, 2002:157). Such a standpoint not only risks their academic credibility, but also creates potential for conflict and raises issues of breaking trust between researcher and research participants (later in this chapter, I describe two scenarios where these tensions played out during my fieldwork). What am I, as an anthropologist, to make of the stories I have heard, or events witnessed, that stretch rational Western credulity to breaking point? How do I gauge what is appropriate to share and what is best left unspoken rather than risk diluting the sacredness of the story or experience? I have said (in Chapter 1) that I aspire to normalise the term 'shaman' and this includes taking all research participants seriously (including the spirits). Blain (2002:150) and Wallis (2004:197) have both expressed similar sentiments. My task, to represent neo-Shamanic alternate realities that challenge the dominant Western discourse without resorting to polemic or becoming an apologist for their practices, is indeed demanding.

Meeting Neo-Shamans in New Zealand

My fieldwork had two aspects to it. The focus of my research was to explore contemporary shamanic healing and neo-Shamanism in New Zealand. As I have previously explained, I also worked with Māori healers because I was interested to ascertain whether there were correspondences between Western shamanism and Māori healing practices and, if so, to examine the nature of those correspondences, and the relationships between neo-Shamans and Māori healers. Working with these two groups of participants required different approaches. I describe my fieldwork relating to the Māori healers in Chapter 8. Fieldwork with the neo-Shamans who were not

Māori comprised the largest component of my study, carried out over three years from April 2006 to August 2009, and I address that now. New Zealand is a small country and social networks overlap in unexpected ways. Once I voiced my interest in shamanism, I began to hear stories: one woman I know told me she was at a party and her husband talked to someone who said his wife was a shaman. I met a second shamanic practitioner at a wedding. The stories and names continued to arrive: my field notebooks grew full of conversations and narratives, and people to contact. This process continues, long after I have completed my formal research.

Some years earlier, as part of the coursework for an undergraduate paper, I met and interviewed two New Zealand neo-Shamans and this provided one entry point into the network of contemporary shamans. Although the bulk of my fieldwork was over a three-year period, my research has benefited from my longer association with the neo-Shamans I originally interviewed. When I reminded one woman about our original interview in 2000, she laughed and said, 'That would be so out-dated now! I have moved a long way since then. Every year...I evolve and the work evolves'. The extended period allowed me to observe changes in how shamanic practitioners worked, and several others have expressed to me that 'it would be a different interview' if we were to conduct one now. This is a perennial issue within anthropology: Rountree (2010:167) has commented on how rapidly the neo-Pagan field in Malta changed over the three-years of her research, and continues to change.

Fieldwork generally occurred within the context of my usual day-to-day home life but over the three-year period, I made several over-night trips and two extended trips. One was a weeklong journey in 2006 to meet and interview several neo-Shamans in the north, followed later on by a 12-day fieldtrip in 2007, during which I met and interviewed several others in the central North Island, and attended two workshops. My fieldwork notebooks, with my recorded observations, snippets of casual conversations, my thoughts, feelings and reflections form the base of my research material. For some in-depth conversations, I was able to take notes as we spoke, which I later typed up and emailed to the person for verification, giving them an opportunity to clarify or expand on particular areas. However, the reality was much more complex than this suggests, and I found myself almost obsessively seizing on every piece of

information that came my way, analysing it, assessing it. Is this relevant? How does this relate to my study? Mulling over each morsel (and mixing metaphors as I went), I wrote that I felt like a fossicker or gold prospector, a beachcomber. Should I keep this? Where should I file it? (Fieldnotes 30 November 2007). Pike (2004:106) describes how she participated in outdoor neo-Pagan rituals, one moment a participant dancing in ecstasy around a fire and the next, a scholar disappearing into the woods to write in her field notebook. Along with many other anthropologists, she had two notebooks, a personal journal as well as her field notebook but she found that her notes 'kept transgressing the boundaries' (2004:108). I also began with two notebooks, only to find it became complicated further still when one of the neo-Shamans recommended that I kept a separate journey journal to record my shamanic journeys. Eventually, my personal journal and field notebook collapsed into one as my personal process became inextricably entwined with my research material. The field was truly 'co-extensive' with all facets of my being (Goulet & Miller, 2007:4).

From April 2006 until November 2007, I attended thirteen workshops, including one held in New Zealand under the auspices of the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies* (FSS), facilitated by two people from Australia accredited by the *Foundation* to teach the FSS basic training workshop, *The Way of the Shaman* in Australasia. Four of the workshops were not overtly shamanic but I attended them because they all induced altered states of consciousness to varying degrees, and I wanted to include as broad a cross-section of experiential and shamanic-like events as possible. These four workshops were:

- A breathwork weekend facilitated by a New Zealander who has worked extensively with Stanislav Grof, using his Holotropic Breathwork model;⁴⁴
- A sweatlodge weekend co-facilitated by a visiting Native American man and two New Zealand men with experience in building and conducting sweatlodges;
- A weeklong dance and movement workshop facilitated by a part-Native American woman. I experienced the entire week as an altered state shamanic

⁴⁴ See Grof (1988) for an overview of his holotropic paradigm.

process with drumming and dancing sessions lasting several hours at a time, although the facilitator told me she was not a shaman;

- A Brazilian faith healer and spirit medium, João de Deus (John of God), was in Wellington conducting mass healings in May 2006. I attended the three-day event as both participant and observer (along with fifteen hundred other people).⁴⁵

In addition, a Native American (Cherokee and Lakota) medical doctor, Lewis Mehl-Madrona, shared his 'post-modern, semi-urban, neo-Shamanic' approach to healing employing 'Coyote Wisdom' storytelling, during a daylong workshop that I attended.⁴⁶ New Zealand shamanic practitioners, trained in core shamanism, facilitated the other seven workshops I attended. The number of workshop participants varied from a minimum of four to a maximum of thirty-three, with twelve to seventeen people being the usual group size. Apart from two introductory non-residential weekends that I arranged in my hometown (see below), the workshops were residential, held at retreat centres in rural or semi-rural settings with native bush, where meditation, yoga or personal development-type courses are typically held. They generally consisted of two full days held over a weekend, although some began on the Friday night, and two were weeklong residential retreats. There was some overlap of participants attending these workshops, enabling me to develop relationships with those people and expand my contacts.

In 2008, I also participated in a yearlong shamanic training, *Shaking the Bones*, which consisted of one full weekend (Friday evening until Sunday afternoon) per month. The on-going nature of this group, consisting of fourteen people at the beginning of the year and reducing to nine after four months (for personal and inter-personal reasons), provided continuity, and enduring relationships formed amongst the remaining participants over the year. The training required a strong commitment from everyone,

⁴⁵ See Rocha (2006) for an account of João's work at his centre at Abadiânia in central Brazil, visited by thousands of Western spiritual tourists annually.

⁴⁶ Words from the workshop flyer. The workshop was held in Auckland 10 October 2008. It was offered as a pre-conference event for the third MindBody Conference, where Mehl-Madrona was a keynote speaker. See also Mehl (1988).

including me, to undertake homework and to integrate our learnings into our daily lives, a progressive personal and experiential exploration of shamanism. I discuss ethical concerns that emerged from my presence at the workshops in the final section of this chapter.

As my fieldwork continued, I conducted twenty-three audiotaped interviews usually in the participant's home or their consulting/healing room; frequently their shamanic paraphernalia such as feathers, stones, bones, drum or rattles were on view. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, lasting about one to one-and-a-half hours. In most cases, I provided a written Information Sheet (see Appendix I) and an Interview Schedule a few days before the interview, to give an indication of the type of information I was interested in. The schedule included the following questions and themes:

- Tell me about your first encounter with shamanism or about a shamanic experience you have had.
- What does shamanism or shamanic healing mean for you?
- Do you regard yourself as a shaman? How important is it for you to use this title?
- How long have you been involved with shamanism?
- What shamanic tradition/s do you draw from?
- Can you tell me about your spiritual path and worldview? What features of your spiritual path cause you to identify with shamanism?
- How did you become involved with this path? Did you experience a specific triggering or transformative event? What was the nature of this experience and what precipitated it?
- What rituals and practices do you use as part of your shamanic journey? Are these incorporated into your daily life? How and why are they important?
- Why do you continue to follow this path?

- What is your cultural or ethnic background? Has this influenced your attraction to shamanism?
- Who consults you? Why do they consult you?

In practice, the interviews took on their own life and it was sometimes a delicate balance between giving each participant sufficient space to take the conversation in whatever direction they were comfortable with, while retaining enough control to gently shepherd them back on-track if they became too wide-ranging in their reflections. The questions were a useful tool in this respect, a reminder and re-focusing for us both. On arrival, I clarified any further questions about my research and a written Consent Form (Appendix II) was signed before commencing the interview. Anonymity and confidentiality were discussed, and participants selected a preferred pseudonym if they wished. Several participants have chosen to use their own name.

I transcribed the tapes and emailed them to each participant for verification, additions, and deletions as they wished. As I transcribed the tapes, I regretted that I couldn't fully reproduce the tone of voice, the laughter, and the inflections and emphases of certain phrases or words, all of which capture something of the essence of the interviewee's personality at that particular moment and place. Follow-up conversations were carried out either in person or, in some cases when this was not possible, by email. Two participants, for example, have since moved to live in Australia. Many participants commented that they found the entire interview procedure very illuminating and that it was helpful for them to reflect on their shamanic journey. One woman told me that she 'had never woven that [shamanic] thread' through her life before: 'somehow, the way the interview went, it allowed me to unravel that thread through my life to this point'. One man wrote to me that he found it was 'very supportive of my programme of intentional multidimensional living to be asked to state my views on spirits' (pers. comm. 11 Jan 2009). In one case, my interview with someone was 'spirit-directed': events conspired to thwart our meeting on several occasions until she had a 'vision' in which she saw me walking away down her driveway, indicating to her that I had already been to her house for the interview. The interview was scheduled smoothly after this, but the following day, she called me

to suggest I should also interview her husband as 'he had further information for me'. I duly did this, as it seemed the spirits were managing our appointments.

During the course of my fieldwork, two events that I hadn't anticipated occurred; both enriched my study in unexpected and different ways. Early on in my fieldwork, I met a neo-Shamanic workshop facilitator, Jan, who proved to be particularly encouraging of my research. She generously coached me privately when one of her introductory workshops that I had planned to attend was cancelled at short notice, leading me gently into her shamanic world and teaching me to journey while she drummed. Some months later, she stayed with me on two occasions when I arranged for her to teach a series of two introductory shamanic workshops locally. Three women who attended these introductory workshops then went on to attend a yearlong *Wisdom Keepers* shamanic training course facilitated by Jan and a fellow shamanic practitioner, Deborah.

From these beginnings, Jan offered to organise for my benefit a gathering of shamanic practitioners, writing to five neo-Shamans whom I had previously had contact with, as follows:

Dawne, as most of you know, is studying contemporary shamanism in New Zealand and she has certainly had some influence (on me, anyway) in getting me thinking about what we do and how we do it. It would also provide an opportunity for her to gather more ideas and perhaps share a little of what she has uncovered (pers. comm. 22 July 2007).

The gathering, attended by six neo-Shamans and me, took place in September 2007. I circulated some possible discussion topics in advance, and one participant contributed some themes he would like to see included too. However, since it was some time since group members had seen each other, and a few of the group were not known to each other, the meeting was taken up with each person introducing her or himself and speaking about their practice. The format allowed me to share my research aims and findings thus far, and for those present to see me in a casual social setting rather than within the context of a workshop or a more formal taped interview. This

unexpected methodological development provided an opportunity for reflexive dialogue with my participants, which I was able to audiotape.

A smaller second follow-up gathering occurred in April 2008 with just two neo-Shamans and me present. Jan commented to me on that occasion that 'you are part of this too because you are linking all the practices. For us, it's a growing in our understanding of what's out there too'. My research questions prompted Jan to reflect on her shamanic practice and teaching, causing her to realise the challenges she faces integrating shamanism with other aspects of her life, particularly her paid work in the corporate world. She said she is searching for a new teacher in human-form who can take her deeper into the spirit world. Six shamanic practitioners attended a third gathering in July 2008, which I was unable to attend, and on-going meetings have continued in 2009 and 2010. My research has demonstrably had a significant effect on the small neo-Shamanic community in New Zealand.

The second unexpected event occurred during a visit to England for family reasons, timed so that I could also attend the second UK conference of the *Society for Shamanic Practitioners*, held in Dorset 4 – 7 September 2008. Almost one hundred people attended the three-day event, approximately two-thirds of them women from all areas of the United Kingdom, Canada, United States, several European countries, and representatives from the Antipodes in the form of one expatriate Australian man, one expatriate New Zealand woman, and me. The conference consisted of plenary sessions and several streams of workshops. During the conference, a Nepalese shaman, Bhola Nath Banstola, facilitated two extended ceremonies.⁴⁷ This experience allowed me to make first-hand comparisons between neo-Shamans in New Zealand and those in other Western countries who are principally trained in various forms of core shamanism.

⁴⁷ The shaman, who began having shamanic visions from a very young age comes from a long lineage of shamans, has a Master's degree in anthropology from Delhi University, and is a graduate in naturopathy from the *Indian Board of Alternative Medicines* in Calcutta. He has practised as a healer and researched shamanism in India, Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. In 1997, he began travelling and sharing his shamanic knowledge in the West (biographical notes from the Conference handbook).

Introducing Key Participants

Four key participants facilitate shamanic workshops under the auspices of three shamanic schools in the Auckland area: the *Academy of Shamanic Studies* (AOSS), *The Cave School for Shamanic Studies*, and *The Practical Mystics of the Earth Centre for Contemporary Shamanism*. Others teach independently. Three women - Terri, Elisabeth and Jan - studied neo-Shamanism in New Zealand when an internationally known neo-Shaman, Sandra Ingerman from the FSS, visited and taught introductory and advanced core shamanism workshops in 1989. The basic FSS workshop, *The Way of the Shaman*, I attended in New Zealand has many similarities with core shamanism workshops taught throughout the West.

For Terri though, 'shamanism has never been new to me in this lifetime because it is very strong from my past'; unlike some neo-Shamans, she has attended only two shamanic workshops and she told me that she learns directly from spirit. She sometimes works with those searching for alternative ways of managing their mental health issues. In 2007, she was invited to speak about her shamanic work to people from the Hearing Voices Network (HVN) in Auckland, a support group whose members draw on different explanations from the arts, literature, shamanism, religion, and politics and human rights issues to explain or validate their experience of hearing voices. She was 'guided by spirit' to co-teach with another person over a six-month period in 2008 with the aim of creating an 'ongoing spiritual community', and the workshops were advertised amongst the HVN and other groups.⁴⁸

Elisabeth later attended further courses in the United States facilitated by the FSS and other teachers such as Tom Brown, Jr, whose *Tracker School* teaches wilderness survival skills and philosophy learnt (so his website recounts) from an Apache man,

⁴⁸ This description of the HVN comes from a social worker who has had some connection with the network (pers. comm. 29 July 2009). See also <http://www.hearing-voices.org/> for information about a similar group based in England (accessed 5 August 2009). There is a worldwide trend towards 'mad pride' and a rejection of the medical model with its rationale of diagnosing, labeling and drug-treatment of perceived mental illnesses. Shen spoke about the secrecy he believes is endemic within shamanism, of not talking about his anomalous experiences as a child or telling his family when he began to attend shamanic workshops as an adult. When he began working in psychiatric hospitals as a social worker, he realised that the worlds of the schizophrenic patients he worked with were not so different from his own, the difference being that they were labelled as 'mentally ill' while he was not.

Stalking Wolf.⁴⁹ Grandfather White Eagle (the spirit form of Stalking Wolf) came to Elisabeth through Tom Brown and is now her principal shamanic guide, as he is for several of her students. For a time, she was the FSS guest facilitator for New Zealand before going on to develop her own form of shamanic practice. In 1998, along with four other neo-Shamanic practitioners, Elisabeth formed the *Academy of Shamanic Studies New Zealand* (AOSS). The *Academy* taught introductory and shamanic healing workshops, and a series of workshops *Awakening Spirits* based on the teachings from Tom Brown. Nowadays, Elisabeth teaches her own *Evolving Spirits* workshops, and other courses.

The third woman, Jan, knew nothing about shamanism and didn't know who Sandra Ingerman was, but when she saw a poster advertising the workshop *The Way of the Shaman*, she was drawn to attend. She had been searching:

I wasn't actually in crisis but I was really searching and I think I had been for some time. That searching, there is something missing here, there is something I am not getting here - I find a lot of people, when they start this path, that's where they're at. They know there is something else out there, feel something is missing...

She felt a 'resonance' with the teachings she encountered at the workshop and connected to them, in spite of initially feeling that it was something outside of her:

After that, for several years, a group of us would meet regularly once a month and practice the journeying and the drumming. But it still felt like it was a separate part of my life and certainly not integrated with my other life, which was the corporate world [as a careers counsellor].

Upon Elisabeth's return from her studies in the United States, Jan did further training with her and in 1998, she began teaching introductory workshops originally through the AOSS. She says that she enjoys teaching the introductory workshops because 'what those workshops do is give people some basic skills to start them on

⁴⁹ See http://www.trackerschool.com/about_tracker_school.asp (accessed 5 August 2009).

their own shamanic journey'. Nonetheless, for Jan, there are challenges to walking between her shamanic and corporate worlds.

Both Shen (an English man who immigrated to New Zealand in 2000) and Deborah (an expatriate New Zealander who returned home in 2007 after twenty-seven years in England) trained in the United Kingdom with teachers in the style of core shamanism but not necessarily accredited with the FSS. Later, Shen studied with Jonathan Horwitz from the *Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies*, which runs courses in the United Kingdom and, more recently, with teachers in North America from the *Sacred Circles Institute*. He established *The Cave School for Shamanic Studies* in England in 1984, and since living in New Zealand has extended his school to offer a one-year course *The Way of the Spiritual and Human Warrior*,⁵⁰ followed by a two year advanced course. A nine-month course *Wisdom of the Crone and Shamanic Spiritual Midwives* specifically explores shamanic perspectives on death and birth, and psychopomp work. Shen is a Gestalt-trained psychotherapist and a Buddhist, and incorporates concepts and philosophies from these disciplines into his shamanic work.

South American shamanic traditions have influenced Deborah who, after her initial core shamanic studies in England, attended trainings in the United States studying South American traditions as taught by Cuban-born anthropologist and psychologist, Alberto Villoldo who established the *Four Winds Society* in 1984.⁵¹ She worked with Q'ero⁵² elders when Villoldo brought them to Europe. In 2007, Deborah and Jan developed *The Practical Mystics of the Earth Centre for Contemporary Shamanism* and, combining their traditions and trainings, they jointly teach introductory shamanic courses leading on to a yearlong series held over six weekends, *The Wisdomkeepers*.

For twenty years, Jack (an expatriate New Zealander and retired academic now returned home) and his wife have been leading tours and workshops internationally, teaching shamanism and connecting people to spirits in nature. I attended a weeklong

⁵⁰ This course is equivalent to the yearlong training, *Shaking the Bones*, which I undertook in 2008 with Shen.

⁵¹ See <http://www.thefourwinds.com/> (accessed 3 August 2009).

⁵² The Q'ero people are allegedly the remaining descendents of the Incas. See, for example http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/profecias/esp_profecias_inca.htm <http://www.qeros.net/index.html> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q%27ero> (all accessed 8 Sept 2009).

workshop with Jack, held on a nature reserve in the Marlborough Sounds in 2007. Genevieve, an Irish woman who has lived in New Zealand since 2000, connects with her Pagan and Celtic roots. She has undertaken extensive energy, voice and sound, chakra and aura healing trainings, shamanic and medicine wheel courses over many years in Ireland, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.⁵³ In common with several other participants who lead workshops, she sees private clients for individual healing sessions; for some of these practitioners, their livelihood depends on their shamanic work, sometimes combined with other alternate healing and counselling modalities.

In addition to the seven participants introduced here, two others teach workshops that, although not overtly shamanic have shamanic elements built into them. One woman, Franchelle, a New Zealander of Cherokee and Russian descent said she comes from a long lineage of 'medicine women'; I attended one of her workshops in November 2007.

Spirits as participants

Throughout this thesis, I draw attention to the difficulties of capturing in words the numinous spirit world, and the strong visual images of several practitioners; frequently, there is an inability to communicate the nature of altered state experiences (Hayden, 2003:62). Galina Lindquist (1997:246), writing about the Swedish neo-Shamans she worked with, observed that '[t]he "other-wordly" nature of...[shamanic journeying] is best grasped by poetic and metaphorical descriptions..., and poses a challenge for scientific analysis couched in detached and objectivist language'. Blain (2002:34-36) overcomes this problem to some extent by contrasting emic and etic accounts of a seidr séance, firstly from the perspective of a 'sympathetic' outsider (the anthropologist), followed by that of the practitioner. There are, in fact, a 'multiplicity of narratives' (2002:37), each account specific to the actors present at any one time and place. My narrative can therefore only give a partial representation; this is true for all

⁵³ Concepts of the chakra energy centres in the body, derived from Hindu texts, are commonly referred to within alternate healing and New Age circles. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chakra#Comparisons_with_other_Esoteric_traditions (accessed 18 April 2011). The aura, as seen by clairvoyants and psychic healers, is a subtle energy field surrounding a person.

ethnographies of course, but I think it is especially the case when writing about neo-Shamanic spirit encounters with the spirit world.

Precedents have been set in anthropology in which spirits become participants in research, and I have already given one example in my study when the spirits set the schedule for interviewing one participant. Treating spirits as ‘methodologically real’ had analytical consequences for Nils Bubandt (2009:291) in his study of spirit possession and politics on the island of Ternate in eastern Indonesia; Bubandt soon realized the spirits had a role as informants, causing him to question anthropological concepts about bounded subjectivities (2009:296). He found that:

[t]he one-body-one-person-one-mind of the self that clings to the category of the informant...clashes, I believe, with the lived experience of doing fieldwork with spirits (2009:297).

By treating the spirits as ‘methodologically real’, however, Bubandt sidestepped issues about the ontological status of spirits (2009:298). I do not believe I can do this in my research. I argue in Chapter 5 that neo-Shamans are people who take the spirits seriously, and I have no choice but to do so too; Blain (2002:157) expresses a similar viewpoint. ‘It may be a struggle to understand other cultures, but respect and dialogue should mean we no longer attempt to fit them into our pre-existing schemes’, writes Harvey (2005:209), and it seems to me this is no less the case when studying ‘one’s own’. In this study, I have endeavoured to take my participants’ voices (human and other-than-human), and my own experiences seriously.

Ethical Considerations

I have noted above some ethical considerations associated with my research, such as provision of an Information Sheet, informed consent processes, confidentiality, and use of pseudonyms. I now outline other ethical issues that became apparent during the course of my study. On submitting my ethics application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) before commencing my fieldwork, two issues arose: one related to my statement that I wanted the freedom to include some of my

naturopathic clients amongst my participants as appropriate; the other concerned cultural safety for Māori participants. In the former case, I was able to satisfy the committee that I was not planning to actively recruit clients, with the obvious potential for creating conflicts of interest; rather, I was seeking permission to talk to a very few self-selected clients who had experience with, or an interest in shamanism, should they raise the matter with me. The following examples, which I gave to the committee when making my case, demonstrate two actual scenarios and show the multifaceted interweaving of connections within the alternate healing world in New Zealand:

- A woman whom I hadn't seen as a client before consulted me shortly before I submitted my Ethics application. We immediately realised we did have a previous connection, having both attended the same yoga class a year or so ago. She then mentioned that she was supposed to host a shamanic weekend on their land but she had had to cancel it because she was unwell. This was of interest to me, but I did not disclose my research agenda as this would have been inappropriate at this time. During the course of the consultation, I carried out some craniosacral therapy, which involved some dialoguing and working with imagery. At the end of the session, she commented, 'Do you often do shamanic journeying work with people?' and I realised that for her the experience had been akin to shamanic work. Again, this was of interest to me but I did not say anything further to her beyond responding to her question with a further explanation about craniosacral therapy.
- Another woman who has been a client intermittently for over ten years and knew about my doctoral project from previous conversations spontaneously told me during a consultation that she had written down some of her recent experiences so that she would remember to share them with me. The experiences included altered states and unusual events arising from some shamanic healing training she was doing. We then talked in general terms about shamanic phenomena although I did not mention my research again.

As it happened, I did not formally interview any clients but I continued to have conversations with some when they raised the topic of shamanism with me.

The second ethical issue, that of working with Māori healers, raised different concerns in terms of potentially complex cultural considerations. These issues included power relations between me, as a Pākehā woman researcher and Māori healers (in the light of New Zealand's history of colonisation), and the transmission of traditional knowledge, which had implications regarding the sharing of precious, sacred cultural property (taonga). This required sensitivity on my part, and several Māori people served as my cultural advisers, and guided and supported me through the correct protocols while I was establishing relationships with both individual Māori healers and the community healing group I worked with. I was advised that it was appropriate for me to approach individual healers, with the understanding that each would have their own style: some might ask for written questions before meeting me, others would prefer oral questions; some may choose to karakia (say prayers) before the formal kōrero (talk) while still others might prefer informal interactive discussions. Each situation demanded flexibility on a case-by-case basis, and a willingness on my part to ask questions and to learn, indicators that I was genuine and sincere in my interest.

In the Māori culture, tikanga (protocols) are frequently orally transmitted. It was therefore with some irony that I realised my concerns about adhering to these traditions were frequently redundant, after locating several healers through the internet and communicating with them by email. Nonetheless, whether I met healers in person or through cyberspace, I described my research project in detail; in almost all cases, I was met with interest, curiosity, and a willingness to help. One Māori woman, whose name and email were given to me by a whānau (family) member in New Zealand, is resident in Sweden and has lived and worked as a healer there for many years (her husband is Swedish). On receiving my email explaining my project, she was so excited she telephoned me on my mobile phone to make contact. Another woman, whose contact details were given to me by a male Māori elder I had met, however, made it clear to me that sacred traditional knowledge was gained from the 'inside out' and not the 'outside in', through being 'born into an Indigenous family with specific skills or knowledge or ceremonies' (pers. comm. 2 June 2008). Some knowledge is so

tapu (sacred) that it is not shared universally even within the whānau, and given their frequently painful experiences of colonisation, Māori have many reasons to be distrustful and suspicious of researchers who may invalidate their knowledge or misuse it (Smith, 1999:172-173). As an outsider and a researcher, I could only respect her perspective.

My attendance at neo-Shamanic workshops raised further ethical issues. I explained my research agenda with the facilitators in all except five cases, those of the four non-shamanic workshops (noted above) and the Lewis Mehl-Madrona 'Coyote Wisdom' workshop. In each of those workshops, I felt that my presence would not be intrusive or impinge on the experience of other participants; my sense is that this was indeed the case and during the introductions round, I made it clear that I was there for personal reasons, while also mentioning my doctoral topic. On each occasion, some participants chose to ask me more about my research during workshop breaks.

Prior to attending my first shamanic workshop, entitled *Shamanic Tools for Health Practitioners*, I emailed the facilitator, Genevieve (whom I had met on two earlier occasions, once socially and, following that, a second time to specifically discuss my proposed research), to talk to her about my dual role as researcher and course attendee/naturopathic health practitioner. She detected my anxiety. A telephone conversation followed, during which we discussed what was appropriate in terms of introducing myself to the group, how my presence unavoidably changed the group, and the importance of everyone (including myself) feeling safe and able to be fully present and comfortable so that we could all 'open to spirit' and our own healing process (as she worded it). Genevieve wondered if my presence might distract people during the early settling in period and suggested that I didn't say too much initially, and that she would explain my presence to the group some time later. In the event, she structured the first morning of the workshop so that the introductory sharing round, using a talking stick, didn't occur until immediately before the lunch break, by which time the group had completed several exercises and was already beginning to bond. When my turn came to speak, I described my long-term involvement with healing and my own personal healing journey, which had led to my doctoral research. By Sunday afternoon, several workshop attendees had approached me to ask more about my

research; they were curious and interested. A few days after the workshop, I emailed Genevieve to gauge how she was feeling about my attendance in the group in retrospect, and she said that she had kept forgetting to mention my presence because 'when I [am] in that big spirit space...everything becomes energy'. She had been involved with the dynamics of the group process while in an altered state so that my role as a researcher became irrelevant for her. It appeared that I was more concerned about the effects of my presence than anyone else was. As I became more comfortable during workshops, it became less of an issue, and I always left Information Sheets out for whoever was interested, and was available to answer questions.

The Australian facilitators of the FSS course, *The Way of the Shaman*, had some questions when I emailed them in advance about my dual role. One of them replied as follows:

[O]ne of the things I love about running this workshop is that I am continually presented with new things to think about. I do have a few questions. The first is who are you studying through and what is the course? The next is what do you plan to do with the information you receive? This is an experiential workshop - do you participate in all the activities or do you observe others and if so do you write notes on other people's experiences? In line with this question - How do you maintain participant's confidentiality and what if any ethics approvals are required or associated with your research? What do you hope to get out of attending this workshop? (pers. comm. 2 Apr 2007).

These were all very pertinent questions, and implied that the facilitators took ethics and the safety of group participants seriously. Once I had provided an Information Sheet and answered their questions, we established a good understanding of my role/s beforehand, which made it very easy for me to introduce myself to the group once the workshop commenced.

Different issues surfaced during the first weekend on the yearlong course that I participated in during 2008. While I had met the facilitators in advance, and explained to the group about my research during introductions on the first evening, as the

weekend progressed, I realised that neither the two facilitators nor I had fully considered the implications of me participating in an on-going group (as opposed to attending a single weekend workshop). We were about to create a community of shamanic neophytes, and it was important that my dual role as participant and researcher was clearly understood by everyone. As a result, I felt the need to mention my research agenda again on the Sunday afternoon, and I explained that the course was an opportunity for me to deepen my personal understandings and experience of shamanic practices, and that it was not my intention to research the group as such. I asked, however, if I could sometimes approach people individually to ask them a question, explaining that they had the right to refuse if they chose.

It was a challenging moment: the reactions were mixed and there was a shift in the energy and focus of the room that I found very unnerving. Some people asked questions about my research; one woman stated firmly that she didn't want to be brought back into her head with academic questions; one man said he was willing to be asked any questions, while others were encouraging and supportive. One facilitator explained to me that high levels of trust within the group were essential because of the fragile and delicate nature of the work with people struggling to articulate newly glimpsed understandings and teachings, and expressing these for the first time in front of the group without feeling they were going to be observed, researched and written about. Several people made sharp distinctions between academic approaches and their shamanic approach, and there was a sense that these were in opposition and irreconcilable. Ironically, some months earlier, I had given a paper at a conference,⁵⁴ standing in front of social scientists arguing the case for the validity of shamanic knowledge, and now here I was before a group of shamanic trainees defending the academic process and arguing for integration of both sorts of knowledge.

My presence in the group brought with it obligations; what gifts did I bring in exchange, I was asked? I bring my passion and curiosity, I replied, and I model full body participation as I enter into my own process of engaging with the spirits. I bring

⁵⁴ The paper was entitled *On Breaking Cultural and Methodological Taboos: Neo-Shamans and Experiential Research*, given at the 32nd Annual Conference, *Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ASAA/NZ)* 17 November 2007. The conference theme was *Taboo: The Forbidden/Forbidding Subject of Anthropology*.

the gift of providing group members opportunities to self-reflect when I ask questions. I carry stories and images in my heart from merely being there, witnessing and participating, and my writing is another gift of sharing those stories with a wider audience that they might better understand shamanism. As the year passed, those group members who had initially expressed some reservations made a point of letting me know that they were now happy to answer my questions; mutual trust was established.

This chapter has identified some of the challenges of a heuristic, radical participatory and experiential research methodology. It has described the inherent tensions between my multiple roles as researcher/outsider and practitioner/insider in a field that includes human and non-human participants. I have argued that with a radical participatory and experiential methodology it is essential that the researcher's inner and outer worlds are congruent when researching the numinous. The fieldwork process and ethical considerations have been outlined, and key research participants introduced. The following chapter, the first that deals with my field findings in detail, maps the neo-Shamanic landscape in New Zealand.

CHAPTER 4

MAPPING THE NEO-SHAMANIC LANDSCAPE IN NEW ZEALAND

Shamanism is an age-old practice of entering into an altered state of consciousness with the purpose of journeying in spirit realms to seek knowledge and healing. Shamanism rests on a belief that all of nature is conscious and inspirited and that human health – the health of individuals and whole communities – depends on a harmonious balance with nature. The maintenance of that balance is the work of shamans, talented individuals who have mastered the techniques of journeying and who have established powerful connections with spirit helpers (Jack, research participant).

* * * *

A shaman dances on top of the equation $E=mc^2$ (Deborah, research participant).

* * * *

[Shamans] plug into the Web of Oneness, the elements, the [cardinal] directions, nature, the devas [nature spirits], right up to God. We work in that Web of Oneness absolutely earthed from the core of the earth to Mother/Father God (Elisabeth, research participant).

* * * *

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand are unique by virtue of living in this land that embraces, inspires, and informs their shamanic practices. The Māori place name 'Te Arai' can be interpreted as 'the veil' and for two neo-Shamans, living where they do with expansive and elevated views across native bush and farmland to the ocean and Te Arai headland, the veil between the worlds is very thin. For one expatriate neo-Shaman, returning to live in the country of her birth was a 'coming home' to the land and the mountains, especially Aoraki (Mt Cook), her birthplace. The interplay of the New Zealand landscape, its colonial history, and relations with Māori, the tangata whenua (indigenous people of the land) all contribute to neo-Shamanic identities and practices in New Zealand. This chapter describes the geographical spaces and the

spatial interior maps occupied by neo-Shamanic practitioners in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It maps a genealogy of neo-Shamans in New Zealand and their spiritual paths, locating them within New Zealand society as a whole, and amongst other spiritualities and healing systems. Some of the multiple and diverse threads that influence, shape, and intersect with the practices of neo-Shamans in New Zealand include the New Age movement, neo-Paganism, Native American spirituality, complementary and alternative medicine, psychotherapy and counselling, Māori spirituality and healing traditions, all of which combine to create a multiplicity of local identities.

Yet these complex networks of alternate spiritualities and healing modalities that neo-Shamans in New Zealand live and practise amongst are also subject to global influences, the dynamic interplay between local and global contributing to diverse and eclectic neo-Shamanic forms. As a result, neo-Shamanic practices while creatively evolving in unique ways, with seasonal and cultural variations distinctive to New Zealand, are influenced by global trends as people access information through books, the internet, or workshops (some of which are facilitated by teachers from overseas). Many neo-Shamans have travelled to, or lived in other parts of the world and have been exposed to neo-Shamanic and indigenous shamanic practices and teachings. Several participants have immigrated to New Zealand from other countries, bringing with them their understandings of shamanism. Neo-Shamans living in New Zealand therefore inevitably share much in common with neo-Shamans in other Western countries, albeit with a distinctive New Zealand flavour.

There is some evidence suggesting that New Zealanders tend to be attracted to alternative spiritualities in disproportionate numbers compared with the total population.⁵⁵ Spiritualist, Theosophical and Golden Dawn traditions arrived with European settlers in the nineteenth century and although the numbers of adherents were small, they achieved a public profile in newspapers, possibly setting a precedent

⁵⁵ Ellwood (1993:186), for example, suggests that there are twenty-five times the numbers of Theosophists in New Zealand on a relative population basis compared with the United States. I have heard similar comments relating to the numbers of Tibetan Buddhists in New Zealand but have no way of substantiating this claim, made to me by a New Zealand Tibetan Buddhist.

for individual spiritual explorations during the 1960s, which flowed into the New Age in the 1980s (Ellwood, 1993). Moreover, Ellwood suggests:

[p]erhaps the twenty-first century will bring a distinctly New Zealand style of modern paganism, in which the Kiwi love of nature and its powers... and the utopian New Zealand myth, blend powerfully with themes from Māori spirituality to create something new (1993:215).

His prediction could be correct. For example, a New Zealand feminist witch and ritual-maker, Juliet Batten, has related the southern hemisphere seasons to Celtic and Māori traditions creating a unique Pagan ritual cycle. Her desire to find the 'dynamic meeting point, the richness of relationship and the joy of cultural exchange from the deepest spiritual perspective' (2005:23) may well continue as New Zealanders are inspired by festivals and rituals introduced by other cultures within their increasingly diverse population (2005:9).

Numbers of New Zealanders identifying as adhering to Spiritualism and New Age religions (the census category that most closely relates to neo-Shamanism) increased more than three-fold from just over 5,000 people in 1991 to 16,000 in 2001, according to census figures comparing responses to a question regarding religious affiliation over the ten years from 1991 to 2001. Within this category, those who identified as following Nature and Earth-based religions (such as Paganism and Shamanism) increased 18-fold, from 318 to 5,862.⁵⁶ However, official census figures may not be an accurate indicator for estimating numbers of adherents, as boundaries between the various groups and peoples' depth of commitment are fluid. The actual number of people practising nature religions may be more than this. Rountree (2009:244) has estimated that approximately 5,000 women in New Zealand self-identify as being participants in the Goddess spirituality movement, a figure somewhat higher than the census statistics indicate.

⁵⁶ Taken from Statistics New Zealand <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2001-census-data/2001-national-summary/default.htm> Table 16 (accessed 8 July 2009).

Nonetheless, neo-Shamans form a very small proportion of the population of New Zealand, a fact I needed to remind myself of as I immersed myself in their worlds. It is difficult to gauge accurately the numbers of people who have attended neo-Shamanic workshops in New Zealand. I have met nine people who have been teaching courses over periods ranging from one to twenty years; based on estimates received from four teachers, I guess that between 2000 and 3000 people have attended neo-Shamanic courses in New Zealand, and others practice independently without ever having attended workshops.

I begin in this chapter by locating neo-Shamans within the New Zealand landscape particularly in relation to New Age, neo-Pagan and Native American spiritual traditions. Next, I outline the lineages and influences that contribute to the distinctive characteristics of neo-Shamans in New Zealand, and map the demographics of neo-Shamanic workshop participants, comparing their characteristics with those from other Western countries. Finally, I examine the ways that neo-Shamans in New Zealand are drawn to shamanism, how they construct their identities, and the roles they create for themselves within a modern Western society that does not generally recognise the role of the shaman.

Neo-Shamans, the New Age and Neo-Pagans

The three strands of nature religions (Greenwood, 2005:x) – the New Age movement, neo-Pagan and neo-Shamanic communities – with their fluctuating and fuzzy boundaries are all observable in New Zealand, as is the case in many other Western countries. My research suggests that, although the boundaries are unclear and mobile, there are a number of correspondences between New Age-like practices (such as millenarian thinking and the use of channelled material) and neo-Shamanism in New Zealand. This situation seems to be similar to that in Sweden. Lindquist's (1997:68) study of Swedish neo-Shamans found that many had already internalised New Age attitudes before they took a shamanic course and were thus easily socialised into the neo-Shamanic culture, and I think this could be the case in New Zealand too given that New Age philosophies have become so widespread and, in some cases, mainstream. A few individual neo-Shamans in New Zealand are more favourably disposed towards

New Age philosophies than others are but, then again, all place more emphasis on the earth-based values of shamanism rather than the transcendent qualities emphasised within most New Age circles.

In the final analysis, because of the shifting boundaries between the New Age movement, neo-Paganism and neo-Shamanism, it is unproductive to attempt to draw clear (and likely arbitrary) divisions between them. Categorising is possibly a preoccupation of scholars and may have as much to do with the perspective of the person doing the labelling as it does with different classes of religious expression. Jakobsen's (1999) study of neo-Shamanism in Britain and Europe, for example, has strongly situated neo-Shamanism within the New Age movement. Conversely, Wallis, archaeologist, anthropologist and self-identified neo-Shaman (2003:29), has noted that some neo-Shamans in Britain seek to distance themselves from New Age mores. This perhaps says as much about the differences between their respective outsider and insider perspectives as it does about the neo-Shamans themselves. In addition, some neo-Shamanic or neo-Pagan practices can look 'New Age' to non-participating outsiders.

In reality, academic concerns have little relevance to individual spiritual seekers who belong to multiple groups and move fluidly between them as they attend workshops, read books about healing and spirituality, browse stalls at spiritual fairs and consult with a vast array of healing practitioners, psychics, astrologers, or crystal healers. The tendency of New Age followers to mix and match from various traditions to create an individualised spirituality is evident in New Zealand too. Linda Hampton (2008) identified herself as an insider when researching New Age identities in New Zealand. She found blends of New Age and neo-Pagan practices (but not specifically neo-Shamanic, although a few respondents mentioned reading books about shamanism as a source of inspiration), as well as traditional and non-traditional forms of established religions amongst the one hundred (predominantly women) participants she surveyed. They self-identified as Pagan, Wiccan, Spiritualist, Buddhist or non-mainstream and/or mystic Christian; frequently respondents added elements from several traditions to create their own individualised belief structure (2008:34).

For the last sixteen years, the *New Spirit Festival* held in Auckland has attracted hundreds of people annually with between forty and sixty exhibitors, a lively example of the New Age marketplace operating in New Zealand.⁵⁷ I attended the *Festival* in April 2008 and gained an overall impression of numerous people searching for healing or some form of spiritual ‘truth’ from varied and multiple sources. Four streams of presentations and seminars ran continuously covering such topics as handwriting analysis, channelled conversations, balancing the energy fields, healing family wounds, awakening and healing the rainbow body, Ayurvedic medicine, foot reflexology, connecting to your angels, native trees and plants of Aotearoa, the medicine wheel, and contacting the divine feminine within.⁵⁸

Several neo-Shamanic participants regularly have stands or lead seminars at the *Festival*. I attended a public presentation one neo-Shaman, Franchelle, gave during the 2008 *Festival* to introduce her native plant essences, a modality that she says is the ‘perfect expression of shamanic healing in the 21st century’. My fieldnotes recorded my response: she is a charismatic and polished performer, able to hold a packed room of maybe two hundred or more people spellbound, drawing them in with her drumming, singing, chanting, her power and energy. The impression I gained was that of a powerful, altered state shamanic performance.

One male neo-Shamanic practitioner told me he finds the *Festival* a ‘buzz’, a place for him to meet with friends and share spiritual experiences and stories. On the other hand, immediately after leaving the *Festival*, I interviewed a second shamanic practitioner. When I mentioned the large numbers of spiritual seekers, she commented on how disturbing she finds the ‘huge amount’ of unfocused and undirected energy

⁵⁷ According to the Festival organiser, 1300-1400 people attend the event each year (pers. comm. 3 Feb 2011). See <http://www.thebigevent.co.nz/index.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009). Similar smaller Festivals are held in other centres throughout New Zealand on a regular basis.

⁵⁸ In many areas of North America, the remnants of medicine wheels or sacred hoops are visible as stones arranged on the ground, forming sites of sacred architecture used ritually. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine_wheel (accessed 15 July 2011). Much of the information about the Native American medicine wheel as a psychological healing tool has been disseminated to Europeans by metis such as Sun Bear, Hyemeyohsts Storm or Brooke Medicine Eagle (see Storm, 1972; Medicine Eagle, 1991; see also Meadows [2002] for an English neo-Shamanic interpretation of the medicine wheel, which he says is a ‘map of the mind’). The issues of appropriation are complex and controversial, as I show in Chapter 9.

present at these events, implying that this large quantity of diffuse energy could be better utilised if it was grounded, concentrated, and transmuted shamanically. A third participant, who regularly presents seminars at the *Festival*, says that in her healing practice she teaches 'lightworkers'⁵⁹ how to shamanically ground and connect to the earth, so that they can work in a more powerful and 'grounded, whole manner'. These latter two participants illustrate awareness around a key difference between New Age seekers and shamans noted by several scholars (see, for example, York, 1995), emphasising connection to the earth in contrast to New Age followers' tendency towards a transcendent focus.

While some neo-Shamans in New Zealand incorporate New Age philosophies into their practice to varying degrees, I have found no evidence suggesting that neo-Shamanic and neo-Pagan groups in New Zealand influence each other. In spite of the fact that they have many features in common, such as animistic worldviews, and connection to the earth and nature, they do not appear to be in regular contact with each other, or to socialise together. The following comments provide a short summary of some neo-Pagan groups practising in this country, as examples of the environment neo-Shamans co-habit (even though there are no overt connections between the different groups).

A number of autonomous groups (such as Wiccans, and Goddess spirituality groups) regularly meet to honour the seasonal cycle, and to celebrate other occasions or events in their lives (see, for example, Rountree's [2004] account of feminist ritual-makers in New Zealand; also Rountree, 2009). Goddess Spirituality, which was the strongest neo-Pagan tradition in New Zealand during the 1990s, continues to flourish but is no longer growing as fast as it did previously, and other neo-Pagan traditions have grown up around it. Stephanie Dobson's (2005) New Zealand-based research about neo-Pagans focuses primarily on Witchcraft (Wicca). Her study is a theoretical

⁵⁹ This participant defined 'lightworkers' as healers who consciously choose to be of 'service to the planet and to spirit at this time in the earth's evolution'. They employ a range of healing modalities such as channelling, energy healing, reiki or massage, sound healing, often connecting with spirit guides and other beings. One lightworker told me she works with Quan Yin (a Buddhist deity), Mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, Archangel Michael, and 'christed galactic beings' along with her personal guides and 'indigenous beings' who bring a shamanic and grounded quality to her work.

examination of contemporary religions (and Paganism in particular) as an expression of postmodernism and new social movements as both a reaction to, and a product of secularisation within modern Western societies. She interviewed eight witches and two Pagans in the Dunedin area. A small number of Druids practice independently (Elsmore, 2005), or meet in small groups. One gathering open to the public came together especially to celebrate the 2009 winter solstice at Stonehenge Aotearoa in the form of Alban Arthur ('The Light of Arthur'), a ritual organised by a woman who was described to me by someone who participated in a similar event as a 'New Age witch and a Druid'.⁶⁰

An internet search brings up several neo-Pagan websites but it is difficult to gauge their levels of activity. Many web links listed with the New Zealand branch of the international *Pagan Federation*, for example, do not appear to be functional and local content is limited (but this situation can change rapidly if new members with sufficient enthusiasm and motivation become involved). The website links to a New Zealand shamanic school, the *Academy of Shamanic Studies*, one of the few indications of neo-Pagan and neo-Shamanic overlaps I have seen. The *PagaNZ* website is accessible to registered users only and there seems to be moderate activity on the on-line Forum, although 2008 plans to publish a quarterly magazine do not appear to have eventuated. Two women who own a retail store selling pagan supplies organised a 'PaganFest' near Christchurch in 2009, with a follow-up event in October 2010. In the North Island, two groups - Magick Earth and the New Zealand Pagan Festival – arrange regular festivals with lectures, workshops, and stalls selling ritual items that attract several hundred people. Natures Magick, a company selling neo-Pagan products appears to be

⁶⁰ Well-known English Druid, Philip Carr-Gomm, attended the ritual, which featured on *Campbell Live* TV3 News programme. Stonehenge Aotearoa was built by members of the Phoenix Astronomical Society and opened in 2005. While built on the same scale as the original Stonehenge in England, it is not a replica. Designed 'specifically for its location in the Wairarapa region of New Zealand's North Island...[i]t combines modern scientific knowledge with ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Celtic, Polynesian and Māori starlore. It is used to teach māramataka (the calendars of time and seasons). The stones also form a Polynesian star compass and can be used to teach navigation'. See <http://www.astronomynz.org.nz/stonehenge/> (accessed 13 July 2009).

one of the most consistent sources for information and networking amongst an eclectic range of neo-Pagan traditions.⁶¹

Based on these observations, I surmise there are some correlations between the situation in New Zealand and that in Sweden where 'neo-paganism and neo-shamanism...are *not* coterminous' (Lindquist, 1997:290, my emphasis). I have found little evidence of much communication between neo-Pagan and neo-Shamanic groups, either socially or through coming together to share rituals, although it could be that some individuals or groups unknown to me meet for rituals on occasions. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand do not regularly meet to observe the eight sabbats of the seasonal cycle that form the core of neo-Pagan ritual activities, unlike Swedish neo-Shamans who participate in regular pagan-like seasonal ceremonies (for example, the winter feast of *Starbrak* and its summer counterpart, *Dance of Fröjd*, are described in rich ethnographic detail by Lindquist, 1997). When questioned about changing north and south directions to fit with the seasons of the Southern Hemisphere, the Australian facilitators of the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies* workshop I attended were surprised, and said they did not relate the four cardinal directions to the seasons. This is not necessarily the case for all neo-Shamans though, and I know of some who independently or in small groups observe the summer or winter solstices, and perform ceremonies at new or full moon and on other occasions.

The blurred and shifting boundaries that make up the three strands of nature religions in other Western countries are observable in New Zealand. Although some neo-Shamans in New Zealand uphold New Age values and philosophies there will always be exceptions, and blanket labelling of neo-Shamanism as 'New Age' is not necessarily indicative of the nature of individual neo-Shamanic practices. 'New Age' itself is too broad and fuzzy a term to be meaningful. On the other hand, neo-Pagans and neo-Shamans in New Zealand tend to practice autonomously without much obvious communication or sharing between various independent groups.

⁶¹ However, in November 2010 Nature's Magick announced that it was closing its business, and the New Zealand Pagan Festival that was to be held in February 2011 was cancelled. Magick Earth was established in 2005; the owners are organising their final festival, to be held in April 2011, but it seems likely that other people will continue to organise similar festivals in the future (see <http://mindbodyandspirit.co.nz/magickearth.htm> accessed 7 Feb 2011).

Native American Spirituality

Fascination with Native American spirituality is a further background influence that contributes to, and shapes the neo-Shamanic landscape of New Zealand. For decades, as numerous scholars have noted, Euro-Americans and Europeans have had a love affair with the 'noble savage' stereotypical Native American; Indian spirit guides featured regularly amongst nineteenth century spiritualists, for example (Aldred, 2000:341-342; Wernitznig, 2003, 2007)). The underlying principle of most Native American Indian spirituality asserts a belief in the 'existence of unseen powers...[that] may take the form of deities or...may be more of a "feeling" that something exists and is sacred and mysterious' (Beck, Walters, & Francisco, 1996:9, cited in Makes Marks, 2007:3). In a different context, these words might sum up the cosmology and beliefs of most neo-Shamans; little wonder then that many are attracted to Native American spirituality.

How do neo-Shamans negotiate these delicate waters without being charged with appropriation? I address this question more fully in Chapter 9; however, the following comments from two participants suggest that they have some awareness of these issues. One woman, for example, believes there is evidence that European forms of shamanism have survived, and contemporary shamanic explorers can seek them out and take inspiration from these 'lost' European traditions without resorting to appropriation of Native American traditions. She told me that when she was searching for a model to explain her anomalous experiences she chose, since her background is European, to search for evidence of Scandinavian, Finnish, Swiss and Eastern European shamanic traditions rather than immerse herself in other indigenous spiritualities, saying that:

Many Europeans in this country gravitate towards Native American traditions, and our exposure to American media culture associates other realities with those teachings but there is no need for that. Shamanism is extant and available to everyone.

She believes shamanism can be practised by anyone who cares to explore it without the need to copy or appropriate others' traditions.

A second participant classes himself as a 'barefoot forest dweller' with a 'huge passion for nature...and all the entities of the forest and plants'. He is aware of the irony when, at the same time that he was learning rongoā,⁶² he discovered a series of books by Tom Brown, Jr⁶³ and was avidly absorbing Native American teachings:

...whilst I was in the forest learning the Māori names of the native plants, I was playing 'shaman'; I was scouting and expanding my awareness. I was playing 'Indian' in the forest [laughs].

His exploration of shamanism has included several traditions as he worked to find his own shamanic pathway, his experience illustrating the interweaving threads that influence and contribute to building individual neo-Shamanic identities; I enlarge on this theme shortly.

Native American people have long used sweatlodges or purification rituals as a sacred healing ceremony, and many Westerners have appropriated and popularised these ceremonies for their own purposes. I know of, or have been told about, groups of New Zealanders who conduct sweatlodges on a semi-regular basis, perhaps at full moon, or following other cyclical periods, during summer gatherings of music and healing, or events held at retreat centres. Some sweatlodge ceremonies have mixed gender participants; others are for men or women only. I cannot gauge how many New Zealanders participating in sweatlodge ceremonies are aware of the complex and sensitive issues regarding neo-colonialism and appropriation, and the complexity is further compounded when some Native American people share their knowledge with Westerners.

In September 2006, for example, I attended a sweatlodge facilitated by a Native American man, Reuben Silverbird (Apache and Cherokee), who travelled to New

⁶² Māori plant medicine. This man learnt rongoā from Rob McGowan, a Pākehā man widely respected amongst several Māori groups (see Chapter 8).

⁶³ Tom Brown, Jr is a white American supposedly taught by an Apache man (see Brown, 1991).

Zealand in his role as an 'Ambassador for Peace' with the *Universal Peace Foundation*.⁶⁴ Twenty-three people (seventeen women and six men, some of whom I had previously met at neo-Shamanic workshops) attended the weekend, which included long discourses by Reuben about Native American history, customs and spirituality, as well as the sweatlodge ceremony itself.⁶⁵ The sweat consisted of almost four hours of ritual and prayers; later, I wrote in my fieldnotes:

Sitting outside on a large stone near the fire at the end of the 4th round, I had an overwhelming feeling of gratitude at the sense of connection and Oneness that washed over me. Each time, crawling on my hands and knees back into the lodge – becoming an animal, as Reuben described it – I bathed in the primal nature of the experience. Squishing mud between my toes, damp grass sticking to my hands and knees, my sarong saturated by this time with wet from the ground and sweat pouring off me, the earth smell, the darkness, completely dark and enclosed (Fieldnotes 23 Sept 2006).

My experience closely matches that of Lindquist's (1995) ethnographic account of sweatlodges she experienced when researching neo-Shamans in Sweden. She outlines the historical and social context of sweatlodges, comparing the traditional Native American sweatlodge as told to Joseph Epes Brown by Black Elk (1967, cited in

⁶⁴ The Foundation is a United Nations NGO (Rainbow News, Aug 2006; also see www.silverbird.at/biography.html accessed 5 Sep 2006). Reuben Silverbird travels internationally, performing in concerts and lecturing about Native American spirituality. The event I attended was organised by two New Zealand women, as part of several days of local UN Peace Day community activities with Reuben Silverbird.

⁶⁵ I knew the two New Zealand men who built the lodge in collaboration with Reuben Silverbird, and also the third man who served as the 'firekeeper' (looking after the fire used to heat the stones outside the sweatlodge and, later, placing the stones in the central pit inside the lodge as directed by Reuben). All three men have been involved with men's groups, and two of them have been conducting sweatlodges (mainly for men) for several years. One man, a New Zealander, told me he had attended gatherings in the United States over twenty years ago but didn't learn about sweatlodges until his return to New Zealand; he spoke about the deep universal cyclical themes that emerge from the dark womb-like space of the lodge, likening the experience to the 'heroes journey' (Campbell, 1993). The second man is Dutch-born and told me he first experienced a sweatlodge at a 'Rainbow Gathering' in Europe in 1981; he has participated in and led sweatlodges ever since.

Lindquist, 1995:18-20) with the urban shamanic sweatlodge rituals she participated in, in Sweden. Pure blood or 'half-breed' Native Americans who travelled, and gave lectures and workshops introduced sweatlodges into Europe as neo-Shamanic practices (1995:17).

However, sweatlodges are not an established or regular feature of neo-Shamanic activities amongst the neo-Shamans I have met in New Zealand, unlike the situation Lindquist describes in Sweden. This may be because several of the teachers (male and female) are in their fifties or older, and constructing and conducting sweatlodges is a team effort that takes considerable physical as well as spiritual stamina. Some women do participate in sweatlodges in New Zealand, but it seems that sweatlodges are held more frequently by and for men who are not necessarily involved with neo-Shamanism, although some may recognise and name their experience as 'shamanic'.

Mapping the New Zealand neo-Shamanic landscape implies a static state. This is clearly not the case; neo-Shamans live within a rich and mobile milieu with unclear boundaries between the various categories of alternate spiritualities. I turn now to mapping the geographic spread of neo-Shamans in this land, their special characteristics, demographics and identities.

The Local and the Global: Lineages, Influences and Demographics

I began my research seeking out those who self-identified as 'shamans'. Semantic confusion soon became apparent around who is or is not a 'shaman'; I summarised the scholarly discourse regarding the definitions of 'shaman' and 'shamanism' in Chapter 2. Throughout my fieldwork, a number of people reported to me that they either know a 'shaman' or know of someone who knows a 'shaman'. Not only does this raise questions about how these people define 'shaman', it also draws attention to comments made by the English neo-Shaman and environmentalist, Gordon MacLellan (2003:365), who has pointed out that, since there is no one accepted definition of a 'shaman' perhaps the term is best used when people feel it is the right one. I have communicated with only some people identified by others as 'shamans'. For example, I have not followed up the 'Blackfoot shaman' that I was told about but in several instances, I

have had email conversations or interviews with those labelled 'shaman' by someone else. I continue to learn about the presence of others who may not necessarily advertise or think of themselves as shamanic practitioners, but are working in an unobtrusive manner with family members or clients, out in nature, healing the land,⁶⁶ or doing psychopomp work, sometimes intuitively and without having attended formal neo-Shamanic workshops. There are undoubtedly others I have not met and haven't been told about.

My fieldwork has traced the geographic spread of contemporary shamans from the far north of the North Island to Dunedin in the southern parts of the South Island. The majority cluster in the Auckland region but some are located to the east in the Coromandel area, and to the west in Taranaki in the North Island, and around Nelson/Marlborough and Christchurch in the South Island. Some practise 'Toltec shamanism', promoted by writers expanding on the teachings of Don Juan, the Yaqui Indian who featured in Carlos Castaneda's writings (see, for example, Castaneda, 1970; Feather, 2006). Others are drawn to travel to South America (in particular the Amazon) to experience *ayahuasca* ceremonies and to learn from shamans in those areas; one man has travelled there for six years consecutively to be with the Shipibo shaman he has apprenticed with. One white South African woman now living in New Zealand practises as a *sangoma*; she trained with a Zulu *sangoma* in South Africa.⁶⁷ I have had email communications with a medical doctor who is interested in spiritual aspects of health and practises 'energy healing'. She attended neo-Shamanic workshops in New Zealand after spending time with indigenous people in Australia and Ecuador while she was at medical school; her experiences in these countries roused her curiosity about other ways of healing by working with spiritual and subtle energies (pers. comm. 25 Mar 2010).

Still others I have located through the internet, such as an overseas teacher, Eileen Nauman (Ai Gvhdi Waya), who describes herself as a homeopath and an 'Eastern

⁶⁶ One neo-Shaman commented to me that it is 'presumptuous' for us to speak of 'healing the land' as it is the land that heals us. However, 'healing the land' is the usual expression employed by many practitioners, often interpreted to mean balancing the energies of an area where, for example, there may have been a natural disaster or human tragedy in the past.

⁶⁷ Traditional healers or shamans in Southern Africa.

Cherokee Metis shamaness'. She trained a group of people in Dunedin in 2003, and I have had some email contact with several people from that group.⁶⁸ One other woman, who immigrated to New Zealand from Australia in 1996, lives in the Dunedin area and combines her shamanic work with psychosynthesis psychotherapy. Her shamanic journey has been one of finding her ancestral indigenous (Celtic) roots, combined with teachings from several indigenous peoples. These examples give an indication of the geographical spread, and the varied and multiple influences that contribute to the character of neo-Shamanism in New Zealand.

Spiritual and Physical Shamanic Lineages

Many neo-Shamanic participants told me they were aware of their shamanic lineages, both spiritual and physical. Their lineages legitimate their practice as shamans. When some said they were 'family' from past lives who have chosen to gather and re-connect in this lifetime, I visualised an energetic network of golden threads connecting shamans throughout the land, around the globe, and throughout history. The belief of these neo-Shamans is that those drawn to shamanism in the 21st century are remembering past lives and are answering a 'call' to return to the earth at this time. They believe the earth is on the brink of ecological, economic and social collapse; the returning shamans are 'reconnecting and remembering', bringing their 'medicine bundles from those [past] lifetimes', one woman said. The 'medicine bundles' she is referring to consist of shamanic tools and spirit helpers acquired from previous incarnations as shamans. For this neo-Shaman, the spiritual lineage of those shamans who have chosen to be born at this time is as important as their physical or genetic lineage.

One woman, Franchelle, enlarged on the distinction between spiritual and genetic shamanic lineages when she told me:

We come [are born] in two waters, the waituhi, which is the water that records. We have two lineages, our soul lineage and our bloodline family in this lifetime. I know both of my lines are healers, medicine men and women, my own soul lineage and

⁶⁸ See http://www.medicinegarden.com/SRE/NZ_shaman.html (accessed 14 July 2009).

my bloodline...For as long as I can remember, I have had communication with my ancestors on both my mother's and father's sides.

Franchelle works very closely with a Māori tohuna, Dr Rangimarie Turuki Arikirangi Rose Pere. Her understandings about waituhi and related concepts are teachings received through Dr Pere and the Kura Huna Māori mystery school whose teachings Franchelle says she is able to directly access spiritually. She is saying here that her shamanic gifts come through her maternal and paternal physical bloodlines, her ancestors. She is a hereditary shaman through this genetic lineage, but she also believes her soul or spiritual lineage contributes to her shamanic powers. It is through her soul lineage that her relationship with Rose Pere, manifests; I enlarge on the relationship between Dr Pere and Franchelle in Chapter 9.

The 'Homogenising' Influence of Core Shamanism

In terms of shamanic lineages in this lifetime, Michael Harner is a pervasive presence and influence throughout the Western world. The basic core shamanic course, *The Way of the Shaman*, is taught in a standard format worldwide, wherever *Foundation for Shamanic Studies* (FSS) workshops are held. Core shamanic teachings have touched many belonging to the neo-Shamanic community in New Zealand, directly or indirectly; for example, Shen's teacher in England was Jonathan Horwitz who originally trained and taught with the FSS before establishing his own school. Sandra Ingerman, who taught shamanic courses in New Zealand in 1989, worked with Harner for several years at the FSS. Three participants have studied with Harner and Ingerman at the FSS in the United States, and two have gone on to teach many others in New Zealand.

In view of the widespread influence of Harner's teachings, Wallis has suggested (2003:51) it is feasible that the hegemony of core shamanism leads to a 'homogenising' effect, with negative consequences such as decontextualising and universalising shamanism (noted in Chapter 2). A number of anthropologists have studied core neo-Shamanism (although not always through the FSS) in the United Kingdom and Europe. These include Wallis (2003:46-48), who attended a basic FSS workshop in

England, facilitated by Leslie Kenton (now living part-time in New Zealand);⁶⁹ Jakobsen (1999) studied neo-Shamans in England and Denmark; Lindquist's (1997) research about Swedish neo-Shamans draws on her fieldwork carried out from 1992-1996 in Sweden, Denmark, England and France. Both Jakobsen and Lindquist participated in basic and advanced neo-Shamanic workshops facilitated by Jonathan Horwitz.

A methodology issue emerges here, however. I believe a distinction must be made between those attending an introductory workshop in core shamanism for a one-off spiritual/shamanic experience, and those who continue their shamanic explorations over several years (either independently, or with other teachers in human form). Shen's original training in core shamanism initially gave him a model to contextualise his unusual childhood experiences (I enlarge on his experiences in Chapter 9), which he has now developed into his own idiosyncratic shamanic practice and he continues to seek out teachers from other shamanic paths (in addition to teachings received from his spirit helpers). A number of Shen's students have continued studying with him for three or four years, and one woman in the group told me that each member has developed their own distinctive way of working.

In Europe more recently, Florian Gredig has researched experienced neo-Shamanic practitioners in Germany, France, Sweden and Switzerland, focusing on healers with five to thirty years experience (the majority have practiced ten to twenty years) (2009:24). He observes, and I agree with him, that drawing solely on participants from beginners' core shamanism courses does not take into consideration that they have not yet had an opportunity for their own form of practice to evolve; moreover, only a minority continue practising neo-Shamanism after attending a short course. All of his informants, Gredig writes:

⁶⁹ Wallis attended one basic workshop in core shamanism. He interviewed Harner in 1998, arguing that his follow-up fieldwork over several years has given him sufficient data to comment on 'core shamanists'. His study also included Druids, Heathens and other neo-Pagan traditions, which he situates under a neo-Shamanic umbrella (2003:46-48).

that have been engaged with neo-shamanisms for more than...six years clearly show a distinct individual concept of what shamanism means to them and of shamanic cosmology, [with] their own set of ritual techniques (2009:23-24).

It is possible the 'homogenising' effect observed by Wallis is not as great as he claims. The fact that several participants in my study began their formal shamanic training by attending core shamanic workshops must influence the development of their personal practices to some extent. Nonetheless, Michael Harner and the FSS are not the only influence. As I show in the following section, in all cases, individual neo-Shamans can identify and cite a number of strands that have influenced and guided them on their shamanic explorations; in addition, not all have attended core shamanic workshops.

Other Neo-Shamanic Influences

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand are constructing a unique form of shamanism composed and blended from a mixture of local and global influences, both Pākehā and Māori. In some cases, contact with Māori healers and their rongoā (plant) medicine has shaped the shamanic paths of neo-Shamans. However, neo-Shamans in New Zealand are also aware of the politics of biculturalism and indigeneity that do not permit them to appropriate Māori 'shamanic' healing traditions in the ways that Native American traditions have been appropriated throughout the Western world. (I enlarge on the complex issues of appropriation and, in particular, the relationships between neo-Shamans and Māori healers in Chapter 9.) Because of these political issues, New Zealand is possibly more of a melting pot of assorted shamanic influences than in other countries where neo-Shamans perhaps trace their practices back to a putative 'indigenous' shamanism. Numerous global influences contribute to and inform their practices, which are then moulded and modified within the New Zealand context. In this respect, neo-Shamans in New Zealand are demonstrably playing a role in the emergence of multiple 21st century forms of Western shamanisms.

While participants of neo-Shamanic workshops were almost all New Zealand-born Pākehā or of European descent, with the very occasional Māori or Pacific Island

person, global influences were pronounced. Those of European descent included both recent and long-time immigrants from the United States, the United Kingdom, Holland and other European countries, South Africa, and one French Canadian woman with part-Native American heritage (who came to New Zealand for other non-shamanic studies). Many participants have travelled and attended shamanic and other healing courses while overseas, have lived in other countries (sometimes for extended periods), or were born overseas before then coming to New Zealand to live. Elisabeth, for example, was born in Hungary and as a child came with her family to New Zealand. She cites her Hungarian roots as one thread of her shamanic heritage and, although her formal shamanic training has included Native American influences (see Chapter 3), she says she has strived to develop a practice that is rooted in New Zealand and appropriate for this land.

For another woman, growing up in South Africa was pivotal; she lived much of her childhood and adult life on isolated farms in South Africa before immigrating to New Zealand in 1999. Childhood experiences with the Zulu people, combined with her inherent love of nature, communication with devas, and knowledge about ancient San shamanic activity in caves near where she lived inspired her life-long spiritual search. A combination of natural childhood inclination towards spirits in nature, learning through books, workshops, exposure to other cultures and indigenous shamans in some cases, and direct teachings from spirits is common amongst many participants.

Jack's experience is typical; he detailed his influences as follows (pers. comm.15 Nov 2009):

1. *Childhood perception and experience of spirit in nature, reinforced by British fairytales*
2. *Exposure to Indian mystical traditions*
3. *Reading about the Findhorn garden and connection to nature spirits*
4. *Shamanic workshops with Michael Harner and Sandra Ingerman*
5. *Sweatlodges and workshops with Native American shamans*
6. *Study and co-teaching with Basque shaman, Angeles Arrien*
7. *Wide reading on shamanic practices worldwide*

8. *Meetings with shamans in Asian and Pacific countries (Balinese, Tibetan, Māori, Aboriginal Australian)*
9. *Throughout: direct teachings from spirits, some formless, others embodied in animal, plant and human form.*⁷⁰

Born in New Zealand, Jack lived and taught for many years in the United States, and has lived and travelled widely in India and other countries. His early experiences awakened a curiosity in him and a desire to search out information and to experience shamanic phenomena himself. Although his list of influences is extensive, including firsthand contact with shamans from several indigenous cultures, it is not unusual in its global scope. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand have a strong drive towards experientially exploring spirituality in general and shamanism in particular, both locally and overseas.

Demographics of Workshop Participants

Neo-Shamans, as I have noted earlier, make up a small proportion of the New Zealand population, a small sub-group within a growing number of people identifying as adhering to earth-based spiritualities. Nonetheless, neo-Shamanic workshop attendees include people from a wide spread of ages and occupations. Neophyte shamanic practitioners are as diverse as shamanism itself. Many told me it is the earth-based teachings of shamanism that attracts them, perhaps a factor of living in New Zealand, with its colonial farming heritage and love of the outdoors, influenced also by Māori spiritual traditions and connection to the land.

As with other healing or personal growth workshops, course participants were mainly women ranging in age from their twenties through to (in one case) a woman in her seventies, the average person being in their forties or fifties. An age spread of close to fifty years is a further indication of the broad appeal of shamanism, encompassing those who have experienced the counter-culture movements of the 1970s through to

⁷⁰ Neo-Shamans I have met tend to say 'spirits' or 'spirit' interchangeably, and the meaning is contextual referring to their spirit helpers (plural) or a single universal spiritual force (singular). I address this distinction in Chapter 5.

younger spiritual seekers (maybe a category of neo-hippies, interested in alternate spiritualities, lifestyles and healing). In two workshops, the participants were all women (seventeen attended Genevieve's workshop *Shamanic Tools for Healthcare Practitioners* in April 2006;⁷¹ five attended Jack's *Advanced Shamanic Training* in March 2007, including one woman in her sixties who came from England especially to attend the course). Men made up about one tenth of the numbers in two workshops, and varied from between one-quarter to one-third in the others.

As might be expected with healing-related courses, many of the participants work in allied fields, both non-orthodox and orthodox – naturopaths, herbalists, an Ayurvedic practitioner, energy and psychic healers, massage therapists, an osteopath, shiatsu or reiki practitioners, lightworkers, yoga teachers, nurses, counsellors, psychologists, a hypnotherapist, an art therapist, social workers, group facilitators and mentors. However, course attendees came from many other occupations too, possibly further evidence of the New Zealand tendency to be attracted to alternative spiritualities. These included a funeral director, several from the corporate and business world, a financial adviser, real estate agent, teachers, jewellery-makers, artists, musicians, a farmer's wife, telecommunications workers, web designer and information technology, environmentalists, gymnasium and fitness industry sales, an electrical engineer, a boat designer and builder, construction workers and builders, an architect, a Non-Government Organisation worker, mothers, students and retired people.

This profile of the occupations of course attendees is perhaps more extensive than those from other countries but, in many other respects, workshop participant demographics have parallels with those of neo-Shamans in other Western countries. Jakobsen (1999:167), for example, reports an age span of twenty-two to over sixty years of age, with an average of forty years, for workshops she attended in Denmark and England during the 1990s. Workshop participants were mainly Danish and British but included people from Ireland, Finland, Norway, Greenland, Switzerland and Germany. As with the New Zealand courses, Jakobsen noted a prevalence of those

⁷¹ This course is currently offered as a certificated three-module training *Shamanic and Energy Healing Training*.

from the healing professions and teachers, and drew parallels between these professions and traditional shamanic roles. Psychotherapists, artists, business and management course facilitators were often seeking to bring a spiritual dimension into their work and shamanism allowed them to do this. Other participants came for their own healing (1999:167-171).

Jakobsen's work differs from my observation of New Zealand neo-Shamanic courses that are dominated by women participants, in that she observed 'many' men participated in workshops: the men are possibly searching to connect with their feminine side but are also attracted to the action of drumming and rattling, and outdoors exploration of nature, she suggests (1999:179). This is difficult to gauge but may be true as many men who are involved with men's groups are encouraged to explore their feminine aspect, in addition to carrying out traditional masculine activities such as drumming or, on occasions, participating in sweatlodge ceremonies. I know at least one facilitator who does not call himself a shaman or advertise men's workshops as shamanic and, although he builds shamanic and archetypal elements into the workshop content, this does not fully explain why more New Zealand men do not attend neo-Shamanic workshops. One explanation may be that neo-Shamanic trainings in New Zealand tend to be advertised in New Age magazines and likely to reach a wider audience of women than men; one commentator estimates that women comprise seventy to ninety percent of the New Age market (Streiker, 1990:49, cited in Jakobsen, 1999:150). Though both men and women teach neo-Shamanism in New Zealand, courses facilitated by men still have higher proportions of women participants.

The course profile of people attending neo-Shamanic workshops in New Zealand broadly mirrors those in Europe and the United Kingdom, although some gender differences are apparent. However, as I noted earlier, not all neo-Shamans have participated in formal shamanic training workshops. The following section identifies some of the avenues that lead individual explorers to 'discover' shamanism.

Paths Towards Becoming a Neo-Shaman

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand come to shamanism by several routes. Some acquire shamanic skills and techniques through books or the internet, or by attending neo-Shamanic workshops. Knowledge about shamanism is gained gradually through learning and practising the methods and the tools; shamanism becomes learned technology. One person says he teaches his students the 'paperwork', and makes it clear to them that they are not shamans although, over time, some may develop their abilities and become competent shamanic practitioners.

For other participants, the first encounter of shamanism at a workshop awakens a fire within, and evokes a passionate life-changing response. One woman told me that after fifteen years of university study and involvement in the business world, the initial shamanic workshop she attended 'totally turned [her] life inside out, upside down. Every belief system, every paradigm, [her] whole worldview was thrown totally out the window.' Her business collapsed shortly afterwards, and 'everything that wasn't spiritual just dropped away' as shamanism became her total focus and passion.

Still others come to their shamanic roles and understandings through their individual explorations and a commitment to their own personal development and spiritual paths; they may not have attended neo-Shamanic workshops. One woman described how she has spent her lifetime exploring shamanism. She told me that, over the course of her life, she has left behind husbands, houses, her children, and her language in exchange for freedom to live her life based on shamanic principles.⁷² She felt it was her only choice, and that she needed to do 'whatever it takes...let me embrace this or I will collapse'. Although she knew the 'shamanic theory', she realised she had to live it, to fully integrate it and embody the lessons. She told me, 'I have done it this way; it was a requirement, you wouldn't choose it freely', adding that some people 'dabble' with shamanism without a commitment to the 'shedding and paring down process', and such people do not become 'true' shamans. Her perspective and life-long experiences matches that of English neo-Shaman, Gordon MacLellan (2003:372), who writes that shamans 'must be horribly true to themselves: they have had to see themselves taken apart and "lick the blood from your own bones"'. This is

⁷² Her native language is Dutch.

the level of commitment required – these neo-Shamans might say demanded – by the spirits, an apprenticeship over a lifetime.

Some participants, it seems, were born as shamans, and stood out with their inherent ability to connect to other realities. They experienced spontaneous awareness of spirits, visions, and inner knowing from a young age; frequently they had a strong affinity with the natural world. These people often grew up with large unanswered existential questions; there was a deep spiritual yearning and seeking, a wondering and searching for answers to early childhood anomalous phenomena. Their identities as someone who experienced unusual events and possessed extraordinary abilities pre-existed their languaging or naming of those experiences as ‘shamanic’. Once they had discovered the word ‘shaman’, it provided a structure to explain and make sense of their world. Kent (2007:235-236) reports similar abilities amongst the Australian neo-Shamanic healers she worked with, many of whom were ‘natural telepaths’ who could swiftly ‘click over’ from ordinary consciousness to altered states of consciousness, abilities that they discovered in childhood and considered completely normal. Workshop attendance may later hone their innate gifts. One young Maltese neo-Pagan noted her shift from ‘unconscious Pagan to conscious Pagan’ after her internet searching gave her a name to describe her natural spiritual inclinations (Rountree, 2010:59); many neo-Shamans make a similar transition, once they begin to read books, meet others with similar interests and experiences, and attend shamanic courses.

These are perhaps the people whom McClenon (2002:12) suggests have ‘thinner cognitive boundaries’ between their conscious and unconscious minds so that they can more easily enter other realities; they are the ‘shamanically-inclined’ (Lindquist, 1997:81) people who can easily undertake shamanic journeys and return with vivid descriptions of their spirit encounters. Neurobiological explanations for the universality of religious experience are of growing interest for a number of researchers. The emerging field of neurotheology investigates the notion that spiritual experiences are interwoven with human biology, and are observable neurological events in the brain (Newberg, D’Aquili & Rause, 2001:8-9, 36), the so-called ‘God module’ in the temporal lobe of the brain (Stein & Stein, 2008:25; see also Krippner, 2002:14; Winkelman, 2000).

In some instances, participants were reprimanded if they spoke about their childhood experiences and they suppressed their abilities to contact other realities, sometimes with adverse psychological consequences. The correlation between shamanism and mental illness is commonly noted within the shamanic literature (Narby & Huxley, 2001; Krippner, 2002; Vitebsky, 1995:138-141). European neo-Shamans Jakobsen met tell similar stories of unexpected, confusing or disturbing supernatural experiences that eventually led them to explore shamanism as a vehicle to explain unusual events in their lives (1999:150, 171-177). The following examples demonstrate the delicate, tangled and complex nature of shamanism that sometimes challenges the mental health of neo-Shamanic practitioners living in a culture and era that generally downplays the supernatural. They are classic examples of shaman as 'healed healer' (Halifax, 1991:18).

One neo-Shaman told me she had an 'innate ability to [shift levels of] consciousness' and she now believes, from her own experiences that, far from being a sign of mental illness, denial of other realities can in fact lead to psychosis. The cost of denial of those other realities was high, and she learnt that she needed to 'honour that which goes on inside' her own life at that deep inner level: 'our neuroses, self-doubts all exist in our lives in the everyday world. We are more likely to "go crazy" denying other realities rather than embracing them', she said. With that realisation, she later trained over a period of four years with neo-Shaman Leslie Kenton (in New Zealand), and this gave her a 'working model' and tools to more directly access and work with alternate realities.

A second neo-Shaman facilitated his first workshop in Taranaki in June 2009 after twenty years of exploration into natural healing and philosophies including shamanism, Western herbal medicine, rongoā and sound therapy. His path, he says, has been one of the wounded healer. He is keenly aware of the seesaw between his ego-driven issues around being a 'shaman', the need to remain humble, and his personal struggles to maintain balance and walk his path with integrity:

There has often been a lot of depression, manic - bi-polar? Often with the shamanic work, I would come out on a high and then crash and burn. I think the depression

is getting less. They often say that mental illness goes with this path. I don't know why that is. I don't know what it's about. I don't want it...

In an email communication several months after our interview, he wrote to me that his life has settled, and he now feels 'self-empowered' in his identity and work as a 'shaman' (pers. comm. 12 Aug 2009). Whatever path has led them to shamanism, the self-identity of neo-Shamans as 'shaman' is variable, as I show in the following section.

Neo-Shamanic Identities and Community Roles

I don't call myself a shaman; it is a mantle others give to me (Elisabeth, research participant).

* * * *

I don't call myself a shaman because I have seen people with truly impressive shamanic abilities, and I don't have that sort of ability. I am a shamanic teacher, and I say I am influenced by shamanic understandings, and I practise shamanism – meaning that I have learnt from people with knowledge of the shamanic tradition but I don't really think I am an adept. I do have shamanic visions [but] compared with real adepts, I would be foolish to call myself a shaman (Jack, research participant).

* * * *

In common with many neo-Shamans from other countries, a number of neo-Shamanic participants expressed concern about their identities and roles within their communities, and on occasions found this difficult to resolve within a modern Western context where the role of the shaman is not widely recognised or understood. In a traditional or tribal situation, community members understand and support the shaman's responsibilities, and there is no need for the shaman to state their role. I examine the dynamic inter-play between the inner and outer identities of my research participants as 'shaman' before turning to their varied roles as neo-Shamanic practitioners within their wider communities, and comparing these with the experiences of neo-Shamans overseas.

My research aim was to speak to those who self-identified as shamans. A range of perspectives became evident, from those participants who were unwilling to label themselves as a 'shaman', except possibly in certain special circumstances or situations, through to those who advocated that 'everyone is (potentially) a shaman'. The former position has become neo-Shamanic protocol amongst many neo-Shamans in other Western countries (Wallis, 2003:69). These neo-Shamans do not publicly self-identify as shamans out of respect for indigenous shamans, and because they consider 'shaman' to be an honorific title bestowed upon them by others (as with Elisabeth, in the 1st epigraph heading this section). Ultimately, they view the shamanic role as a calling from the spirits; their power as a shaman comes from the spirits. Jack likened it to the use of words such as 'hero' or 'mana',⁷³ just as people do not self-identify as a hero or speak of their own mana, so too with shamans. They perceive of shamanism as a vocation with their shamanic perspective encompassing and informing all that they do. Their internal identity may be that of a shaman, embracing a particular worldview that honours the sacred in all things, believing in the Oneness and inter-connectedness of all things. Shen, for example, doesn't advertise or call himself a shaman but, he told me, 'inside I know I am a shaman', and he is recognised as such by some people in his community.

In spite of this ethos, one participant told me she has heard of someone who facilitates workshops advertising him or herself as a shaman. The participant was uncomfortable about this, questioning the training and qualifications of the person she had heard about. She felt that this person was unethical, charging money and misrepresenting 'shamanism' to a gullible public, exploiting them for money or power, and that there was potential for harm if, for example, spirits were evoked without proper protection (see the following chapter for further discussion about safety issues).

The second perspective, that anyone can potentially become a shaman is similar to that put forward by the Māori writer, Samuel Robinson (2005), who suggests that everyone (Māori or non-Māori) should claim his or her own tohunga within (I discuss Robinson's viewpoint in Chapter 8). One woman spoke of her 'shamanic self' as her

⁷³ Authority, control, influence, prestige, power (see Shirres, 1997:53-61 for a full discussion of mana).

'real' self, an aspect of her being that holds wisdom, 'elder energy' and 'teacher energy'. She believes everyone has a 'shamanic self' and some choose more consciously to stand in the power of that role, a position that perhaps confirms criticisms regarding (some) neo-Shamans psychologising shamanism.

This standpoint was not the norm for most participants; many were concerned that such a wide outlook can result in 'shaman' and 'shamanism' becoming hackneyed terms used too loosely, and devaluing the special status of their meaning. One person withdrew from my study for these reasons, saying she no longer wanted to be associated with 'shamanism' as a descriptor for her healing work. Another disagreed with the notion that everyone is potentially a shaman: he believes shamans have a particular understanding of how life is, how the universe works, and that they use specific tools and methods to communicate with the spirits and move between the worlds. Moreover, as one woman pointed out, there is a difference between potential and reality; we may all be shamans in potential, she said, but following a shamanic path requires rigour. In common with several other participants, she feels the weight of the responsibilities of her vocation, a path that she believes she doesn't have a choice about following, as the spirits are in charge.

Another woman was more fluid in her self-labelling. Her public identity as a 'shaman' is variable. She told me she gauges each situation and decides whether it is appropriate (and safe) to name herself as 'shaman', depending on the likely attitudes or beliefs of those around her. Sometimes, she said, it is a powerful thing to be able to state 'I am a shaman' and 'if we start calling ourselves that, that's the power of what we will then become'. She is suggesting that in some cases, naming and fully taking on the power of the title will assist practitioners in stepping into their role as shamans; the title itself is empowering. In some circumstances, vocalising her internal identity builds upon and strengthens her external identity, which in turn reinforces her internal identity. A second woman told me that when she began her shamanic work she realised she had to initially 'fake it until you make it'; '*doing* may lead to *being*' (Rountree, 2010:53, emphasis in original), but equally *being* may lend authority to *doing* (as in the case of the first woman).

The above discussion leads into consideration of performance, the *doing* aspect of shamanism in relation to shamanic power, internal and external identities. Many scholars have viewed shamanism and shamanic healing as performative arts (Harvey, 2003a:13-15 summarises some of this literature; see also Laderman & Roseman, 1996), and the power of a shaman is undeniably heightened by her or his ability to draw in their audience through drama. Franchelle's performance at the *New Spirit Festival* illustrated this very clearly (described earlier in this chapter). In her theorising of neo-Shamanism and performance, Lindquist notes that the performative authority (and therefore the power) of the shaman stems from her or his ability to bring about 'a sense of Presence' or 'Emergence' (after Schieffelin, 1996, cited in Lindquist, 1997:110-111), which evokes the spirits in non-ordinary reality. The very presence of practitioners such as Franchelle creates an atmosphere of expanded, altered awareness that draws in her audience so that they too share the reality evoked by her. The shaman's internal identity and external performance must be in alignment to truly enable this state; complete and total participation during shamanic rituals is a given if the shaman is to be successful in her or his work.

The situation is somewhat different for beginners, as in the case of the participant mentioned above, who realised she had to 'fake it' initially. Lindquist (1997:114) argues that neo-Shamans are socialised through learning to internalise beliefs about the spirits, and that they move from initial notions of the spirits as aspects of their unconscious mind to a state in which spirits are plausible and believable entities. This may be the case for some neo-Shamanic explorers (and I can relate to this personally), but several neo-Shamanic participants who have had prior anomalous experiences do not necessarily undergo this internalisation process; spirits are already real entities for these people. For others, however, performing shamanic rituals in workshops or undertaking sweatlodge ceremonies may strengthen their internal identity as a 'shaman' over time.

Neo-Shamans and Community

Although their internal and external self-identity as 'shaman' may vary, and despite lack of general recognition in the wider community, neo-Shamans in New Zealand

serve many roles as they utilise their shamanic skills. I have met people who do not regard themselves as contemporary shamans but, at the same time, they are aware of traditional shamanic functions, and there is something of the role of shaman-priest, shaman-politician, shaman-magician and community broker or social mediator in what they do and how they do it. Michael and Elaine – identified as shamans by others – both work at a deeply intuitive level as environmentalists or agents for social change, in a similar manner to MacLellan’s description of ‘community healers’ and ‘patterners’ (2003:369, cited in Chapter 2). Others develop a reputation for their ability to clear land or houses of malign energies, or they serve as psychopomps. Shen passionately advocates the role of ‘eldership’ as a shamanic function, and requires his advanced students to undertake a community project that weaves their shamanic understandings into their work. He himself has worked to take shamanism into prisons in the United Kingdom, and is working towards the same in New Zealand, although it seems New Zealand authorities are less open to this. On the other hand, Elaine has found it possible to incorporate her shamanic sensibilities and understandings into her work with prisoners without naming it as ‘shamanic’; I enlarge on her work in Chapter 9. Others are visionary artists or storytellers who enter mythopoetic realms and carry their audiences with them – shaman as trickster, shape-shifter, and charismatic performer. These functions are congruent with the skills and roles that shamans traditionally serve, as identified by Halifax (1991:3-34) and Tedlock (2005:23).

The test for neo-Shamans in New Zealand and in other Western countries is to make their practice relevant to their everyday lives within their communities, where their work is validated, even as it challenges orthodox ways of knowing. Deborah, for example, works in the corporate world, as a human resource manager, mentor and careers counsellor, and she struggles to bring her shamanic practice out into the world ‘in the context of the way we live now’. However, on some occasions she has been able to perform shamanically at her workplace. She shared this example:

Recently, one of the companies that I was working for was failing. I suggested to the woman who runs the business I could do a ceremony for her to bring in the energy that was needed. One of her problems was that she wasn’t getting enough work and she had over-committed to expensive premises and a lot of staff; she had

been looking for a tenant for her premises for a year. I asked everyone who wanted to come who was working there, and I did a ceremony called huaca [pronounced 'waka']. A huaca is an opening in time and space, which brings in a sacred place. It is a sacred place, a power place in Peru [for Q'echua speakers] and in a huaca ceremony, you invite in, or you pull in the original energy of creation, the energy that was there when everything began, when the universe was created. You bring it in; you bring it down through the body into my mesa, my altar and then transfer it onto another altar. The Q'ero call it the ceremony of place, it's the main ceremony of place to bring energy into a place.

As we did this ceremony, the people who were there were forming their intention that whatever was to happen to the company was going to be what needed to happen. So there was no particular – you can't put an outcome on it. They were all doing that, especially the woman who owned the business. We did that and then – it's like a column of energy that comes down. We put it into a plant. We put offerings around the plant, and it had to be tended by the owner of the business for a month, a lunar month and then it goes. It just returns [to the universe]. That was the ceremony. It worked really quickly because the next day she got a tenant [laughs] which speeded up everything, so that she could make all the changes that she needed to do and the business was saved.⁷⁴

In this ceremony, Deborah is saying, her physical body became a conduit as she physically sat on her *mesa* (her altar) bringing 'Universal energy' through into her *mesa*,

⁷⁴ As with the Peruvian *curanderos* (Joralemon & Sharon, 1993; Sharon, 1978) or *curanderas* (Glass-Coffin, 1998), Deborah views her *mesa* as a representation or construction of the universe. However, it is kept closed even during public healings whereas the healers documented by Joralemon, Sharon and Glass-Coffin arrange their *mesa* artefacts, an eclectic array of pre-Columbian Andean and Catholic objects, in precise arrangements that reflect their cosmological beliefs. She told me that a further difference between her contemporary Western version of South American traditions and the Peruvian healers is that hers only:

contains stones or kuyas, gifted to us by the Mother Earth herself or by other teachers in human form. Once you have a complete Universe/Mesa, i.e. 13 kuyas in our work, you can add any other objects for healing and wholeness. We learn to work with the stone people first. I think it is because we Westerners are so remote from true reciprocity with the earth and are likely to go for the quick fix - the beautiful crystal or the representation of the Virgin Mary - rather than really tune in to the long, slow stories that the stone people give us - very, very, very slowly... (pers. comm.10 Aug 2009).

which was then transformed and transferred to a second altar, the plant. Shamans seemingly change or transform energy when they step into non-ordinary reality. Deborah was stating this when she said shamans dance on top of Einstein's relativity equation (in the 2nd epigraph heading this chapter); shamans work with, and transform light and energy.

The notion of 'energy' is one that requires me to walk that delicate line between 'insider' and 'outsider', naturopathic practitioner comfortable with 'energy-talk' and anthropologist analysing the ceremony as described to me by Deborah. I examine 'energy' in more detail in the following chapter when I discuss spirits as energy, and again in Chapter 7 in relation to shamanic healing. For the moment, I draw on Ann Appleton's theorising of the Melanau healing ritual she witnessed in the town of Mukah on the northwest coast of Sarawak. Appleton used Jungian and post-Jungian theory about cultural images and their shadow, concluding that the healer was 'a portal through which creative energy is channeled into the world [reuniting] form and substance' (2006:267). Similarly, Deborah's body served as a catalyst or lightning rod. In Jungian terms, her body could be conceptualised as representing, and focusing or concentrating the world body (2006:267). The power of the ceremony stemmed from her performance, her presence producing an altered state field of time and space that allowed the owner of the business and other staff members present (who were all highly motivated towards a positive outcome) to believe change was possible. Her external identity (*doing*) and internal identity (*being*) as a shaman were in alignment. Although Deborah's shamanic role is not recognised in her wider community, within her workplace she has now developed a niche specialist position.

Unlike Deborah's experience, where she was able to work shamanically with the permission of her work colleagues, other neo-Shamans can sometimes feel isolated or inhibited in their desire to help others in their communities. They may see the need for shamanic interventions but lack of recognition of their role constrains them. Ethical issues are at stake too, if neo-Shamans manipulate energy without the permission of people who could be affected by changes brought about shamanically. The issues are complex, particularly when working in subtle realms that are especially open to manipulation through egotistical needs or misguided intentions (however good these

may be). English neo-Shaman, Gordon MacLellan, has a different perspective, writing that with the 'driving need' for shamans to balance energies and mediate between people and the natural world around them, the shaman often works without their knowledge or awareness (2003:369). I am not suggesting his motivations are misguided or egotistically determined, but he does appear to be prioritising his perceived need for shamanic action above that of informed consent of others.

Internationally, neo-Shamans express a desire to work in their own local communities and to take shamanism into the world. The theme for the sixth annual conference organised by the *Society for Shamanic Practitioners* in the United States held in June 2010, was *Self in Service: The Practice of Shamanism without Borders* with the aim to encourage shamans to go into disaster areas spiritually, a spiritual version of the French organisation, *Doctors without Borders*. Tom Cowan, an American neo-Shaman and one of the conference organisers has spoken of the responsibilities neo-Shamans have to tend to suffering, bringing in a shamanic perspective to balance energies and to foster active relationships within the world around them, with due care given to the ethical concerns mentioned in the previous paragraph.⁷⁵

There is a second sense in which neo-Shamans engage in community activities: in common with many personal growth and healing workshops, 'instant communities' (Lindquist, 1997:56) are formed during shamanic workshops. Neotribal theory (Maffesoli, 1996) proposes that contemporary 'tribes' are fluid with temporary alliances formed by groups coming together for a common purpose, breaking apart, re-forming. The tribes are 'communities of practice' in which groups come together by choice to share interests and to learn:

[They] engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems...In a nutshell, Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for

⁷⁵ See <http://www.shamansociety.org/Christinas%20Interview%20with%20Tom.mp3> for an audio interview with Cowan (accessed 22 June 2010).

something they do and learn to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, circa 2007, cited in Smith, 2003/2009).

'Communities of practice' can develop deep bonds between individual group members, for example, between trampers in the outdoors pitting themselves against the elements, or competing in endurance sports activities. My experience is that in neo-Shamanic workshops, the creation of sacred space and calling in the spirits enhances the liminal experience of 'community', which is both a community of people, and of spirits; I enlarge on the creation of sacred space in Chapter 6. This space is outside normal time and reality, and strengthens real-time and place community bonds when the empathy created between individuals sharing non-ordinary experiences spills over into a sense of community in ordinary reality. Some trainee neo-Shamans continue to come together to learn and practice their skills after their initial workshop training, sometimes over several years, as is the case for on-going groups led by Shen.

The neo-Shamanic landscape of New Zealand mapped in this chapter is a nebulous world of unclear boundaries, and mobile identities and communities. Although neo-Shamans make up a very small proportion of the population of New Zealand, they form a distinctive thread that contributes to the emergence of numerous 21st century neo-Shamanic practices evolving in the Western world. My research suggests that neo-Shamanic identities in New Zealand are moulded by intersecting influences of the New Age and, to a lesser extent, neo-Paganism. In addition, Native American spirituality and numerous other global and local influences contribute to the development of their eclectic practices as neo-Shamans. While their inner and outer identities are variable, neo-Shamans in New Zealand are generally aware of the contradictions and ambiguities implicit in their identities and roles within a modern Western society, and work to find ways of making their practices relevant in their communities. In this respect, they are similar to neo-Shamans in other Western countries. Neo-Shamans are people who take the spirits seriously, and the following chapter examines neo-Shamanic cosmologies, and the ontological status neo-Shamans in New Zealand give to the spirits.

CHAPTER 5

TAKING THE SPIRITS SERIOUSLY

[M]ore widely there is a huge population of discarnates of varying degrees of development just beyond the veil, a vast ocean of influence lapping against the subliminal shores of our everyday lives, which is largely unnoticed by people but influence our actions. As long as the impact of the ocean is unacknowledged, humans are not totally in charge of their existence (John, research participant).

* * * *

Dawne: I've had that experience [of feeling the breezes] at times; one time on the cliff I remember really clearly. I was facing the sea and it was a still, still morning, which is unusual up there, for there to be no breeze at all. I asked for a sign of spirit. Immediately there was this gentlest little caressing breeze on my face. I turned to the west to face it and feel it, and there was a rainbow...

Dido: Those are the signs of the dakini.

Dawne: A dakini is...?

Dido: One of the deities. One of the types of female deities, dancing. The signs of the dakini's presence and the signs of the dakini's affirmation are breezes, sudden showers, rainbows, cloud formations (Transcript from a conversation about spirits with a Western Tibetan Buddhist meditation teacher, trained in the Tibetan Buddhist and Bon traditions).⁷⁶

* * * *

My doors are quite open...It's a fine balance, to be open to that kind of energy and not to open to destructive forces (Nina, research participant).

* * * *

⁷⁶ She described the traditions to me thus: 'Bon is the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. Some say it is more shamanistic. Tibetan Buddhism can also be seen as full of shamanic elements. Most people believe the Buddhism of Tibet comes from India and is not related to Bon. Others see the two as having grown out of each other and developed side by side' (see also Samuel, 1993:10-13).

In the movie, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*,⁷⁷ a crucial moment from the 1920s is re-enacted when the traditions of a group of Inuit people erode as they are exposed to the teachings of Christian missionaries. Tension builds during the film as one of the last great shamans, Avva, is pressured to abandon his shamanic practices and embrace Christianity. The film culminates in a dramatic and grief-stricken scene when Avva sends away his spirit helpers. Further to the east, across the Arctic waters, Greenlandic *angakkoqs* (shamans) once engaged with a malevolent supernatural world whose spirits required constant propitiation, perhaps reflecting the realities of survival within a harsh natural world (Jakobsen, 1999). As Hultkrantz (1996:13) rightly observes, the 'provenance of the spirits is an interesting problem', while Eliade (1972:5-6) notes that '[s]everal volumes would be needed for an adequate study of all the problems that arise in connection with the mere idea of "spirits" and of their possible relations with human beings'. However, Eliade then suggests that it is not necessary for scholars to enter this discourse in order to study shamanism: 'we need only define the shaman's relation to his helping spirits', he states. While it may not be possible to formulate a definitive statement about spirits because of wide-ranging cross-cultural and intra-cultural beliefs and ideas about them, it seems important that I consider their ontological status in relation to my neo-Shamanic research participants, since spirits are central to their shamanic work. If neo-Shamans are people who have a special relationship with spirits, then discussion about the essence of spirits and the nature of that relationship is central to the study of shamanism, and indeed to my research.

Neo-Shamans are people who demonstrably take the spirits seriously. My corresponding need to take the spirits seriously is two-fold: firstly, there is the methodological requirement to take seriously the stories my (human and other-than-human) participants have entrusted with me. The experiential process of immersing myself in neo-Shamanic worlds required me to balance my internal cynic and sceptic with my desire to embody and understand spiritual experiences. Learning to take my own experiences seriously without minimising them, or rushing to rationalise and explain them away was challenging for me, as I described in Chapter 3. Along with

⁷⁷ Filmed in 2006 at Igloodik, Northern Canada, by directors Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohen from the 75% Inuit-owned independent film-making company, Isuma Productions. See www.isuma.ca (accessed 20 July 2007).

many neo-Shamans, I struggle to verbalise and make concrete something that by its very nature is ineffable, and not readily understood by non-participating outsiders. How do I find the language to express altered state experiences and retain my academic credibility? Mystics through the ages have used creative art forms, song and dance, storytelling and poetry, all avenues for expressing the inexpressible. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to balance stories from my own experiences with those of my participants, grounding them in, and comparing them with theoretical discussions that flow from stories of other anthropologists' experiences in the field (see, for example, Young & Goulet, 1998; Goulet & Miller, 2007).

Secondly, I walk a tightrope of finely balancing my dual positions as a critical, experiential researcher with my role as a healer who has professional and personal agendas of exploring spirituality and healing. Along with other anthropologists (see, for example, Blain [2002, 2004], Wallis [2004], and Turner [1998, 2003, 2005, 2006]), I walk between the worlds, translating from the other side as best I can. Participating in the 'discourse of "taking the spirits seriously"' (Blain, 2002:74) leaves me feeling exposed and vulnerable. Taking the spirits seriously challenges mainstream Western orthodoxies about 'reality'. Academic taboos around discussion about spirits have led to academic 'shamanophobia' (Dowson, 1996, cited in Blain, 2000:7), 'a nasty hegemony' (Turner, 2006:46) that refuses to take seriously peoples' reports of their experiences. The only place for spirits to go to in this environment, is for them to become an extension of one's personality (Blain, 2000:7), something one either 'believes' in or not (2000:9, 2002:156-157). This latter perspective exists in spite of the fact that only a small portion of the human population in very recent times has *not* believed in spirits, as one participant reminded me. Furthermore, a study such as this is not merely about 'belief'. Spirits, whatever ontological status given to them, are *experienced* as a practical reality by neo-Shamans.

In this chapter, I examine the complexities of spirits, and the meanings contemporary shamans in New Zealand give to taking the spirits seriously, beginning firstly with an outline of neo-Shamanic cosmologies. Next, I address the ontological status of spirits, and propose a schema of four possible spirit states: spirits as separate and independent entities that manifest in embodied or disembodied forms, spirits as

energy, spirits as mental constructs, and spirits as transpersonal imaginal beings that arise from the mind but do not exist solely in the mind. This fourth category brings together aspects of each of the previous three categories. As will become evident, the boundaries between these possible spirit explanations are fluid, perhaps reflecting the fluidity of spirits themselves. In addition, woven amongst these four categories is the idea of an over-arching 'Great Spirit' from which everything is derived, perhaps a kind of fifth category of spirit. Spirits are a practical reality for my neo-Shamanic participants; they do not generally engage with complex theological or philosophical debates about the nature of spirits. Their concerns are with how spirits manifest in non-ordinary reality and produce positive results in ordinary reality. Finally, I conclude by comparing the benign spirits some neo-Shamans evoke with the less-than-benign spirit encounters of other neo-Shamans, which are not so very different from those described by many indigenous people.

Neo-Shamanic Cosmologies

Discussion about neo-Shamanic cosmologies includes such considerations as animism, relationships with embodied and disembodied spirits and the natural world, and cosmic geographies. These themes are intrinsic to the practices of neo-Shamans and recur throughout the thesis. Neo-Shamans' cosmologies are flexible and vary widely, shaped by a number of influences, as I showed in the previous chapter. Further influences include Christianity, New Age philosophies, Hinduism and Buddhism, all of which are apparent at different times and in variable contexts.

The domination of Christianity worldwide has impinged on numerous shamanic cosmologies seen, for example, in the syncretic blending of Catholicism and shamanic practices in Central and South America (see Halifax's [1991:195] comments regarding the impact of two hundred years of Catholicism on the Mazatec cosmos, or Joralemon & Sharon's [1993] account of *curanderos* in Peru). Inevitably, given their immersion within Western cultures, Christian beliefs similarly permeate neo-Shamanic cosmologies. Some pray to a Higher Power or to guardian spirits as Christians might petition God, a saint or an angel. Neo-Shamans, however, tend to slide between dualistic thinking derived from Christianity, apparent in ideas about good and evil,

light and dark, and unitary concepts of Love, Oneness and the Great Mind that are filtered through New Age philosophies originating from Hindu or Buddhist teachings.

One further difference between Christians and neo-Shamans is that the latter are animists; for them, everything in the cosmos is inspirited and connected. It could be said that shamanism is 'applied animism' (Drury, 1989:5); animistic beliefs are embedded in the shamanic practices of shamans, a practical reality rather than simply (or merely) a belief system involving spirits. 'Animism' is used here in two senses: firstly, in an older, social evolutionary and Tylolean sense in which spirits are separate entities. Secondly, a number of academics are interpreting animism in new ways and developing theories that support differing indigenous worldviews (Harvey, 2005:xxiii,3).⁷⁸ Ideas about 'old' and 'new' animisms are not intended as a progression; old and new animistic beliefs may co-exist (Harvey, 2009:408). Both are apparent amongst neo-Shamanic practices in New Zealand, in their spirit discourses and in their desire to merge with nature. The rest of this chapter outlines neo-Shamanic perspectives on, and their relationships with their spirit helpers, as examples of old animism; I enlarge on some of the ways in which new forms of animism are evident in the following chapter, when I discuss neo-Shamanic practices and neo-Shamans' relationships with, and desire to blend with the natural world.

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand trained in core shamanism learn to enter altered states of consciousness and journey to the upper, middle or lower worlds to meet with spirit helpers for information and healing. Embodied and disembodied spirits appear in numerous guises, and include animals, plants, nature spirits, devas and elementals

⁷⁸ Three examples of new animism proposed by anthropologists follow: firstly, perspectivism is a theme in Viveiros de Castro's theorising about Amazonian shamans; the difference between humans, animals and spirits is a matter of perspective (1998, cited in Harvey, 2005:151). Secondly, drawing on her ethnographic work with the Nayaka hunter-gatherer people in South India, and expanding on Irving Hallowell's (2002) notion of personhood, Nurit Bird-David has developed a theory of animism as a 'relational (not a failed) epistemology' (2002:77), one in which humans interact with 'other-than-human persons' (Hallowell, 2002; Harvey & Wallis, 2007:25). Finally, Willerslev (2007:8-27) has proposed that for the Yukaghirs of Siberia, animism is not a coherent doctrine but a mimetic process in which hunters imitate the animal they are about to kill: '[b]y means of mimicry, the Yukaghir hunter assumes the viewpoint, senses, and sensibilities of his prey while still remaining aware of himself as a human hunter with the intention of killing it' (2007:26). Mimesis, Willerslev argues, is necessary for animistic relations between the hunters and the animals they hunt (2007:191).

(relating to earth, air, fire or water), fairies and other little people, natural landforms, weather spirits, land spirits and guardians, ancestors, dead people, guardian spirits, warrior spirits, deities, spirit guides or teachers, angels and galactic beings. Amongst neo-Shamans trained in core shamanism, power animals or guardian spirits are the single most important ally, thought to provide spiritual power and protection. Generally, they learn to journey to the lower world to meet power animals, the middle world to connect with the non-ordinary aspect of the mundane world, and the upper world to gain knowledge and meet teachers and guides (usually in human form, ancestors or archetypal forms such as Wise Woman or Wise Man). This cosmology is similar to that taught to other Western core shamanists (see, for example, Horwitz, 2000:4; also Lindquist, 1997:63).

Ideally, over time and with experience, novice practitioners become familiar with the geography of the spirit world, which is complex, 'a great cosmic jigsaw puzzle' according to Harner (1990:45). They begin to map and integrate even the most unusual experiences into their own personal cosmology. This process is spirit-directed: Elisabeth, for example, told me 'I simply open my arms wide to follow spirit'. For some time, she worked with, and taught, a complex cosmology learnt from Tom Brown Jr (trained by an Apache man) until her main spirit guide, Grandfather White Eagle, finally told her to stop relying on her notes and to access her teachings directly from spirit. As a result, Elisabeth's teaching has changed over the years and she has 'taken some flak for doing this' from those neo-Shamans who have adhered more closely to 'traditional' (neo-)Shamanic principles. I enlarge on Elisabeth's 'new' form of shamanism in Chapter 9.

Other neo-Shamans have been influenced by South American traditions and work with a variation of a three-tiered cosmology based on the chakra energy centres in the body that correspond to four cardinal directions and three worlds, each with related archetypal energies.⁷⁹ The cosmos is imprinted within the human body. For one

⁷⁹ The correlations are as follows: base chakra (south, serpent), second chakra (west, jaguar), third chakra (north, hummingbird or dragon), fourth chakra (east, eagle), fifth chakra (Huasca, Lord of the Lower World), sixth chakra (Quetzcoatl, Lord of the Middle World), seventh chakra (Pachakuti Inca, Lord of the Upper World, home of ancestors). There are further divisions amongst the upper and lower worlds.

woman trained in this tradition, journeying to the underworld gives her the sense of travelling to a tangible and very physical world. She can ‘touch the walls...smell and taste...’ while knowing, at the same time, that she is ‘travelling to a different level of consciousness’ and interpreting ‘energy information’ in ways that make sense to her and the person she is journeying on behalf of. Her altered state journeys therefore occur on multiple levels.

What is a ‘Spirit’?

Underlying the notion of taking the spirits seriously is the question, ‘What is a “spirit”?’ ‘Spirit’ is a term used by ‘sceptical outsiders’, and mystifies the discourse, Harvey writes (2003a:9). He argues that ‘spirit’ is an expression loaded with associations and implications that do not do justice to indigenous people who already have their own nomenclature for non-ordinary beings. This may be true within academic discourses about indigenous shamanic practices: as Harvey suggests, ‘[e]ven when shamans talk to beings unnoticed by scientists, they do not (necessarily) consider them to be ontologically different from, or transcendent above, more mundane persons’ (2003a:11). When outsiders (sceptical or otherwise) use the word ‘spirit’ as a general descriptor for many different categories of beings, they potentially minimise or confuse layered nuances embedded within someone else’s cultural context. However, this argument may not automatically be true for contemporary Western shamanic practitioners who are familiar with the word ‘spirit’. Vague or obscure its meanings may be, but nonetheless it is the word English-speaking neo-Shamans universally choose to employ, perhaps because of residual Christian associations;⁸⁰ it is not an expression imposed upon them by outsiders. Additionally, neo-Shamans frequently speak of ‘energy’ as an alternative word for ‘spirit’. Their universe is composed of vibrating, inter-connected energies and forces, which manifest in physical or non-physical spirit forms that they are able to sense. In this thesis, I have chosen to use the word ‘spirit’ to refer to those beings and subtle energies encountered by my research participants, as a reflection of their languaging.

⁸⁰ The New Testament story of Jesus casting out ‘unclean’ spirits from a man is not unlike a shamanic exorcism (see Luke 8:26-39).

I became curious about the concept of 'spirit' when I heard a number of neo-Shamans use the word in different contexts. Sometimes they seemed to be referring to 'Spirit' (singular, with a capital 'S') as in Great Spirit, an unquestioned, taken-for-granted and over-arching mysterious energy or force that permeates and connects all things both seen and unseen, and is the ultimate source of everything. Several other terms are also used inter-changeably: Creator, Oneness, Source or, less frequently, God/Goddess, all of which reflect the eclectic influences neo-Shamans draw from, including Christianity, neo-Paganism, Buddhism, Native American traditions, or New Age philosophies. On other occasions though, they were talking about their spirit helpers or guides (plural). They appear to use the word 'spirit' indiscriminately as a blanket descriptor that could be referring to either category: they might say 'spirit said', or 'I asked spirit' and so on and whether they meant Spirit in a monotheistic sense, or their spirit helpers is context-dependent. Spirits are certainly slippery beings, and neo-Shamans constantly reflect this in their variable and seemingly imprecise terminology.

Westerners immersed within an orthodox, rational and positivist scientific worldview that privileges the intellect could well struggle with the concept of 'spirit' (as indeed they might with the concept of 'God'). They may be uncomfortable with ambiguity and challenged by the 'radical mystery' of not-knowingness (Walsh, 2001:259; Walsh, 2007:143-149). Yet others, perhaps the shamans and mystics from all spiritual traditions (including some Christians), are inclined to welcome and embrace this mystery. My research participant, Jack, for example, wrote to me:

I believe that of the spirit world. It's mysterious, and the best we can do is marvel at its existence and ask the spirits to be benign. Again, you need to know that in me you are dealing with someone who likes mystery and considers that one of science's greatest foolishnesses is the delusion that greater knowledge will dispel mystery (pers. comm. 21 Feb 2009).

Jack is a neo-Shaman who is comfortable with mystery and the unknown, and considers that there are limitations to the types of knowledge that the Western scientific paradigm can address. In Chapter 2, I raised the possibility of a sacred science

and Harner's 'science of spirits'. Along with Wallis (2003:70), I argue that neo-Shamans are pushing the limits of orthodox science as they 'pay extra' to shamanism.⁸¹ I return to Jack's comment about benign spirits in the final section of this chapter, but firstly I identify and discuss some possible ontological categories of spirits.

Spirits as Separate Entities

Some people – shamans and adepts from many different traditions – are apparently able to access information and wisdom that they experience as coming from entities outside of themselves. Others may have similar experiences spontaneously, perhaps when out in nature or within the context of a religious ritual (Walsh, 2001, 2007). Several research participants had profound childhood experiences in nature, seeing fairies and nature spirits, and they instinctively knew not to mention their experiences, or were cautioned by adults not to tell anyone. It is not uncommon for sensitive children to be receptive to seeing and hearing spirits in nature. Terri, who grew up in rural New Zealand in the 1950s, told me she saw and heard nature spirits, 'the spirit of the river speaking, spirit of the water, stones' and, in a nearby cemetery she could hear the voices of people who had died: 'I knew that wasn't right, it was like they had got trapped.' Terri's curiosity was awakened from an early age when she spent time alone in 'wild silence' in nature observing, listening, and absorbing.

Spirits may be embodied or disembodied. Gloria Orenstein's Sami shaman teacher taught her that the real animals were as important as her disembodied spirit helpers were, and her teacher made no distinction: 'all was real, all was spirit, and all was sacred, simultaneously' (1994:178). David Abram (1995,1996,1999), anthropologist and magician, points out that for thousands of years, humans have lived in intimate connection with nature; their close relationships and communities extended beyond other humans to include animals, plants and natural objects such as mountains, rivers, or clouds, objects that have only relatively recently been considered inanimate by Westerners. Through constantly attending to the nurturing and healing of their close

⁸¹ I am not suggesting here that shamans are the only group of people who are comfortable with the mystery of the unknown; they share this trait with mystics from all religious traditions. All mystics push the limits of orthodox science but, as my research is about neo-Shamanism, I am particularly interested in the ways in which neo-Shamans do this.

relationships with the spirits of the local landscape, the healers Abram met were then able to heal within their human community (Abram, 1999:21). Jack is familiar with the writing of Abram; he told me:

I share David Abram's view that a lot of what indigenous people identify as spirits are not disembodied at all. They are actually the life energy in plants and animals...I think a lot of Western talk about spirits over-emphasises the disembodied, because we have that heavily from our Christian background where the spirits are ghost-like forms that have shadowy or spectral appearances. Many spirit-forms are just as manifest as we are but, in addition, I believe there are disembodied or only occasionally embodied forms.

Jack's understandings of embodied and disembodied spirits are derived from his personal experiences and his wide reading of academic and popular books about shamanism.

When Jack and his wife moved onto their bush-clad land, they resolved to communicate and work in harmony with both embodied and disembodied nature spirits on the property. He told me they limit the possum population on the land by communicating with the (embodied) spirits of the possums, establishing a contract with them in non-ordinary states of consciousness. The agreement is that Jack and his wife won't trap or poison them but, in return, the possums agree to control their numbers so that the bush can regenerate and thrive.⁸² Department of Conservation workers have congratulated them on their possum management programme, Jack told me. He and his wife have been able to develop a relationship with other-than-human persons (the possums in this case) on their land, in ways that support and enhance the environment for all.

In addition to being embodied spirits, some animals also have shamanic powers, Jack believes. He told me a story about Sam, a 'shaman cat' he and his wife once had,

⁸² Possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) were introduced into New Zealand from Australia in 1837. They are now well established throughout the entire country and have been designated by the Department of Conservation as a pest causing major destruction of native bush. See <http://www.teara.govt.nz/TheBush/Conservation/IntroducedAnimalPests/2/en> (accessed 4 March, 2009).

who can apparently shape-shift and appear in embodied or disembodied forms. Once, when Jack was attending a shamanic workshop several hundred miles away from his home, he suddenly felt Sam jump on his back:

[My wife] felt that his spirit wasn't there, even though he was walking around in physical form. She was home with him but he didn't seem to be present, and he appeared in my workshop. [During] one exercise, we were working in the dark, and suddenly I felt Sam the cat jump on my back. Afterwards, I had claw marks on my back, quite fresh slightly bloody claw marks through my shirt. Sam was definitely around the workshop all that week.

This event occurred when Jack was living in the United States. Sam has since died but he 'still has the ability to manifest' to Jack and his wife, and they have seen him walking on their land in New Zealand on occasions. The ability of Sam to reveal himself in physical form is not unlike the Christian notion of angels who, although disembodied can at certain times appear in physical form to humans. It also reflects the experiences of the Nabesna people of Eastern Alaska, who regularly attribute shamanic powers to animals (Guédon, 1994:52; also Harvey, 2005:100-102).

Animate and Inanimate Objects

In some cases, it is more than the (obviously) living natural world that is inspirited and therefore animate. I am making here a distinction between 'animate' and 'inanimate' objects as perceived within the cosmologies and practices of neo-Shamans in New Zealand. One neo-Shaman told me that unless an object is empowered by spirit, it is empty and therefore powerless. For her, the differentiation between animate and inanimate objects depends on whether she senses them to be inspirited or not. Is an object inherently empowered, or is it the neo-Shaman's intent that empowers it? Viveiros de Castro's Amazonian research suggests the latter: his explanation for the mechanism by which inanimate objects become animated postulates that '[a]rtefacts have this interestingly ambiguous ontology: they are objects that necessarily point to a subject; as congealed actions, they are material embodiments of non-material

intentionality' (1999b, cited in Harvey, 2005:110). This implies that, if neo-Shamans work with sacred objects that are spirit-empowered, it is necessary for them to bring their intent to the act of empowerment; it is through their 'agency and intentionality' that objects become (sacred and inspirited) subjects (Harvey, 2005:110).

During a sacred art workshop offered by two neo-Shamanic practitioners (not attended by me), workshop participants went through a sequence of creating and transforming mundane inanimate objects into the sacred and animate. The facilitators invited participants to explore the process of making a power object, to discover the interfaces between the dream world and the physical world through the creation of a power object by journeying or visualising in non-ordinary reality within sacred space. Participants were posed the question, 'What happens when an object is imbued with energy?' (pers. comm. 1 Apr 2010). Each participant's experiential discovery and answer to the question would be different, the power objects created apparently animated by the intention and agency of their creator.

Hallowell grappled with an ethno-linguistic issue as he endeavoured to understand Ojibwe categories of animate and inanimate objects: in an Ojibwe worldview, only some objects from nature (trees, thunder, stones) along with only some material or manufactured objects (kettle, pipe) are classed as animate. However, grammatical classification of, for example, a rock as an animate object need not necessarily mean that all rocks are alive; rather, it denotes a potential for animation under certain (special) circumstances (2002:22-26). Some neo-Shamanic practices suggest they have a similar worldview to this, one that challenges Western divisions between object and subject, raising questions about evolution and consciousness (Harvey, 2005:189). Can a rock be conscious, for example? A recent report from a team of geologists suggests this could be a possibility when they speculated that minerals can evolve, and that rocks are a dynamic 'species' that are transformed over time in relationship with other living things.⁸³ Certainly, for neo-Shamans, some rocks are conscious and inspirited.

During several shamanic workshops, I participated in rock divination exercises, working with a rock spirit to receive an answer to a specific question. I theorise

⁸³ See <http://www.canada.com/vancouver/sun/story.html?id=839b3ae1-264a-4e61-a6f5-d464d5f0f923> (accessed 6 January 2009).

divination in the following chapter; for now, my discussion is concerned with animate or inanimate categories of rocks. Choosing my rock was the first step in the exercise: which was the right rock to answer my specific question, for this time and place? To find the rock that ‘spoke’ to me, I found I needed to go inside myself and become very still, holding the question that I wanted answering, opening and sincerely trusting that I would be guided to the appropriate rock, one that was inspirited and empowered.⁸⁴ Did my agency and intention cause me to ascribe power to the rock I chose? I can’t say with certainty but, in each case, I was attracted to a specific rock and the answers that emerged were relevant to the question posed. Could it be that the power of that particular rock became activated so that it became a tool for answering my question, whereas the others nearby simply remained pregnant with potential powers of animation that might be available for someone else with a different question, or in different circumstances? This seems to be the case, at least if I were to adopt an Ojibwe worldview.

Neo-Shamans participating in exercises such as this are stepping beyond orthodox Western perspectives, and the level to which each individual workshop attendee is able to enter into the exercise is likely to be variable. The following stories provide further examples of blurred boundaries between animate and inanimate objects that emerged from my fieldwork:

- One man, trained as a scientist and now working as a student counsellor, became interested in shamanism and other spiritual explorations after an unusual experience in a forest of Californian Redwoods (in New Zealand) one evening with a friend who was introducing him to the practice of ‘opening chakras’ that induced an altered state of consciousness. After completing the exercise, he saw trees ‘of a purplish/mercuric hue, shimmering with no solid outline’, a sight his rational, scientifically trained mind had difficulty comprehending. Amongst his readings and private study, Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of a ‘noosphere’ resonated with him, the notion that ‘the universe is composed of mind, thoughts, power, spirituality connecting people,

⁸⁴ I was perhaps unwittingly entering an enstatic state of consciousness.

animals, plants, inanimates'.⁸⁵ Malcolm's experience is typical of the curiosity that drives many neo-Shamans to explore spiritual matters and search for explanations after they have experienced anomalous events such as this. He told me that he had never previously thought of talking to stones, but somehow he wasn't surprised by the rock divination exercise he participated in during a shamanic training.

- A white South African woman now living and practising in New Zealand, is an initiated traditional Zulu healer, a *sangoma*. While still living in South Africa, she underwent training, learning to call in her ancestors through trance drumming and dancing, and to divine by throwing bones. During her first visit to meet the Zulu woman who later became her teacher, she told me that when the bones were thrown for her reading, she became goose-bumpy and transfixed as the bones appeared to open and close their lips and she could 'hear' their messages for her. She was so mesmerised by the bones directly communicating with her that she couldn't concentrate on what the *sangoma* was telling her.

In this ontological model, spirits are experienced as separate entities that neo-Shamans see, hear, or sense kinesthetically. The spirits may be disembodied or embodied and appear in physical form. In altered states of consciousness, divisions between animate or inanimate objects collapse and objects sometimes become inspirited subjects. Neo-Shamans, as with indigenous shamans, are animists whose meetings with other-than-human persons are fundamental to their practice.

Spirits as Energy

On a personal level, the notion of spirits as subtle energy forms is the spirit explanation most accessible to me, given my clinical experience as a complementary and alternative therapist. I regularly sense and kinesthetically feel energy (as tingling, or hot and cold

⁸⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), French Jesuit priest, philosopher, 'scientist and seer' (Raven, 1962) wrote widely about his theories of evolutionism and religion. I have no space here to enlarge on his arguments, and this is the participant's personal interpretation and understandings gleaned from his readings of Teilhard de Chardin's complex writing.

sensations) when working with my clients, particularly when using my hands in some form of bodywork. However, to take the extra step of conceptualising energy as ‘spirit stuff’ required me to suspend my rational mind. It was as if I physically needed to exercise my brain, to train it and open new neural pathways, developing other ways of accessing information, moving between right and left-brain perhaps, between rational knowledge and intuitive knowledge obtained through stretching and expanding my extra-sensory perceptions. This process required me to go deeply within myself.

The anthropologist, Edith Turner, has written widely about her anomalous fieldwork experiences with spirit, following her initial epiphany in 1985, when she saw a spirit form leaving a sick woman’s body during a Ndembu healing ritual in Zambia (1998, 2003). She subsequently worked with Inupiat Eskimos in Alaska and attended a Harner core shamanic workshop, experiencing many non-ordinary events, her sensory perceptions seemingly opened to receive them.⁸⁶ Because of her encounters, Turner came to understand that there is ‘a thing variously called spirit-energy [that] is everywhere and is commonly accepted at the heart of ritual of all different societies’ (2006:33). Moreover, she says, ‘[i]t is important at last to find out what this *psi*, this *chi*, this *wakan*, this shamanic gift is’ (2006:55, emphasis in original).

It is interesting, however, that Turner described what she actually saw in the Zambian ritual as ‘a large gray blob of something like plasma emerge from the sick woman’s back’ (Turner, 2003:146). She then labelled this as ‘spirit stuff’. Western clairvoyant healers who see the human energy field (aura) frequently describe similar things but are more likely to articulate them as ‘energy’ rather than anthropomorphising or zoomorphising the phenomena.⁸⁷ Almost all complementary

⁸⁶ Sociologist James McClenon (2002:62) interprets Turner’s experiences by writing that she had become more ‘hypnotizable’ as a result of ‘thin cognitive boundaries’ which allowed her to move more readily into other states of consciousness. Turner herself appears to validate this when she wrote ‘[We] are endowed with a permeable psyche. It may dawn on one that this tendency toward religion is inborn, an endowment, a biological predisposition, a propensity, existing for just such a purpose, the communication with spirits (who also *are nature*)’ (Turner, 2006:55, emphasis in original). Turner’s ‘thin cognitive boundaries’ or ‘permeable psyche’ allowed her to enter an altered state of consciousness during the healing ritual, and it was while she was in this state of non-ordinary reality that she saw the ‘gray blob’ emerge from the woman’s back. The question then becomes one about the ontological status of the ‘gray blob’.

⁸⁷ Scientist, healer and clairvoyant, Barbara Brennan’s (1988) book includes coloured illustrations of the human energy field, as seen by her, including some showing ‘gray blobs’

and alternative therapies are based on a premise of vitalism and subtle body energies (Fuller, 2005; Hufford, 2003), although healers working in those modalities are not necessarily animists who would extend these concepts to their environment; I return to the notion of subtle energies for healing in Chapter 7.

Over the course of my fieldwork, a number of people described seeing lights and other energy forms, variously interpreted as energy or spirits. During workshops, I frequently heard phrases such as 'working with (the) spirit/s', 'connecting with/to spirit', 'calling in spirit', 'holding the energy'. The phrases were used inter-changeably and their meaning depended on the situation and how the person interpreted it. Some neo-Shamans make a distinction between free energy and energy that has coalesced into a spirit form, while for others there is no difference. In one workshop I attended, for example, in a led opening meditation, the facilitator invited participants to ask their spirit healers and guides to come in, and to feel the energy connecting and surrounding the whole group. She was seemingly differentiating between spiritual energy coalesced and manifesting in (dis)embodied spirit forms, and non-specific energy in the room. One neo-Shamanic workshop facilitator told me that spirits are energy with intelligence or 'thought forms'. He clairvoyantly sees spirits as energy forms that can interact with humans, but he also sees energy per se that is not in a spirit form, as in someone's body that may be depleted of energy or have excess energy. This is different from a spirit, he says. Another person told me something similar: she works with energy, and 'light beings' or spirits, and says that they are the same thing but their density varies.

One woman was punished when she was three years old for telling her mother about the 'colour bursts' or 'fairies' she saw at night-time: 'I remember I got my backside walloped and I never saw them again until I was about 45 or 46 [years old].' When she began to see them again, someone else identified them to her as 'energy balls'. I can only wonder if the phenomena she experienced resembles that described by Barbara Tedlock (2005:5) when she related stories told to her by her Ojibwe grandmother, 'stories about witches called "bear-walkers" who travelled about at night

similar to that described by Turner, present in a range of physical, mental or emotional ailments.

inside glowing balls of light'. For this woman, spirits are energy, but she thinks that perhaps some people choose (or need) to personify the energy into spirit helpers or power animals: 'That's fine if that's what they want to do', she told me, 'but I don't. It's all energy.' There is no distinction between energy and spirit stuff, at least in terms of her healing work.

These neo-Shamanic descriptions and interpretations of their experiences of energy seem analogous to those observed by other anthropologists. Narby and Huxley (2001:195), in their introduction to a chapter by Harner about the magic darts (*tsentsak*) of the Jivaro (Shuar) shamans, liken the darts to the Victorian notion of ectoplasm, a 'viscous substance that ...exuded from the bodies of mediums in trance and which formed the material for the manifestation of spirits'. This is also very like Turner's description of what she saw; energy, it seems, can coalesce into spirit-forms, be they disembodied or embodied.

Spirits as a Mental Construct

The discussion thus far has considered spirits as autonomous entities with a separate (embodied or disembodied) and objective existence outside of humans, and as a form of energy connected to a larger universal spiritual force that in some situations coalesces into spirits who may or may not be embodied and visible under special conditions. Another perspective suggests that spirits are a mental construct, a projection arising from the unconscious mind. The constructed spirit becomes a metaphor embodying qualities significant to the person envisaging their existence. A philosophical materialist with this standpoint will therefore have a very different worldview from an animist, and will perceive spirits and other apparently transcendent phenomena as solely mental constructions (Walsh, 2001:257). Some Scandinavian neo-Shamans whom Lindquist (1997:77-78, 81) worked with interpreted the spirit images they encountered during shamanic journeys as part of their unconscious mind and imagination but for others (the 'shamanically inclined'), non-ordinary reality and the spirits exist separately and independently. For most, the question was irrelevant: the information received was important, not the ontological

status of its source. Whatever their conceptual framework, their non-ordinary experiences were still meaningful to the individual practitioner. Shamans tend to be practical realists rather than theorists of spirit ontologies, as I show in the next section of this chapter.

However, for one woman (born in Europe and but now living in New Zealand), who undertook extensive shamanic training some years ago when she lived in England, the distinction is important. She passionately told me that shamans would be 'insulted' if I suggested their worlds were 'just' a mental construct because 'the spirit entities are their friends'. As I write these words, my mind returns to the scene in the Inuit film where Avva sent away his spirit helpers and friends (described in the first paragraph of this chapter). For this woman and Avva, the spirits are very real and not just something 'made-up' (and possibly implying they have diminished status).

'The "metaphor" model...is rarely found in the real world where events of the psyche are regarded as common place', writes Turner (1998:93).⁸⁸ The anthropological literature is replete with stories where occult and psychic events are the norm, sometimes with grim results (see, for example, Taussig, 1987; also Turner's annotated chronological bibliography, 2006). Anthropologist Paul Stoller, to give just one example, experienced the powerful effects of sorcery firsthand when he undertook training over an eight-year period as a sorcerer amongst the Songhay people of Niger. As an apprentice, he indirectly caused temporary facial paralysis of the sister of his intended victim, and was himself the recipient of a sorcery attack that caused temporary paralysis of one of his legs; later he abandoned his apprenticeship as the Songhay world of sorcery became too much for him (Stoller & Olkes, 1987:ix).

Nonetheless, psychic experiences are not unusual in Western cultures, as David Hufford (1982) illustrates in his case studies of night-time supernatural attacks amongst Newfoundlanders, where legends of the Old Hag are common. Later, he began to hear similar stories throughout the United States, in areas where there were no cultural precedents in the form of legends, which might predispose people to

⁸⁸ Turner's descriptor of the 'real' world is perhaps unfortunate, as it appears to discount all Western beliefs; however, her main point that anomalous events are not generally regarded as 'real' in the Western world remains valid.

unusual events.⁸⁹ The difference between many other cultures and Western ones is that Westerners who encounter anomalous events frequently learn at their personal cost not to mention their experiences. This cultural conspiracy of silence around supernatural occurrences has implications for neo-Shamans: practising their shamanic skills in a modern Western world that by-and-large no longer subscribes to a spirit-filled universe can be hazardous. They may be disbelieved, labelled as New Age weirdoes, sidelined from the mainstream rationalist materialistic culture, accused of appropriating from indigenous peoples' cultures, or diagnosed as schizophrenic and mentally unstable.⁹⁰ There are often no safe spaces within everyday Western society for people who are sensitive to subtle energies or spirits to speak about their unusual experiences, their out-of-body occurrences, near-death events, or vivid lucid dreams. The notion of spirits is sidelined and becomes something one either 'believes' in or not. However, for some neo-Shamans, perhaps those with 'thin cognitive boundaries' (McClenon, 2002:62) or the 'shamanically inclined' (Lindquist, 1997:81), the idea of spirits as a mental construct is an anathema; they clairvoyantly experience spirits as separate entities.

Spirits as Transpersonal Imaginal Beings

The fourth approach to spirits that I consider brings together elements from each of the other perspectives: spirits are separate entities, they are energy and, while they arise from our mind, they do not exist solely in our mind. For clinical psychologist Richard Noll (2001:248-250), spirits are personified 'transpersonal forces', imaginal beings 'existing in a realm of experience in which they inhabit a reality of their own...which is co-existent with the mundane experiential world of our ordinary state of waking consciousness'. Spirits exist in a reality that co-exists with the ordinary reality of

⁸⁹ See also McClenon (2002:11), who has collected over 1,500 stories of anomalous events from his (North American) anthropology students since 1988 when he began asking them to interview people about their unusual experiences.

⁹⁰ Diagnoses of mental illness may also be becoming more prevalent in some indigenous cultures. Appleton, who studied traditional healers in Sarawak in the early part of this century, told me she suspects that, as traditional societies move towards a Western biomedical model of healthcare, younger people who begin to show signs of 'beginning the journey' with shamanism may be diagnosed with schizophrenia and put on medication (pers.comm. 1 Aug 2009).

humans and, through cultivating visionary techniques and by entering altered states of consciousness, shamans learn to connect with and engage with these beings. They are autonomous entities with their own agendas that move in and through humans, but are not entirely moved by humans (Noll, 1987:48). In this view, spirits are thus self-directed beings, seen by shamans such as the Australian Aboriginal 'clever men' who have cultivated the 'strong eye' (Elkin, cited in Noll, 1987:50). Jung, considered a shaman by some neo-Shamans and academics,⁹¹ wrote:

Philemon and the other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life (1963:207).

I quote Jack again, who wrote to me:

We should also pay attention to one lesson from quantum physics: The process of observation affects what is observed. So spirits do not exist independent of our consciousness of them. Nor do we exist independent of their consciousness of us. The world, in part at least, is the product of our thoughts about it – of what we think it is. And vice versa (pers. comm. 21 Feb 2009).

In addition to his understandings gleaned from quantum physics, Jack's cosmology is shaped by his periods of living in India and his study of Hindu philosophy and mystical teachings, along with his learnings from Native American teachers and from time spent amongst Australian Aboriginal people. Everything he has learned from these sources suggests to him that mind or consciousness is the:

...foundation of all that is in the cosmos, and that the lila – the dance or play – of that consciousness manifests forms that are inspirited – some visible, some not;

⁹¹ See Smyers (2002) for a discussion about Jung as shaman/scientist. Smyers argues that it is not sufficient for anthropologists to dismiss Jung as a cultural universalist or 'mystic' without taking seriously his explorations into psychical worlds.

*always temporary, always changing but through vastly varied time dimensions
(pers. comm. 21 Feb 2009).*

‘Everything is consciousness’, Jack told me, and everything is a manifestation of the ‘Great Mind [which]...is Love or Goodness’, including spirits whether they be embodied or disembodied: ‘I don’t like the dichotomy that is sometimes made between the non-material and the material’, he said.

Spirits thus arise from spirit-human co-production across the boundary between realities. They are a product of our minds and our imagination but not entirely, and this is the paradox of spirits, their ‘ontological indeterminacy’ (Walsh, 2007:147). For Terri, paradoxes frequently arise when discussing metaphysical matters. I had the following conversation with her:

Dawne: Are spirits projections from my own unconscious mind? Or do they have a separate existence outside of me?

Terri: It’s paradox after paradox...They’re separate but not separate. It’s really hard to put into words. I feel that they come in the form that they come in to you or to me, in whatever way to make it easy on us to connect with them...Whereas, if we journeyed and all we had at the beginning was Source, Oneness...would we be able to get a handle on it? I don’t think so.

Terri’s view of spirits here aligns with those of Noll (1987, 2001) and Jung (1963): spirits come from within and from without, they are ‘separate but not separate’. Her worldview is one where Spirit/Oneness is a compassionate force (akin to the Great Mind evoked by Jack above) that works with humans in ways that make it easier for them to comprehend the mystery, meaning that Spirit reveals itself to humans in specific forms as spirit helpers/energies/metaphors which humans are able to comprehend more readily. All come from the ‘Creator’, she says, a view that is consistent with that of American neo-Shaman José Stevens, who writes that all helping spirits are aspects of the One (cited in Ingerman & Weselman, 2010:34).

My observation is that neo-Shamans often unawaresly switch between talking about Spirit, spirit/s, energy, perhaps reflecting the impossibility of essentialising ‘spirits’ as a

unitary concept. There is no single agreed definition. Their understandings shift and ontological states merge and change, sometimes one explanation, sometimes another depending on the individual and context. There is often not much self-reflection about spirits as an ontological category. Neo-Shamans do not usually engage in theological and theoretical discussions about the existence and nature of spirits. The spirits are simply there when they enter an altered state of consciousness; they psychically perceive them and they work with them for practical results. While the notion of spirits may be a mystery and a paradox, shamans are practical too, and they interact with spirits to get results.

Spirits as a Practical Reality

The following paragraphs include ethnographic material to illustrate how some of my participants have responded to my curiosity about spirits. In several cases, this process has stimulated them to articulate tentatively for the first time the essence of their deepest and most sacred relationships, those with their spirit helpers. One woman, in response to my questioning about spirits was initially surprised but then replied, 'I do think about this sometimes, but mostly I'm quite primitive. I trust it, and am guided by the spirits. And it works.' Later, she wrote 'Really I am just grateful they are there' (pers. comm. 22 Oct 2007). For this woman, her spirit helpers are a given; she drums, rattles, whistles and she sees them as they arrive to support her healing work.

Avanol, on the other hand, is much less certain about the nature of spirits. The following quotes are from two extended recorded conversations I had with her, and show how she worked through some confusion as our talking expanded and deepened, allowing her to reflect further. She began by telling me that she petitions 'Spirit generally', in much the same manner as a Christian might appeal to God; unlike Christians though, she searches for signs in nature, a divination process common amongst neo-Shamanic animists:

If I have a question, I will ask, 'Please give me a sign' or 'Give me an answer' and I trust something may come up on my walk or something will happen, like finding an unusual feather, a rainbow appearing when there is no rain about, or a snake

suddenly crossing my path... and that will be my answer. This is the way I usually petition Spirit as opposed to actually calling on a spirit [power] animal. But it is a lovely feeling, having a power animal. Feeling that there is an animal in spirit that is there just for me, to help or to guide and protect me. I feel so connected to the world of nature anyway that I rely on Spirit relaying messages to me through the animals, plants etc. in this reality. So I suppose when making a choice who to call on, I tend to go for the Big One, Great Spirit. I call on Great Spirit and trust that I will be heard. The question is the trust, isn't it? I believe I will be 'heard' and I guess the idea of a 'Great Spirit' really appeals to me. Sometimes I do feel a little unsure, but most of the time I feel very certain, you know, and then there just isn't any doubt at all... (her emphasis).

Avanol lived for many years on isolated farms in South Africa, and feels her connection to the land, plants and animals intensely. While still living in South Africa, she communicated with devas on farms where she lived, and carried out ceremonies by herself in places sacred to her. It is not surprising then that she should ask for guidance from signs in nature. Sometimes she trusts and is certain about a Great Spirit; at other times, she is uncertain. In the second conversation, she enlarged on her ideas about Spirit and the spirits:

I just have to trust there is a Force, a Power, a creative power as a central point of Oneness, the central part that holds the whole web together. When I speak to Great Spirit, I suppose I am imagining that central point in the Web of Oneness, and when, for example, I speak to the spirit of the north, I see it as an aspect of that Great Spirit. But the actual word 'spirit' – really, I can't quite get a grasp on it. Some part of me would like to have it as more than just energy. I suppose that is why I am so drawn [to shamanism]; the shamanistic view of 'spirit' seems more substantial to me. It makes me feel somehow closer to the world of 'spirit' and that the spiritual help or helpers I can call and draw on are very real. I feel that all of this helps me to form a connection with Higher Knowledge. The 'helpers' I call on, whether it be a power animal, a spirit guide or Great Spirit, are like my teachers in

spirit passing me knowledge and wisdom from non-ordinary reality to this reality.

I go with that, at this point in time...

Dawne: *Do these spirit guides have a separate existence outside of us? Are they mental constructs?*

Avanol: *They do have a separate existence, connected through the Web of Oneness. I don't understand how it all works...*

As her language suggests – Great Spirit, Web of Oneness - reading about Native American Indian cosmologies has influenced Avanol. She is, however, ambivalent about the nature of Spirit and spirit guides; she wants them to be more than energy, and to have a separate existence. The spirit helpers are teachers she can call upon, and she feels at this stage of her spiritual development that she needs them to act as a bridge, allowing her to connect with some larger spiritual force or power located in the centre of the Great Web.

Terri has a similar cosmology, wherein her spirit helpers point towards a Higher Power. Everything encountered while journeying comes from Great Spirit, Terri says. She frequently struggled to find the words to elucidate her experiential understandings of the spirit worlds. 'River', 'vein', and a 'ladder' were all metaphors she used at different times in her attempt to explain the ineffable nature of her shamanic journeying and meetings with spirit. The teachings or healings ('medicine' as many neo-Shamans call it) are presented in images she can recognise, and later relate to her client. She expressed her shamanic journeying experiences as follows:

Spirits come from Great Spirit. [It is as if] Great Spirit says, I've got to show these souls down here, walking in these bodies so I'll come through with a human face, a power animal face, an angel face, and with whatever form other cultures have. It's like a vein and we see it. Always, working with the power animals and teachers, you know that you are working with the Great Spirit, which is absolute Spirit. The spiritual teachers and power animals are like a river, a vein from Great Spirit. They come forward in a particular form that we can see and recognise...

They're almost like a ladder and in the end, there's no ladder, just Oneness. It is almost like spirit comes in certain forms to show us the way. It already knows what

will maybe light us up and help us to follow. So I might have, say a wolf power animal and someone else might have another power animal which will be very helpful to them to continue on their journey. And you do see this so often, whatever power animal is retrieved is perfect for that person.

Power animals or other spirits come in many different forms, and Terri is aware that different cultures may have spirit guides specific to them. Neo-Shamans, exposed to a multitude of images and information from many different global sources, potentially have rich and diverse imagery to internalise and to feed their imaginal worlds (Magliocco, 2004:228-229). This is very different from the situation within traditional cultures where, until recently, inter-generational stories and folklore created the unique cultural character and forms of otherworldly spirits, and the ways in which they interacted with this world (Orenstein, 1994:176; Turner, 1998:92-93).⁹² The neo-Shamans Lindquist worked with in Stockholm tended to meet wild and exotic animals rather than those that they perceived as less glamorous or domesticated (1997:76). Wallis (2004:208) also notes that animal helpers or power animals tend to be higher up the food chain, and ‘only rarely do such organisms as slugs, worms, beetles, and mice enter neo-Shamanists’ animal-helper repertoire’.

Here, Terri uses a wolf as an example of a possible power animal that neo-Shamans might discover when journeying. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand meet the usual kinds of power animals that other neo-Shamans from overseas find when journeying – such as a wolf, an eagle or snake – but they also sometimes meet locally derived or less ‘exotic’ spirit helpers, perhaps a bird (a specific species such as morepork [a native owl], native wood pigeon or, in one case, a generic green bird), butterfly, horse, or deer. Each power animal brings particular qualities that the practitioner relates to, and that support their inner spiritual process for themselves or for others. Skink, for example, has become an important helper for me in embodied and disembodied forms; living skinks scuttling in my garden remind me about moving between the cracks that

⁹² Traditions within indigenous cultures are not as fixed as many Westerners might like to think, however. Henry Rupert, for example, was an innovative Washo healer who incorporated other cultural traditions and motifs into his work throughout his long lifetime, contradicting notions of fixed cultural imagery and spiritual worldviews (Handelman, 1977).

connect the worlds, and when I am journeying to the lower world, skink often appears to show me the way. Earthworms too have appeared to me, advising me to 'stay close to the earth'. Power animals need not necessarily be exotic or wild, as becomes clear from the following conversation I had during the second gathering of the shamans held in Auckland in April 2008 when I recorded the following conversation between Jan and Shen about the nature of power animals and other spirits:

Shen: If you trust your power animal, your guides or whatever – we have this power animal, and we call on it, but what is it? Where does it come from? Is it an actual animal or is it God itself, or Creator, whatever – in another form? Going deeper and deeper and trusting. Go deeper, with permission into those forces, we respectfully ask, can I come into your body, can I come into the guardian's [or power animal's] body and trace it back?

Jan: And maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe it doesn't matter whether we've just chosen to see it as a bear or as an angel but it is that trusting that it is appropriate. It still has that connection back to the Source. It's coming from a pure space even if we feel good about having a tiger or a bear or an angel or Christ or someone as the face of Spirit.

Shen: Because I think, we can only manage that, as human beings. We can only manage that...

Jan: ...It is all energy and sometimes we just give it a face.

Shen: Yes. I think that's what it is, energy... We are so child-like as humans. We are not really ready, so that's the way it presents, the way you can manage it. You talked about trusting. It's real. People come in and say 'Is this true? Does this work?' Well, if it works, it works. If it's true, if you're meant to get a squirrel, you get a squirrel. If you get an ant, you're supposed to get an ant! You can't just have a polar bear, sorry!

For Shen, going 'deeper and deeper' is to journey into the power animal itself, to merge with it, to 'respectfully ask', to trace its lineage back to where it comes from, receiving information to further his understandings about the nature of the power

animal or guardian spirit. At the same time, his exploration is a going 'deeper and deeper' into himself, into his psyche. During the conversation, both Jan and Shen arrive at a position of thinking that trust in the process is the key, trusting the information received from the spirits they meet. The spirits are energy that manifests in variable but specific forms meaningful for that particular person, time and purpose, and connected to a higher energy source. The test is 'does it work?' rather than 'is this true?'

To debate the reality and ontological status of spirits is to miss the point, equivalent to attempting to debate the veracity of God. How neo-Shamans designate 'spirit/s' – is the bear or angel 'real'? – is to miss the importance of the underlying metaphor and the deeper meaning of spirits for shamans. Neo-Shamans are often not clear about spirits, and their mobile, non-specific language reflects this as they slip between using terms such as Spirit, spirit/s, energy. The role of spirits as sources of knowledge and healing, and neo-Shamans' relationships with the spirits are more significant than how spirits are ontologically categorised.

Taking the Spirits Seriously

I return now to Jack's comment about benign spirits, noted earlier in this chapter. When I asked him if he had met any malevolent spirits or felt that he had had to battle with the spirits in a classical and heroic shamanic manner, he replied, 'No, but remember I am a teacher of shamanic practice not a shaman'. Jack is not denying the reality of malignant spirits, but he is making a distinction between the powers and abilities of some shamans and his own abilities as a shamanic practitioner and teacher. Neo-Shamans are not homogeneous in their practices and experiences of spirits. Their cosmologies vary, encompassing perspectives and beliefs ranging from New Age or Christian-like ideas about Goodness and Love, through to dualistic notions of 'light' and 'dark', 'good' and 'evil', perhaps closer to indigenous peoples' perceptions of the spirit world as something dangerous for humans to enter. This latter viewpoint is possibly also similar to (largely outdated) Christian ideas of evil spirits. Moreover, I think a methodological issue, identified in the previous chapter, is apparent here too: experiences of long-time practitioners will inevitably be different from those of beginners attending a single introductory weekend.

The anthropological literature seems to point to a disjunction between the benign helping spirits some neo-Shamans evoke and the sometimes-terrifying spirit encounters indigenous shamans experience, as described in much of the writing about traditional forms of shamanism. Some commentators view shamans as masters of the spirit world; Jakobsen subscribes to this definition. She contrasts this perspective with that of some core shamans who view their relationship with spirit helpers not as mastery over, but as one of co-operation with; the spirits provide 'help, power, and knowledge' and are there to 'play' with humans who choose to journey to their worlds (1999:9). She compares this approach with Greenlanders' perceptions of the spirit world, which is '...at best...neutral, at worst... malevolent'. The Greenlanders' attitudes are fundamentally different from the naïve and idealised beliefs of core neo-Shamans who are taught to journey and contact benevolent spirit guides who will support, assist and generally enhance their lives, Jakobsen writes (1999:218).

As with many debates about neo-Shamans and their practices, the issues are not as clear-cut as Jakobsen (1999) is suggesting. Nonetheless, she is pointing to the reluctance of those neo-Shamans more aligned with New Age thinking to engage with, or to acknowledge the darker side of the spirit world. The denial of the 'reality of intrinsically nefarious spirits' (von Stuckrad, 2002:775) by some neo-Shamans has been noted by a number of commentators (see, for example, Brown, 2001:113). Consequently, Westerners attending weekend neo-Shamanic courses may run the risk of trivialising the spirit world, and not taking its potential dangers seriously.

One of the facilitators of the FSS basic course, *The Way of the Shaman*, I attended commented to me that 'I think people sometimes enter [shamanic explorations] like some kind of sweetness and light thing [but] it's gutsy and grounded and traditionally people were aware of its power' (pers. comm. 9 April 2009). FSS publicity does not usually mention this to prospective course attendees, but in response to my questioning, the facilitators told me that it was important that course participants initially learnt the spiritual landscape when in non-ordinary reality, so that they could navigate it safely and set up strong boundaries. European neo-Shamans are taught similar guidelines (Lindquist, 1997:94; Jakobsen, 1999:191; Gredig, 2009:134-135), although there is a risk of the guidelines becoming a 'dogma' (Gredig, 2009:123).

During the course I attended, the FSS facilitators established clearly defined parameters, advising course participants to send away 'inappropriate' spirits such as insects, reptiles, spiders or snakes or those with teeth who might appear when journeying. These guidelines seemed arbitrary and it wasn't until later, when I questioned the facilitators further, that they began to make sense within the context of the tripartite cosmology of core neo-Shamanism. It seems these particular spirits should be avoided because 'traditionally ill intentions were often sent or were seen as a spiritual intrusion in the form of these things'. It is possible to do 'powerful' work with snakes and spiders in the upper and lower worlds but as a precaution, for the basic introductory workshop, they suggest that participants avoid them (pers. comm. 9 Apr 2009). Spirit helpers in the middle world may 'have an agenda'; they may be disaffected nature spirits or dead peoples' spirits who have been unable to leave, and working with these spirits requires more advanced techniques, they said. The facilitators recounted a time when they were teaching near a cemetery. When they called in the spirits at the start of the workshop, they realised that there were many spirits of the dead moving into the workshop space. They had to put up a barrier and firmly tell the spirits to leave, as their (the facilitators') first responsibility was to the course participants. On the other hand, perhaps it is unlikely that anyone over the course of one weekend workshop would go deeply enough into altered states of consciousness to meet anything harmful and, as Wallis (2003:71-72) comments, possibly only the more 'dedicated' seek advanced shamanic trainings with its potential for meeting the 'darker aspect of "spirits"'. In one other workshop, in response to someone's fears, the teacher said 'this is a teaching group; we won't find big things, [we are taking] baby steps'.

In addition, the kinds of spirits neo-Shamans are likely to meet when journeying to the spirit world appear to have changed. Harner's initial spirit experiences in the 1960s with the Jivaro were terrifying encounters but later on, he appears to minimise the possible risks or potential for harm for neo-Shamans, writing that '[g]uardian spirits are *always* beneficial' (1990:68, emphasis in original). This statement, based on Harner's understandings of shamanism as taught to him by indigenous shamans and his own experiences of teaching and practising shamanism, nonetheless points to a major

change in perspective. While it may be true that guardian spirits are benign, this is not necessarily the case for all spirits. Some neo-Shamans seem to transpose New Age-like ideas of love, light and beneficence to create a version of shamanism palatable to contemporary Western sensibilities. A domestication process has apparently occurred with the kinds of spirits Western shamans meet, perhaps a parallel process to that which has occurred amongst Catholic Charismatic healers. Csordas (1994:168) has observed that Christian notions about deliverance from demonic manifestations have evolved over the centuries from the 'golden age of Christian demonologies' during the Renaissance. By the early 20th century, spirits had Biblical or inspired and invented names such as Gog or Magog, which in turn gave way in the current 'golden age of psychology' (with its 'deemphasis of sin') to names such as Anger or Depression (1994:181).

In spite of the apparent domestication of spirits neo-Shamans are likely to meet, other neo-Shamans do still encounter risky situations and possible dangers. I complete this chapter by including a number of ethnographic examples from my participants, which demonstrate that for some neo-Shamans at least, the spirit world is indeed something to be taken seriously. Their stories illustrate awareness of potential abilities to misuse their shamanic power, and of the importance of protection and releasing spiritual or psychic energies that do not belong to them.

One woman, trained in a South American shamanic tradition, has learnt to recognise danger signals when journeying. She described to me the potential dangers of journeying to the lower world and meeting Huasca who is the gatekeeper, from whom permission is sought to enter the lower world. He is a source of information about the journey ahead especially if one needs to be alert or on guard:

[S]ometimes you might meet him and he might have eyes lit up, blazing. That's usually a sign of danger; [to] be a little more aware when you're travelling, that something might perhaps be a little bit untoward.

During her training, she learnt about possible sorcery and she is confident of being safe when working with whatever she encounters. In one instance, she worked with

someone who had left a cult they had been involved with but there was still an 'energetic' connection imprinted in them. She told me that they were:

...dealing with a very powerful sorcerer, although I didn't feel in danger myself. I think you go into a sort of warrior stance, a very strong – quite different from your everyday life – when you are a strong warrior, when you stand up to energies in that way, it's just – the power is – you push them over. It's quite incredible.

She was able to access powers within herself to counteract the negative energies that were affecting the person on whose behalf she was journeying, so that she herself could return safely.

A second woman told me that she has had strong experiences of darkness and possession, of feeling possessed by outside energies. Nowadays, she interprets her experiences through a Jungian lens, exemplifying the need for her to embody the darkness or shadow within herself. Another person shared a similar story with me, although he did not necessarily interpret his experiences in the same way: on occasions when half-asleep in bed, he has felt 'someone' or 'something' systematically inducing paralysis in him. It feels as if the entity is blocking his full return to his body and, he said, it takes a considerable struggle to resist this paralytic invasion and to regain command. These stories appear to parallel the hag-riding incidents collected by David Hufford (1982), mentioned earlier in this chapter.⁹³

For many years, Shen has suffered serious life-threatening illnesses that orthodox medical practitioners have been unable to treat. He senses that his personal shamanic practice is to work with staying present in his body, while 'working with death' (that is, coming to terms with death). He finds that his spirit helpers are not always present to support him when he is working shamanically, and that powerful and energetic forces are challenging him more and more. He has to fight these forces using his guardians and spirit warrior: 'It's a battle...They're not nice, I can assure you.' More recently, Shen has felt that he is under spiritual attack, and Māori healers who are

⁹³ Hag-riding, within an English folkloric tradition, refers to 'a frightening sensation of being held immobile in bed, often by a heavy weight pressing on one's stomach or chest' (Simpson & Roud, 2000).

working with him agree with this assessment. Anthropologist, William Lyon (1991:23), has described a similar dilemma in the lives of Lakota shamans who, over time, are challenged to perform greater tasks, which carry with them the potential for greater terror and are a test of their faith in the spirits. By their very nature, '[o]ver time, the tests must intensify if they are to be tests', to such an extent that the shaman eventually loses power and is unable to work as a shaman any longer. I showed Shen Lyon's article; this is how it is, he agreed. As with the Lakota shamans, it seems that his engagement with the spirits over his lifetime is confronting him with larger and larger challenges.

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand, as with neo-Shamans in other Western countries, vary in their cosmologies and beliefs about spirits, and the levels they engage with shamanism and the spirits. This also depends on the length of time they have been studying and practising shamanism. Some incorporate Christian or New Age-inspired ideas about love, light and benign spirits to create a version of shamanism acceptable to modern Western sensibilities. Others are well aware of the need for caution and protection when entering alternate realities. However, to suggest that all Western shamanic searchers are romantics who psychologise shamanism is to privilege the indigenous experience and deny the reality of at least some neo-Shamans' spirit encounters.

There is no doubt that the notion of spirits is a conundrum. I return to where I began: to conceptualise spirits and spirit 'stuff' is a mystery. I concede that Eliade's cautionary observation (1972:5-6, cited at the beginning of this chapter) was perhaps a wise one, maybe we do not need to know definitively what a spirit is. This chapter has been an exploration of the nature of spirits, the meanings my participants ascribe to them, and the relationships they have with their spirit helpers. Turner (2006:44) likens the plight of anthropologists trying to record and capture spiritual events to that of quantum physicists: 'like the famous electrons in particle physics, spirituality and communitas will not stay still to be watched'. Throughout, I have struggled to capture those imaginal spirit-beings (Noll, 2001), to find words that name them without solidifying them and making them rigid, seeking to balance my roles as researcher and shamanic explorer. Taking the spirits seriously means that I, as a researcher, have to

take spirit stories seriously too (both those of my research participants and my own). Perhaps asking 'What *is* a spirit?' is not the right question; just as shamans are masters at shape-shifting, so too do spirits shape-shift discursively. In the following chapter, I outline neo-Shamanic practices as described to me by some participants as they meet, and work with their spirit helpers.

CHAPTER 6

NEO-SHAMANIC PRACTICES

Terri: *The fundamental thing is I alter my state of consciousness; my shadow soul moves from the room here with the client and goes out into non-ordinary reality back in time [or] wherever it is needed.⁹⁴ There is no space and time there, so it moves out into no space and no time. The journey is fundamental to get the answers. It is absolutely, totally my intention that takes me through, absolute intention for the healing for this person. It is the intention that carries me. The drum does that too, also the canoe [that I can journey on to non-ordinary reality]. I need to have laser-like focus that stays on it [her intention]; it stays on the job at all times.*

Then the teachers, and the guides and the power animals come as a connection to the Source to help with the work and so I'm there in absolute focus, with this intention for the healing but also out of the way - a paradox - so that Source can create. The vital thing is to be able to be out of the way. I become hollow bone, totally there in spirit but not in ego or small mind. That's how the Source can fill you up with its juice really, how you can expand and become just light. Because if I'm there in my head, I am not in the shamanic state.

Then there is the vital heart connection. The heart opens and expands because it really wants to help on someone else's behalf and I truly do it for somebody, if I can get out of the way. The journey is fundamental.

Nature is another; it's about this planet, this earth, this universe.

Dawne: *Connection to the Oneness?*

Terri: *Absolutely, with Oneness. It's a nice concept and all that, and I kind of understood it with my intellect, my small mind, not with my heart and my greater mind but with my small mind for many, many years but until the expansion*

⁹⁴ According to Scandinavian neo-Shaman, Jonathan Horwitz (n.d.), some people believe there are at least two souls, a fixed soul that belongs to the physical body, and a free soul or spirit that can leave the body during dreaming or shamanic journeying; Terri is referring to this second form of soul. Other people have different anatomies of soul and spirit (see, for example, Vitebsky, 1995:12-14).

happened within me, where you actually do expand, implode, explode into Oneness, I did not know it. I did not experience it. It is an experiential thing, to become that; you see it, feel it, know it and you are in it. It's not a taught thing.

Dawne: *You can't think yourself there with your brain?*

Terri: *No. You can't read yourself there; you can't watch things and do things and follow someone else there. There's a space in you, you surrender, you allow. There was one occasion that I felt and knew what that space was - making me goosy actually [rubbing her arms, as she recalls the experience]. In that space, there was nothing in me except love. I knew my whole vibration was nothing but love. There was nothing else there. And so it happened, it was able to happen. That expansion could happen because nothing was there except space and love.*

* * * *

Neo-Shamans are people for whom the spirits are a practical reality, although their cosmologies and perceptions of the nature of their spirit helpers are variable. In this chapter, I describe the practices of some neo-Shamans in New Zealand. Many use variations of core shamanic methods and the practices I describe here originate primarily from core shamanism as practised in other Western countries, tempered by local and individual influences. I am describing these neo-Shamanic practices within the context of introductory neo-Shamanic workshops, and as they occur during individual healing sessions. As I have previously noted, there is considerable variation between novice and experienced practitioners. Terri, in the epigraph above, is a longterm practitioner and she encapsulates the key aspects of neo-Shamanism for her: the journey is 'fundamental', she says. She alters her state of consciousness and enters non-ordinary reality, carried by her 'laser-like' intention; her spirit helpers join her as she journeys to receive knowledge and healing. The second important shamanic thread for her is 'nature' and connection to the 'Oneness'. I examine these characteristic tropes, beginning with an outline of how the neo-Shamans I observed create sacred space as they commence their work, along with the multiple methods they employ to engage their senses and enter altered states of consciousness. Next, I describe the shamanic paraphernalia used, followed by an outline of neo-Shamanic journeying, the

importance of intent and presence, imagery encountered, and completion of the ritual process. Finally, I analyse neo-Shamanic participants' inter-actions with, and relationships within the 'Web of Oneness' and 'nature' as an exemplar of a new form of relational animism.

Creating Sacred Space, Entering Altered States of Consciousness

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand typically begin their work by creating sacred space and calling in the spirits, with drumming, rattling, singing, chanting and sounding, whistling, dancing and moving to create a sensorial-rich environment that engages all the senses (Hume, 2007). This is generally a simple ritual for an individual healing session but at the commencement of a workshop, setting the scene may be a more elaborate process to establish a sacred and protected space for the duration of the workshop. The air may be heavy with the aroma of burning sage or other herbs used by the workshop teacher/s to smudge participants as they move to form a circle. Participants stand or sit on the floor surrounding a central altar on the floor, varying from something minimal through to complex and creative artworks (see Figs.6.1, 6.2). The workshop teachers, or someone nominated by them, create the basic altar form, marking out each of the cardinal directions and the centre with a candle, and participants may be asked to bring a sacred object such as stones, feathers, bones, crystals, shells, flowers and foliage, images of deities or spiritual teachers to place on the altar. Sometimes participants will spontaneously add found natural objects from the environment around them. Rattles, drums, talking stick and, less commonly, a peace pipe rest nearby; I describe these items of shamanic paraphernalia in the following section.

The circle is based loosely on the Native American medicine wheel (see Chapter 4), but there are similarities with other traditions too, such as the Celtic wheel used by some neo-Pagan groups, and the inter-play of global and local influences are evident as neo-Shamans bring their personal and eclectic understandings to the circle. Some teachers use a format for calling in the directions derived from the *tohuna*, Dr Rose Pere, often performed outside (see Chapter 9). The facilitators acknowledge and call in the spirits from each direction, lighting the candles, establishing an altered liminal

space with its shared bonding and *communitas*, all of which strengthen and enhance the shamanic experience. During the opening ritual for one workshop, the neo-Shamanic facilitator 'woke' the spirits by 'calling' to the four directions, the above and the below without words; there was stillness and intense focused attention as she shook her small plastic, egg-shaped rattle, followed by a spine-chilling stockman's whistle.⁹⁵ She told me she she usually 'sees' helping spirits from different cultures in each of the four directions, and general helping spirits come from the upper and lower worlds; in addition, specific spirits appear depending on the purpose of the ritual.



Fig.6.1 Neo-Shamanic altar showing candles, seasonal and dried plants and flowers, gannet skeleton with outspread wings.

⁹⁵ This was a facilitator from Australia and she found the plastic rattle made it easier when going through airport customs. Her intent and focus created a powerful ritual despite the seemingly incongruous rattle.



Fig.6.2 Neo-Shamanic altar showing a talking stick decorated with bone and feathers (left), Tibetan bowl and gong, found dried kauri branch and leaves, fresh plants and flowers, gannet feathers and bones (right), rattle, candles representing the cardinal directions and the above and below (central candle), crystals, shells, bird's nest and various other items brought by participants.

Through rituals such as these, neo-Shamans open portals to other worlds and thereby expose themselves to potential dangers. They perceive or experience the portals in various ways, depending on their cultural and personal cosmology. *Foundation for Shamanic Studies* beginner courses usually teach people to visualise entering the lower world through an opening into the earth, a burrow or a cave and then to travel through a tunnel (Harner, 1990:31) and this was the case for all introductory courses I attended. Two people, now living in New Zealand, who had extensive shamanic training in England told me their teacher lives within a world of auras and colours 'like fractals' which are everywhere in nature and for her, these are the doorways to other worlds. Several participants (such as Terri, above) described their experiences as simultaneously going inward and outward, an implosion/

explosion to other realities, and Jonathan Horwitz (2000), neo-Shamanic co-founder of the *Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies*, has written of a similar inner expansion as he journeys outwards.

Shamans work to awaken their senses through a variety of somatic stimuli; a combination of techniques works most powerfully, and neo-Shamans use many different stimuli and engage in a variety of methods to induce altered states of consciousness as they prepare to journey to the spirit world. However, sonic driving using drums (and to a lesser extent rattles) is the staple method employed by neo-Shamans in New Zealand, and the deepest altered states I experienced occurred during extended times of drumming and moving in darkness. On one occasion, I took part in a sensory deprivation exercise; workshop participants moved in darkness, eyes and ears covered to awaken other faculties such as smell, taste or kinaesthetic sensing. One woman told me that psychological preparation beforehand provides safety that allows her to let go of control, with many different triggers working to take her 'out of her head' so that she gradually enters non-ordinary reality. Methods used by neo-Shamans in New Zealand to enter non-ordinary reality are similar to those used by other Western shamanic practitioners. The neo-Shamans I joined with while attending the *Society for Shamanic Practitioners* conference in England embraced a range of techniques to access other realities, with almost one hundred people calling in the spirits, spontaneously drumming, moving and sounding during the plenary sessions; a Nepalese shaman led extended healing rituals with singing, wild dancing and drumming in two séances.

Sound is another avenue used by neo-Shamans to attain an altered state of consciousness and to communicate with the spirits. I have written (in Chapter 3) about my experience of working to find an authentic sound for calling out to the spirits; I resonate with the Native American elder who reported to North American neo-Shaman, Steven Gray, that 'when the Spirit is really moving, the song sings the singers' (Gray, 2008:27).⁹⁶ The urge to call out and sound appears primal, and perhaps this

⁹⁶ Gray (2007:27) has written about the importance of sound in Native American Church ceremonies where many of the oldest songs consist of phonetic syllables (phonemes or vocables) such as *hey, hee, ah, nay, yah* and so on, perhaps the remnants of an ancient language, repeated in standard patterns and combinations.

was/is one of the roles of poet-singer shamans (Hoppal, 1987:90; see also Cowan, 2009:11-16; Halifax, 1991:29-34). In Amazonian South America, ritual songs or *icaros* are an integral part of the healing armamentarium employed by *curanderos* (Bustos, 2006; Luna, 1992). One New Zealand woman, whose training included time in Peru with a Peruvian shaman, learnt to use sacred singing as a form of vibrational healing during *ayahuasca* healing ceremonies she participated in: 'beautiful, beautiful sounds', she said, that came through her and other participants at the ceremony. Although she has no recall of the words now, she regularly sounds, singing without words when out in nature. Glossolalia – speaking gibberish or nonsense, the gift of speaking in tongues, 'ecstatic speech' (Csordas, 2001:41) while in an altered state – is a different kind of sounding. Following Kavan (2004), the glossolalia I have witnessed amongst neo-Shamans seems to be of the spontaneous type.⁹⁷ For example, a spirit-language distinctive to one woman comes through her when she is carrying out healing, and when calling in the spirits, eerie and potent to hear and witness; a second woman's personal spirit song appears to contribute to her trance state while also being channelled through her when she is in trance.

In the present socio-political era of the 'war on drugs', drug use as a means to alter consciousness is potentially a problematic issue for those neo-Shamans who wish to experiment with entheogens to enhance their altered states.⁹⁸ This is particularly true for workshop facilitators advertising their courses, and the use of drugs to reach trance states is not the usual practice during neo-Shamanic workshops in New Zealand. The majority of neo-Shamans I worked with explicitly said 'no' to the use of drugs to enhance their shamanic work. There is no need for drugs to access other realities, they said, as this can be done through ceremony and ritual, although the depth of trance

⁹⁷ Kavan (2004) theorises two forms of glossolalia: spontaneous and context-dependent. Spontaneous glossolalia commonly accompanied altered states of consciousness amongst members of the Golden Light yoga group she studied, whereas the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians' experiences tended to be more mechanical and socially determined, after their initial joyful baptism of the Spirit.

⁹⁸ Because of the prevailing anti-drug ethos in the West, some scholars have adopted the term 'entheogen' (meaning 'god within') as being more neutral and less pejorative than 'psychedelics', 'hallucinogens' or 'psychoactive', terms which are associated with recreational drug-use as opposed to sacramental use. See Blain, 2002:53-59; Wallis, 2003:239; also the website for the *Council on Spiritual Practices* <http://www.csp.org/practices/entheogens/entheogens.html> (accessed 9 Feb 2010).

states reached by neo-Shamans varies according to their experience and inherent abilities (I return to this point shortly). Moreover, given the history Westerners have of substance abuse, neo-Shamans opposed to the use of drugs consider it is unwise for some Westerners to use drugs as a tool for accessing shamanic states. One woman thinks the misuse of drugs (taking drugs in a non-sacred context) is yet another example of Westerners wanting instant gratification without understanding what it means to follow a deep spiritual path.

Nonetheless, the draw to explore psychotropic plants as sacred healing tools is strong amongst other neo-Shamans in New Zealand, and at least four participants have travelled to South America and experienced shamanic healing rituals that included the ingestion of plants (albeit in homeopathic form for one woman). One man has travelled to Brazil on three occasions to attend ten-day seminars taking *ayahuasca* to make visionary art as a personal spiritual journey. He is adamant that, for him anyway, other methods of attaining altered states are not as powerful and do not have the same intensity or ability to take him outside his 'comfort zone'. *Ayahuasca*, he says, takes him to the edges of his courage, likening his experience to that described by Taussig (1987, cited in Uzendoski, 2008:19): 'a beginning defined by terror and an ending of beauty and healing'. In Amazonia, in particular, *vegetalistas* or *curanderos* (shamanic healers) ingest various psychotropic plants such as *ayahuasca* in combination with tobacco over many years to learn from the medicine of their sacred teacher plants and these practitioners have captured the imaginations of many Western shamanic explorers.⁹⁹ Neo-Shamanic magazines, such as *Shaman's Drum* or *Sacred Hoop*, routinely contain advertisements for *ayahuasca* and *san pedro* tours to Peru, although these magazines are not easily accessible in New Zealand and are not widely read by potential shamanic explorers who are more likely to find information through the internet.¹⁰⁰

The depth of the altered state neo-Shamans reach varies with experience and the ability of the practitioner. Novice neo-Shamans attending introductory core shamanism

⁹⁹ Shamans in South America frequently use psychotropic plants during prolonged healing sessions. See, for example, Bustos, 2006; Dobkin de Rios, 1992; Joralemon & Sharon, 1993; Langdon & Baer, 1992; Mabit & Sieber, 2006; Stevens, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ *San pedro* (*Echinopsis pachanoi*) is a psychoactive cactus native to the Andean mountains of Peru.

workshops in New Zealand are taught to move from ordinary states of consciousness (OSC) to enter a shamanic state of consciousness (SSC) (Harner, 1990:21), although ordinary and non-ordinary levels of consciousness do not fall into a simple binary model (Harner, 1990:49).¹⁰¹ Many people (and not only shamans) drift in and out of altered states throughout the course of the day, the depth of their experiences on a continuum ranging from a light trance through to much deeper states, which go beyond simple visualisation or imagery (Horwitz, 2000:5). Some shamanically experienced participants told me they are constantly moving in and out of different states of consciousness, and their skill at managing these varying levels is perhaps a measure of their shamanic ability. One woman made a distinction between the 'night throne' when she receives visions and dreams while asleep or in a semi-wake altered state, and the 'day throne' when part of her mind is always held in altered state, tuned in and alert. She said:

I often think in an ideal world, I would have no distractions and the whole of my brain could be in altered state but, of course, that isn't how it is supposed to be, so it becomes seamless. I don't need to go into an altered state by consciously choosing to because I am already in one. I might be answering the phone, I might be paying my bills, but part of me [is] always in that state where you can obey or do what's asked of you [by spirit].

As with all shamans, she lives and carries out her daily life activities while, at the same time, she is aware of receiving information from other levels of consciousness. For participants such as this woman, moving between the worlds is a constant and challenging dance that requires them to be in more than one realm simultaneously and sometimes, they say, it is more of a test for them to remain grounded and present in ordinary everyday reality.

¹⁰¹ Harner's terminology of OSC and SSC corresponds to Castaneda's ordinary and non-ordinary (NOR) states, and I use them inter-changeably. Wallis (2003:56) chooses to use the term 'altered consciousness' because he says it makes a less rigid distinction between ordinary and non-ordinary states.

Shamanic Paraphernalia

Before describing neo-Shamanic journeying, there is a further aspect of 'setting the scene' that requires attention: that of the tools neo-Shamans use to support their work. There are some pieces of equipment used almost universally by neo-Shamans both in New Zealand and overseas, in workshops or during private healing sessions, such as the drum and rattle (see Fig.6.3).



Fig.6.3 Neo-Shaman's drum and drum stick painted to represent a giraffe power animal.

Native American influences are evident in the drums and beaters, in the use of talking sticks in circles, and feathers during some healing rituals. A few neo-Shamans have a wooden staff representing the world tree, symbolically connecting the upper, middle and lower worlds. Less commonly, a peace pipe may be used, for example, as preparation before going on a vision quest but this is not an item routinely used by neo-Shamans in New Zealand. I have taken part in two neo-Shamanic peace pipe rituals, and during the one-day workshop I attended with Lewis Mehl-Madrona, the Cherokee and Lakota medical doctor and medicine man (see Chapter 3), everyone in the circle shared a peace pipe before he began his healing work. Neo-Shamans believe that their shamanic tools such as drums, rattles and talking sticks are sacred items with their own spirits that support the shaman's work. The following discussion builds on that of the previous chapter, and provides further examples that illustrate the fluidity of boundaries between animate and inanimate, material and immaterial objects used in neo-Shamanic practices. In each of the examples given, the shamanic tool is alive, animated, inspirited and sometimes appears to be actively leading the healing.

The drum is an essential piece of neo-Shamanic paraphernalia, the rhythmic vibrations used to induce trance states and to promote healing for themselves or others. Drums vary in size but usually are circular shaped, approximately 30 – 40cm in diameter and consisting of deer, goat or horse skin tightly stretched over a wooden frame, bound in place by leather thongs; synthetic materials are occasionally used instead of animal hide. The drums are imported from overseas, or made in New Zealand by neo-Shamans for their own use, or for sale to other practitioners. Sometimes, a picture of the shaman's power animal is painted on the skin by the drum-maker, or the neo-Shaman. Larger drums are used occasionally in ceremonial work. One man reported that he has seen three people holding a large drum while a fourth person drummed it. The drum 'pulled' them around the room as it seemingly took on its own power and energy, stopping in front of particular people for healing.

Talking sticks are usually created from wood, carved and decorated or inset with items such as feathers, bones or crystals. One workshop facilitator used a large piece of polished pounamu (New Zealand greenstone), and sometimes the 'stick' may be improvised from whatever materials are on hand, such as a stone, purified before use

by passing over a lit candle or smoke from burning sage. As I became more familiar with workshop protocols, I learnt to appreciate the inherent power and healing that is accessed during open-ended deep sharing rounds using the talking stick. During these rounds, someone picks up the stick as they feel moved, holding it, responding in a tactile manner to the beauty of the craftsmanship, feeling the energy or spirit of the stick, its imagery and symbolism. In the reflective silence, they focus inwardly to connect with their interior processes, gathering their words to speak without interruption while other group members give their full attention. The silences and stillness of the group can be profound, supporting and holding individuals within a powerful and sacred healing space.

During neo-Shamanic healing rituals, the rattle has several purposes: it serves as a rhythmic instrument that contributes to altered states; it is used to 'call' in or 'wake up' the spirits; it also serves as a powerful healing tool in its own right. During one healing session I observed, a workshop participant preparing to undertake a soul retrieval journey used her rattle to rattle around the person lying down, who was to receive the returned soul part (see Chapter 7 for an explanation of soul retrieval). The teacher, watching and supporting the process, stopped the practitioner and instructed her to 'let the rattle, rattle', whereupon she stopped, breathed deeply and became very still and quiet before repeating the rattling procedure more slowly and intentionally. This time, the rattling had an entirely different quality to it, one of the rattle leading rather than being led. By stopping and focusing on her breathing, the practitioner presented herself in an altered state, she was able to listen to the spirit of the rattle, and mindfully follow this rather than moving erratically without full awareness of the process or her intention.

I once watched Shen (a former student of the Scandinavian neo-Shaman, Jonathan Horwitz) carrying out a healing during a workshop, using his rattle to scan the patient's body, and then to track the energy changes in the manner of a '*power antenna*' (Horwitz, 2002:2, his emphasis). The rattle was 'totally' doing the work, Shen later told me; the rattle is 'very powerful', and was made especially for him from a scorpion 'to cut away illusions'. Sometimes, the rattle becomes an ally, which can be called upon in spirit form even if the physical rattle is not present; I return to this latter point shortly.

Lindquist (1997:69-72) described the 'inexpressibly magical moment' she observed when Horwitz 'rattled the group together' during a workshop she attended as participant observer: 'the rattle seem[ed] to live a life of its own, singing different songs for different people'. I agree with Lindquist; the indefinable and awesome qualities present at such moments are indescribable.

In the above examples, when the neo-Shamans used their inspirited rattles to 'track energy' during the healings, the rattles became an extension of their hands. Oths and Hinojosa (2004:103-104), in their discussion about bonesetters,¹⁰² suggest that bonesetters' 'embodied hand-based knowledge' is preconscious. They highlight the phenomenological 'know how', derived from the embodied experience of the practitioner, in combination with specific knowledge that allows their hands to 'attend other suffering bodies on a nonconscious level'. The neo-Shamans I observed are working on those levels too, through the medium of their hands and their rattles. In other healings, a feather or crystal might be used in a similar manner, to track energy or to remove intrusions (see Chapter 7). The shaman's hands and their tool become one, energetically speaking.

In other situations, the shamanic tools are experienced by the shaman entirely on the spiritual plane. One woman, trained in a South American tradition, journeys in non-ordinary reality to the *altiplano* (Andean high plains) and told me she meets medicine people who are 'holding the energies and guarding the fire', supporting her work. She has a spiritual *mesa* (altar) there as well as her physical one; sometimes, she said, it is sufficient that she works solely with her *mesa* on the spiritual plane. A second person says he has trained himself to work without his tools, the 'sticks and stone, bones, drums, rattles, feathers'. His spirit guide told him he does not need his tools and he was to 'stand naked before spirit'; consequently, he has developed an understanding that everything has a spiritual counter-part, and that sometimes at least, it is maybe the client who needs to see or feel the 'props' rather than the practitioner.

¹⁰² Oths and Hinojosa (2004:xvi) arrive at an expanded definition of a bonesetter as a 'healer who may set fractures, mobilize joints, and reposition the minor movements or major dislocations of the vertebrae, joints, muscles and even organs'. In my writing, I use the terms 'bodywork' or 'manual therapy', more commonly used by Western practitioners who work in situations where access to modern Western medical facilities are readily available and who therefore do not usually set fractures. The important feature is the use of the healer's hands.

This latter perspective is different from that of another neo-Shaman who says that, although she uses various items of shamanic equipment in her practice (and continues to use them if guided by spirit), she has concerns about being too 'way out there' in terms of presenting herself and her work to the public. She has found it better to 'not dress it up' by using overtly shamanic paraphernalia. Ultimately, she says, 'everything is energy...and if I need a drum or not it doesn't matter because what the drum would have provided, it will come in another way that spirit provides'. Her spirit helpers guide her when she works, and they determine whether she uses a particular item in physical or spiritual form. This viewpoint is similar to that of English neo-Shaman, Gordon MacLellan (2003:369) who says he does not usually use his drums and rattles in public.

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand use their shamanic paraphernalia in a variety of ways – to help induce trance-states, and to track energy when doing healing work. In some situations, their tools can become instruments for healing in their own right. The boundaries between material and immaterial objects are not always clear-cut, and they do not necessarily distinguish between an object on the physical or spiritual plane; all are animated with spirit and serve as their allies or spirit helpers during their healing work. The cosmologies and animistic worldviews of neo-Shamans enable them to perceive of, and to use their tools in a manner that is not congruent with mainstream 'realities'.

Neo-Shamanic Journeying: Intention and Presence

The previous sections have described how some neo-Shamans in New Zealand set the scene for their work by creating sacred space and entering altered states of consciousness, while noting the ways their tools serve as spirit allies in support of their work. The purpose of the preparations is to enhance the neo-Shaman's ability to journey while in a trance, whether this occurs within the context of an introductory neo-Shamanic workshop or during a one-to-one healing session. There is considerable uniformity amongst core shamanic accounts of journeying to the lower, middle and upper worlds when in a trance or altered state of consciousness. Jakobsen (1999:182-193) and Lindquist (1997:58-77) give thick ethnographic descriptions of basic core

shamanic workshops in Britain and Europe that closely parallel my workshop experiences in New Zealand. Typically, introductory core shamanic workshops take place over a weekend in rural or semi-rural retreat centres, and cover the following topics and practice exercises:

- Informal introductory talk about shamanism by the teacher/s with space for questions and answers, and general discussion or storytelling;
- Discussions about spirits, power animals or guardian spirits and other spirit helpers, neo-Shamanic cosmology, shamanic concepts of illness (I discuss the latter topic in the following chapter);
- Practice trance journeys (varying in length from approximately 15 - 30 minutes). These include journeying to the lower world to retrieve a power animal or guardian spirit, to ask for healing, to meet a plant ally, or journeys to the upper world to meet a teacher and ask for information for self or a fellow course participant;
- Divination (such as the rock divination exercise described in the previous chapter. I discuss divination further in the following chapter);
- Silent time outside in nature, extending the senses and observing (this time varies in length, but may be from 30 - 40 minutes up to an hour or longer);
- Sharing of experiences and stories around the circle, often using a talking stick.

Once sacred space is established at the beginning of a workshop in New Zealand, preparation for a neo-Shamanic journey may include further group singing, sounding, drumming or chanting a 'power song' to focus the mind and raise energy, calling in specific spirits to support the journey. Neophyte practitioners lie on the floor, sometimes with a blanket for warmth, eyes closed and covered by their forearm or a scarf, breathing gently; experienced practitioners find their own position – lying down, sitting or standing. More importantly, setting a clear intent or purpose for the journey is a crucial step before commencing drumming (during workshops it is usual for the facilitator/s to drum; outside of workshops the practitioner may drum for her/himself, or play a drum and/or rattle recording). To arrive at a clear, strong and focused intent

requires the practitioner to work through a sequence of mental processes to clarify the information sought before arriving at a position to state their intention decisively. One workshop teacher talked participants through their first shamanic journey to find their 'medicine place',¹⁰³ beginning with two full breaths and stating their intention three times: for example, 'I am journeying to my medicine place to meet a spirit guide' or 'I am journeying to meet a power animal to ask for healing (in general, or for a specific condition)'. Experienced neo-Shamans might journey for information about events in their lives, or on behalf of others; they might also journey to carry out land healing or to do psychopomp work. Whatever the purpose of their work, the strength of their intention is essential. I reiterate Terri's words (in the epigraph heading this chapter):

It is absolutely, totally my intention that takes me through, absolute intention for the healing for this person. It is the intention that carries me... I need to have laser-like focus that stays on it [her intention]; it stays on the job at all times.

A second neo-Shaman also believes his most powerful tool is his intention and passion to be a conduit for spirit for the healing of the person for whom he is journeying. As their words suggest, shamanic states of consciousness are 'intensely concentrated' (Vitebsky, 1995:148). Their intention becomes a prayer to the spirits. This state matches the 'intense concentration' termed the 'flow' experience by Csikszentmihalyi, a holistic state of total involvement that occurs when one feels in control and 'there is little distinction between self and the environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present and future' (1975:43, cited in Hume, 1999:10-11). Experienced American neo-Shamans too emphasise the importance of intention: thought, intention and sound have the power to transform the energies around us, says neo-Shaman Martin Ball (cited in White, 2007:19; Ingerman, 1991:63).

¹⁰³ The 'medicine place', in the cosmology taught to Elisabeth by her teacher, Tom Brown Jr, is a safe, sacred place reached on first entering an altered state of consciousness when journeying (see Chapter 3). Not all teachers use the imagery or concept of a 'medicine place'.

Intention, then, is a powerful tool for transformation and healing;¹⁰⁴ such a state demands relinquishing human ego – the ‘hollow bone’ Terri mentioned: ‘I’ve had to learn courage to be in this place’, she said. Lindquist (1997:118) distinguishes between intentionality (as articulated by Husserl and Kapferer) and intention or motivation. She defines intentionality as an understanding that ‘all action is directional and has a trajectory’. Intentionality, she says, is a ‘force of consciousness that is...pre-verbal and pre-conceptual...that leaps from the embodied consciousness beyond the confines of the body, towards the horizons of the life-world’. Shamans, carried by their intentionality and in an altered state of consciousness, move beyond their life-world to that of the spirits. It seems that (latent) intentionality is mobilised through intention, will and (psychic) power, and that neo-Shamans are using their intention in this sense, when it carries their consciousness beyond themselves.

Besides their focused intention, neo-Shamans require a second quality as they journey, that of a strong presence. Neo-Shamans engage with deliberate intention, and it is this intention, in combination with a powerful presence, and in partnership with their spirit helpers that transforms and heals. This state requires an intense, meditative focus. Several participants told me some form of meditation practice is essential as a means to train their mind and develop their intent and presence, and a number of participants follow a Buddhist path in tandem with their shamanic practice. The shamanic journey ‘requires presence...courage, discipline and attention to the details of the journey as well as the client’s needs’, writes American neo-Shamanic practitioner, Sandra Harner (2007:27). She defines presence as a quality found in a close relationship, a heightened state of awareness and a ‘subjective experience of *here and now*’, which may include awareness of spirits; presence is a ‘state where the material and immaterial meet, [and] can transcend the boundaries of each’, (2007:25, emphasis in original).

Anthropologist, Petra Rethmann, draws on Zen Buddhist teachings of awareness, and comes close to defining ‘presence’ as I am using it here, as a quality exuded by the shamanic healer (or any other healer who is ‘tuned into’ this way of being). ‘*Presence*’,

¹⁰⁴ Some researchers have examined the clinical implications of ‘intention’ in relation to complementary and energy medicine (Jonas, 2003).

she writes, 'is a notion that does not dwell on the future or the past but reveals what is (this is it!) in the presence, the moment, the now' (2007:38, emphasis in original). Such a state, she continues, has led her to 'new forms of being that are more audacious, centered, and connected' (2007:39), discovered when she did her fieldwork in the deep silence and presence of the Russian Far Eastern tundra that calms people (2007:43-46).¹⁰⁵ This silent presence, however, whether on the Russian tundra or within a healing ritual space is never completely empty, since it serves as a container in which audience, shaman/healer and patient rest and receive knowledge and/or healing, and is perhaps the place where the spirits reside.

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand, as with neo-Shamans in other Western countries, enact their rituals by creating sacred spaces, entering non-ordinary reality, engaging a laser-like intention and focus, and cultivating a powerful presence that enables them to perform their work. As they journey in altered states of consciousness, they encounter, sense and inter-act with other beings; seemingly miraculous events occur that are outside everyday time and space.

Neo-Shamanic Imagery

Along with many contemporary Western shamans and other groups of healers who work psychically, neo-Shamans in New Zealand receive information when journeying to other realities through several channels: many are highly visual and clairvoyant, others are clairaudient or telepathic. They might have a strong sense of smell or taste, and kinaesthetically feel sensations in their body. Some participants told me they extend their sensing into another person's auric (energy) field for information as they 'listen' to their own internal intuitive voice. Information may just 'arrive' as a revelation; the shamanic practitioner might then journey to their spirit teacher for clarification and confirmation. The information arises within as a 'mode of consciousness' (Csordas, 1994:79-80), and there is often a sense of 'rightness', an 'aha' moment of recognition.

¹⁰⁵ Transpersonal explorer, John Heron, has used the phrase 'free attention of the Universe' (2001:264), in reference to the sense of stillness and apparent impartial attention of the Universe to human endeavours, and I believe this is what Rethmann is describing here too.

A comparison can be made between the neo-Shamanic experience and that of Catholic Charismatic healers. While they have very different cosmologies, both groups experience the information they receive during healing rituals as (simultaneously and paradoxically) coming from within themselves, and from without. The Charismatics report similar channels to the neo-Shamans for gathering information: their revelatory gifts are embodied and received through all of their senses – visual, kinaesthetic, intuitive, auditory, olfactory, affective, motor, or as dreams (Csordas, 1994:87-88). The received information arises spontaneously and is perceived to be of divine origin:

[I]t is at once profoundly of the self, but at the same time is experienced as profoundly other, in a way ripe for thematization as the sacred Other acting within the self' (1994:94, emphasis in original).

For the Charismatics, 'Other' is God or the Holy Spirit, whereas the neo-Shamans are working with their spirit helpers; however, they might also perceive a Higher Power as the source of their information. The perception of spiritual experiences that arise from the self but, at the same time, exist outside of the self fits with the fourth ontological category of spirits, that of transpersonal imaginal beings (see Chapter 5).

Although neo-Shamans in New Zealand receive information through all channels, nonetheless, visual imagery tends to be the most dramatic and vivid for many. The imagery is so vivid that, on returning from her journeys, one woman said she has difficulty capturing what she has seen in words: 'I would love to have a video to bring back...it is really difficult to put some of the beauty into words'. Neo-Shamanic students learn to trust the otherworldly 'wild' and 'unbounded' images that appear during their journeys. 'Wild' images, Desjarlais says, are those that:

leapfrog into the imagination...[with] a random and roundabout slideshow of perceptions - a rock, a cave, a thoroughfare – that excites the senses and entices imagination in a particular way (1996:155).

In non-ordinary reality, animals and birds appear, people are magically transported, the landscape changes suddenly, and information is conveyed by

thoughts. American fantasy storywriter and shamanic student, Michael Haas, has observed similarities between his process when engaged in story writing and that of shamanic journeying, in terms of imagery. He has found that the 'ecstatic state of the shamanic journey feels to me remarkably similar to my state of flow in fantasy writing' (2007:50).

This leads into a consideration of the sources of neo-Shamanic imagery that New Zealand neo-Shamans are exposed to. I consider two possible theories, that of the social construction of imagery, and the idea that neo-Shamans are tapping into universal sources of mystical knowledge. Neo-Shamans consciously and unconsciously absorb imagery from many sources in their lives that become available later when they enter shamanic states of consciousness. Magliocco has theorised one possible mechanism as to how an individual's spiritual imagery is socially constructed, arising through exposure to many influences and cultures in a globalised world:

[P]ersonal spiritual experience has roots in the autonomous imagination, a part of the unconscious that combines individual memories and psychological material with elements from the surrounding culture. Because of globalization, transnationalism, and the explosion of information on the World Wide Web, middle-class whites now have unprecedented access to information, symbols, and practices from other cultural and religious traditions. These entities come to possess them, to inhabit their imaginations in ways that would have been impossible a century ago, and they become incorporated into the reserve of symbols from which the autonomous imagination draws in creating spiritual visions (2004:228-229).

As an explanation of unconscious processes, this concept seems valid. It explains the type of imagery and spirit helpers frequently encountered by neo-Shamans during altered states of reality; the imagery correlates to the sources they have had most exposure to (Native American, Celtic, Christian, Egyptian and so on) and which have become meaningful to the individual. All contemporary Western shamans, including those in New Zealand, therefore have a rich well of potential material to draw from.

However, there is some consensus amongst other researchers exploring the ontological and epistemological structure of visual imagery associated with mystical experiences such as shamanic journeying, which proposes that not all images are socially constructed. At least some shamanistic conceptions and imagery are the expression of universal experiences, and not shaped by 'cultural milieu, belief structures, autobiographical memories' (Rock & Baynes, 2005:60-61). Rock and Baynes admit though that methodological issues make it difficult to determine conclusively whether images are actually context-free or whether they derive from the shaman's pre-existing imagery or memories that they have 'forgotten', a case of 'cryptoamnesia' (Ferrer, 2002:216). This debate may be inconclusive, although Ferrer (2002:149-151, 216-217) cites empirical evidence from Grof suggesting that some people in non-ordinary reality are able to access visions and universal symbols that they can immediately and intuitively understand, even when they had no previous interest in mysticism or 'were strongly opposed to anything esoteric' (Grof, 1988:139, cited in Ferrer, 2002:150).

Neo-Shamans, journeying in altered states of consciousness encounter colourful and fantastical worlds that they 'see' or sense through multiple channels. Their imagery comes from many sources, and it is likely that they contain elements that are both socially constructed, and universally accessible to all mystics. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand are subject to all these influences, and whatever their source, the images arrive to support and validate their relationships with their spirit allies.

Completion of the Ritual

The end of the trance journey is signalled by a change in drumbeat (the 'callback'). In introductory neo-Shamanic workshops in New Zealand, participants are taught to thank their spirit helpers and retrace the steps taken during their journey, back to ordinary reality. A period of integration follows, during which insights, often received in symbolic form, are 'captured'. Individuals journeying for themselves are encouraged to write down their experiences to help 'solidify' information gathered from their time in non-ordinary reality. Later, the journey may be shared within the group; this strengthens bonds between group members and normalises or confirms unusual psychic phenomena, as I described in my journey to meet a spirit warrior (Chapter 3).

In my experience, this can be a subtle process as participants attempt to translate and articulate information perhaps glimpsed for the first time.

After journeying for someone else, a time of mutual sharing follows as the practitioner re-counts the story of what he or she sensed in non-ordinary reality. The sharing of stories while still in a liminal space entails a gentle dance back and forth between the practitioner and the person they journeyed for: the practitioner describes their journey, and the person receiving the information expands, develops, interprets and reframes it to fit their reality. Confirmation or affirmation of the information received sometimes validates the journey experience for the practitioner. Although this is an inter-subjective interaction ultimately, individuals have to find their own meanings, and it may require the receiver to do follow-up journeys for themselves to refine and integrate or clarify the received information. This period of sharing is an important aspect of core neo-Shamanic rituals in New Zealand; workshop participants spoke of the 'sacred' and 'intimate' nature of this time. It is a delicate art, bringing something from the non-material realm to the material: images, sounds, kinaesthetically received information that conveys the essence of a particular experience in non-ordinary reality is brought into the physical realm of everyday reality. Attempting to articulate an intensely subjective experience to another is a tender and potentially fraught process, one participant told me. At the same time, he said, as the receiver, he found he had to really 'open up' to the information being received, to ask himself the question, 'How does this resonate with me?' Lindquist describes a similar dynamic exchange between shamanic practitioners and their clients, observed during Scandinavian neo-Shamanic rituals (1997:84, 86-87, 117; 2004:161-164). The process is also possibly similar to the post-ritual de-briefing conversations Appleton witnessed amongst the Melanau people of Sarawak. She found that people sought clarification later, their conversations serving a 'revelatory or *unmasking*' function that may be cathartic as material from the subconscious comes into conscious awareness and is integrated (2006:268-269, emphasis in original).

The sharing of information gained while the practitioner is in non-ordinary reality is central to neo-Shamanic practices in New Zealand and, as the preceding paragraphs suggest, perhaps the most challenging. For the journey to be effective – in the sense of

producing positive change or new insights – it requires honesty, trust and (as Terri commented, above) courage. Blain has written that the non-visible component of shamanic ‘imaginal performances’ – their interactions with the spirits while in non-ordinary reality – leaves shamans ‘most open to the (outsider’s) charge of invention’ (2002:25). Lindquist makes a similar observation in her analysis of soul loss and soul retrieval as a neo-Shamanic healing ritual. She suggests that a suspension of judgment is required (on the part of a non-participating observer) as the ‘reality’ of the ‘ritual’s internal discourse...seen by the participants’ “inner eye”...becomes shared through shamanic performances and, most importantly, through narratives of the journeys’ (2004:158). This is no doubt true in relation to ‘outsiders’, but the format of a typical neo-Shamanic workshop in New Zealand, where each person is equally vulnerable, likely minimises the risk of charges of invention amongst insiders; nonetheless, a high level of trust between participants is necessary.

Sharing the trance journey completes the ritual. Compared with preparations to establish sacred space for an individual healing session, or at the beginning of a workshop, closure is a relatively simple process. The practitioner (in the case of a private healing session), or the teachers at the conclusion of a workshop, acknowledge and thank the spirit helpers who have come forward to support the work. Workshop participants form a closing circle around the altar, spiritual support from the cardinal directions is acknowledged, and the candles are blown out to signify a return to everyday reality.

There is one further consideration to conclude this aspect of neo-Shamanic practices in New Zealand: that of ethical and safety issues. Given the complex and subtle nature of shamanism, it is unsurprising that the history of shamanism is rife with stories of the use and abuse of power, as one neo-Shaman pointed out to me. During the shaman gatherings I attended, conversations frequently turned towards ethics and questioning whether shamanic practitioners require supervision. For many participants, ethical practice is an internal process of listening and following the direction of Spirit and their spirit-helpers, requiring them to take the ‘ultimate responsibility’ of working from their heart, as one woman expressed it. Such an approach may not always protect clients from misguided practices, however, and Shen

requires his students to consider the Principles of Integrity developed by the *Society for Shamanic Practitioners* (SSP) and from that, to develop their own Code of Ethics.¹⁰⁶

For one neo-Shaman, the fact that ethics came up for discussion at the start of the first shamans' gathering indicated to her that the group was 'serious about moving the work out into the world and perhaps coming up against examination [and] challenges from established, more conventional practitioners'. As a psychotherapist and a shamanic practitioner, Shen is comfortable and familiar with supervision; however, he has mixed feelings about this in relation to shamanic practitioners. Supervision, he writes, is a Western concept arising from management, health and psychotherapy organisations within a potentially litigious Western milieu; shamans in villages didn't need supervisors because:

[I]n the context of the tribal structure, which of its very nature imposes its own iron logic on the behaviour of the individual there would be a restraint on any excess or extreme deviancy from the accepted values of the group (pers. comm. 15 Feb 2009).

Shen is expressing the same issues as those raised by scholar Eleanor Ott, who noted the limitations and risks when neo-Shamans no longer work within the safeguards of a community with shared understandings about accumulated cultural experiences and wisdom. Furthermore, Ott writes, '[o]nly with vigilance and the constant discipline of honestly examining one's own motives...can one get beyond one's own shadow self' (2001:284). For neo-Shamans, working without traditional community safeguards, and in a society that demands accountability, it may no longer be sufficient (and perhaps a little naïve) for them to say they rely solely on guidance from the spirits. Their clients expect to be physically, emotionally and psychically safe. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand, along with those in other Western countries are developing new forms of shamanism that, while similar to indigenous shamanisms in some respects, are also evolving to create practices that are relevant to the 21st century

¹⁰⁶ See <http://www.shamansociety.org/members/ethics-integrity.html>. A much more comprehensive Code of Ethics is on the SSP website. See <http://www.shamansociety.org/members/ethics-shaman.html> (accessed 19 Feb 2010).

Westerner. These require new structures and safeguards that provide safe and ethical containers to support their spiritual work; at the same time, the structures must be flexible enough to avoid becoming rigid doctrines.

Neo-Shamans in Nature

The second important shamanic thread for Terri (in the epigraph heading this chapter) is 'nature...this planet, this earth, this universe...I have always been in love with nature, in all its forms...it wasn't just sitting under a tree, it was merging with nature' she said. I conclude this chapter with an account of what 'merging with nature' means in terms of (some) neo-Shamanic inter-actions and relationships with 'nature'. 'Being in nature' or 'getting back to nature' are post-modern Western ideals that play an important role in neo-Shamanic and neo-Pagan circles. My research suggests that while neo-Shamans in New Zealand do not have a common political identity as feminists or environmental activists in the ways that Goddess followers do (as described by Rountree, 2009:245), nevertheless shamanic perspectives of an animated world, along with concerns about their human and other-than-human communities informs their lives and practices as shamans.

Neo-Shamans have been criticised because they romanticise 'nature', unconscious actors in the dual processes of disenchantment and resacralisation that have their origins in nineteenth century philosophies of nature in Europe and America (von Stuckrad, 2002:771, 784, 790). Rather than engaging with these complex historical discourses, I examine neo-Shamanic relations with nature through the lens of contemporary transpersonal theorising, and that of the 'new' animism (Harvey, 2005), exploring the ways that neo-Shamans in New Zealand seek to merge with all beings in an inspired world. The notion of 'relational' animism as proposed by Nurit Bird-David (2002) is relevant to the discussion since an animistic worldview infuses the shamanic practices and way of life of neo-Shamans in New Zealand, and is especially evident in their perceptions and connections with the natural world around them.

The 'merging with nature' Terri described is beyond subjective/objective dualisms. She and other neo-Shamans depict a process not unlike that eloquently expressed by

transpersonal writer, Richard Tarnas. His view of nature is a co-created and reciprocal 'unfolding' between humans and the natural world:

The essential reality of nature is not separate, self-contained, and complete in itself, so that the human mind can examine it "objectively" and register it from without. Rather, nature's unfolding truth emerges only with the active participation of the human mind. Nature's reality is not merely phenomenal, nor is it independent and objective; rather, it is something that comes into being through the very act of human cognition (Tarnas, 1991:434, cited in Ferrer, 2002:155).

This perspective suggests that the essence of 'nature', perhaps like that of spirits, arises and emerges when humans attend to the phenomenological world around them. 'Nature' shifts from being *just* a resource for humans to utilise, to conscious phenomena humans interact with, and potentially merge with in the web of life. Neo-Shamans communicate verbally and non-verbally with animals, plants, stones and thereby change them, and are themselves changed.

The reciprocal relationship that develops then creates a space in which healing can occur, as one woman explained. Merging with nature was an important aspect of her healing journey after serious illness, being 'utterly present' to herself connected her into the 'web of all consciousness, in that moment'. She said she was "'told" intuitively to start working with nature, being available to be loved really, and bringing in the love forces of nature'.¹⁰⁷ She went on to say that:

[I]t cuts through...separateness and individual[ity]; there is that connection to everything, and so all information is available across time and space. I've had experiences like that in nature. I've been completely present, utterly into nature, and things have just morphed out of solidity into energy in front of my eyes -

¹⁰⁷ Von Stuckrad (2002:787, 789-790) argues that 'love' in nature is a theme apparent in romantic pantheism and amongst neo-Shamans. This may be true but the point I want to make here is that the experience of this woman and other neo-Shamans is primarily that of merging in a reciprocal relationship rather than one of idealising and romanticising 'nature' as 'other'.

everything just became vibrating light energy and not solid. It's always been when I've been fully present, when my mind has been really still.

When she is in that state of complete merging with everything around her, her universe becomes a vibrating network of energies that connects all things, 'the community of life' recognised by animistic societies (Harvey & Wallis, 2007:146). The state this woman describes is a meditative one and is consistent with Buber's relational spirituality (1970, cited in Ferrer, 2002:119), or Nurit Bird-David's relational epistemology (2002), which I turn to now, beginning firstly with one participant's story to illustrate.

A grandparent supported and validated Jules's early experiences of communicating with insects and animals, and seeing the fairy world in nature. As an adult, she trained as a nurse before travelling for ten years, working as a nurse and learning from indigenous healers around the world. On her return, she trained as a naturopath and medical herbalist 'because what I'd learnt...I couldn't put on a wall' and she felt she needed the formal qualifications to give authority to her healing work. Now, she specialises in native bush medicine and works with the spirits of the plants to create her own medicines. She has found that when she is harvesting, for example, kawakawa (*Macropiper excelsum*) the leaves do not always release easily unless she first talks to the plant and asks if she can take some leaves for medicine. Each leaf then comes away easily into her hand: 'It's like all the healing medicine from the bush rushes into that leaf ready for picking'.

Talking and working with the trees and plants in this manner is a serious and genuine reaching out to establish a relationship with the plants and their plant-spirit medicine, perhaps comparable to that of the hunter-gatherer Nayaka people of southern India with whom Nurit Bird-David worked:

'Talking' is shorthand for a two-way responsive relatedness with a tree - rather than 'speaking' one-way to it, as if it could listen and understand. 'Talking with' stands for attentiveness to variances and invariances in behavior and response of things in states of relatedness and for getting to know such things as they change

through the vicissitudes over time of the engagement with them (Bird-David, 2002:96).

Such processes then develop a sense of 'we-ness' rather than 'otherness' (2002:96). These ideas are central to the ways many neo-Shamans conceptualise their relationships with human and other-than-human persons in their environment. Amongst neo-Shamans in New Zealand, the deep desire to expand their senses, transcend dualities and experience 'oneness' in nature was a strong aspect of their attraction to shamanism. At the end of the yearlong shamanic training course I participated in, all of the trainees reported that one of the most rewarding highlights of the year were the Sunday mornings outside in nature, extending their senses and being present to all that was around them as much as they were able. This time outside took place whatever the weather conditions: it was not simply an exercise in romance as we bushwhacked our way through dense undergrowth and experienced 'nature' in all her moods, including gales, fog and rain that tested our endurance at times.

For a second woman, also recovering from a serious illness, the aspect of her exploration of spirituality, healing and shamanism that most delighted her were her times in nature. Her yearning for an intimate connection with the natural world is something she has come to as an adult, and is a bridge to deepen her bonds with her Māori heritage. She told me:

The nature connections for me just filled me up in a way that I find incredibly precious. I'm very grateful for that and it's more than just being connected or being out in nature. I felt that it was my own nature being in nature. What I really wanted to learn was how to 'read' and be in nature in a way that maybe I haven't experienced previously. The seeing beyond seeing, the hearing beyond hearing, and developing faculties of perceptiveness that may be latent in me. I felt stirrings of that, of being able to see signs or just the spirit consciousness with nature. When we [she and her husband] spend time with a kuia [Māori woman elder] of ours, she is in tune; she is speaking the language of the universe. It's something I am searching for, and I am really willing to learn. That was a really profound part of my shamanic experiences.

This woman's deep desire and spiritual search is to 'come home' to herself, her own nature in 'nature' and, at the same time, she has a willingness to humble herself and learn, a coming home to her cultural roots that is deeply healing on all aspects of her being.

The wish to communicate and work with spirits in nature need not necessarily involve being in untamed 'wilderness'. One woman aims to work with the devas and spirits in her suburban garden, not assuming that she knows best what is needed for her plants to thrive. She described her process of learning to extend her sensing, opening to, and respecting the community of plant spirits in her garden:

Spirits come to me as a sensation, almost like a gentle breeze in the inner world; if they are not so friendly, they are somewhat denser. When I have been working with plant spirits, I have seen different types of beings in my mind's eye; for example, in my work with evening primrose, she appeared to me as a woman in her prime, many hands out-stretched filled with many, many gifts. Her energy is filled with joy; her light is yellow, white and a touch of green.

Working with Plantain, I got a sense of a glorious female being, a full skirt of plantain leaves. Her medicine is of a strengthening kind. Her veins are strong and full, her colour deep, her flower upright and strong.

For me now, most importantly is to give time for the experience to happen... to wait and be present to what is there without jumping the gun as it were. Creating balance in my environment can only happen in this way, I cannot do it alone and need the help and support of the nature spirit community around me... and there is another key... it is a community, and to respect that.

The work to date on getting to know the spirits have involved really spending time with the plants... observing how they are, looking at each part of them in great detail... drawing them, meditating on them... asking for the spirit to talk to me. This starts with walking in the garden observing what I'm looking at and what calls me, being present in the garden. When I feel drawn to a particular plant, sitting with it... seeing but also feeling the sensations in my body...is this plant already gifting me something? Our mother [the earth] is so incredible... going

deeper and deeper into what I'm seeing and feeling... opening my heart to this experience... In this time of looking hearing feeling the sensation of hearing/feeling colour and seeing sound can occur (pers.comm. 28 April 2009).

By being with the plants in this meditative and patient, receptive way, each teacher plant reveals its medicine to her. Some altered states of consciousness and deep meditation states extend the senses in unusual ways. This woman's experience sometimes manifested as a crossing-over of the senses so that they 'translate into each other'; seeing becomes non-visual and colours can be heard or smelt (Taussig, 1993:57-58, cited in Uzendoski, 2008:16). Synaesthesia, the mixing of two or more senses is relatively common amongst many healing traditions (Tedlock, 2009:7). Uzendoski is writing about his experience in Amazonian Ecuador and Peru, describing personal healings he received amidst the overwhelming sensory 'somatic poetry' of the Amazon, but this need not be only in the context of a romanticised exotic 'other' place; it can happen in an 'ordinary' suburban garden in New Zealand.

Some neo-Shamans in New Zealand are seeking to merge with nature in a process of reciprocal co-creation and communication that is beyond dualistic concepts of self and other. They wish to co-operate with the communities of embodied or disembodied spirits living in their environment, be they in an urban, rural or wilderness setting. This is not a romanticised perspective of a separate, pristine untouched 'nature' but an earthy desire to communicate with all beings who co-habit the surrounding spaces. By extending their senses, neo-Shamans intimately connect with the vibrating web of life, developing a two-way relational connection that sometimes allows deep healing.

I began this chapter with an extended transcript of an interview with one neo-Shaman about the fundamental aspects of neo-Shamanism for her, as an example of neo-Shamanic practices in New Zealand. The typical format of neo-Shamanic rituals performed in New Zealand during workshops, or individual healings, demonstrate similarities to those of core shamanism in other areas such as Europe and North America. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand, as with neo-Shamans from other countries, are animists who perceive of the shamanic trance journey to the spirits, and connection to nature within the Web of Oneness as the two key platforms from which all else in their practice derives. Their power as shamanic practitioners is dependent on their

ability to enter altered states of consciousness, to surrender ego, engage with strong intent and develop presence to work with their spirit helpers for themselves and on behalf of others. Their desire to merge reciprocally with all other beings, seen and unseen, in their environment is an example of a new relational form of animism.

Shamanism, in all of its numerous guises, is about healing in the broadest sense of the word – healing individuals, their communities and their environment. In this respect, all shamans are healers, although not all healers are necessarily shamans. In the following chapter, I explore shamanism as a system of healing, drawing on the experiences of neo-Shamans, situating them within the larger complementary and alternative medicine, and biomedical healing milieux in New Zealand.

CHAPTER 7

**MEDICAL PLURALISM IN NEW ZEALAND:
SHAMANIC HEALING, COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE
MEDICINE, AND BIOMEDICINE**

Healing is much more like planting a seed, or like nudging a rolling ball to slightly change its trajectory so that it ends up in a different place, than it is like lightning striking or mountains moving (Csordas, 2002:5).

* * * *

[S]hamanic healing reveals its own general character: a complex development of the skills of taking disease out of the body, using a consciousness of the disease as a kind of substance, that is, a “spirit substance” – a paradox for our minds; a subtle and real sense of spirits; the courage to go into trance, that wild yet controlled condition; an understanding of the nature of the human soul, which can become lost; and a strong notion of the spiritual character of the cosmos, combining what we call “nature” with an ethic of respect and of getting in step with the cosmological cycle (Turner, 1994:237).

* * * *

This chapter explores the diverse nature of healing in relation to shamanic healing and its position within the complementary and biomedical fields in New Zealand and in other Western countries, while the following chapter engages with contemporary Māori healing (which might be construed as a form of shamanic healing) within the context of Māori cosmology and spirituality. What do we mean by ‘healing’? How do people ‘heal’? These questions have long intrigued me, and they are central to my research. Of course, I am not the first person to be curious about the mystery that some call ‘healing’. The interfaces between ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’, ‘healing’, ‘curing’ and ‘biomedicine’ are multifaceted (Sered & Barnes, 2005:9). In Native American healing traditions, medicine and religion are ‘two sides of the same coin’, Hultkrantz says (1992:1), and while it may not always be immediately apparent, this is true for all

cultures and their healing traditions. To some extent, all healing systems (including biomedicine) have elements of ritual healing (and certainly systems of belief) embedded within them, the difference being that in some systems, the ritualistic component is more overt than in others. South African-born medical anthropologist and family medical practitioner, Cecil Helman (2007) lived and practised in the United Kingdom for almost thirty years. He describes himself as a 'suburban shaman' navigating his way amongst his patients' beliefs and stories, their family histories and communities. His is a performative role, carried out for his patients' benefit, his clinical paraphernalia – medical books, framed certificates, surgical instruments, prescription pad – 'multi-faceted mnemonics', as powerful as any shamanic toolkit (2007:188). He likens his role to services performed by shamans throughout the ages and within all cultures, as he attempts to listen, reorder chaos, restore balance and equilibrium, and help his patients to find peace.

The same interfaces between healing and spirituality are apparent in New Zealand too, as Patricia Laing's study of Māori healing, Western medicine, and alternative therapies and spiritualities illustrates. Complex healing narratives result when 'spirituality, religion, medicine and magic' intersect (2002:160). Upon Laing's diagnosis of breast cancer, the Māori healers whom she had worked with for many years (as a researcher) viewed her illness as a spiritual condition, whereas Europeans tended to focus on the physical aetiology.¹⁰⁸ Medical pluralism has always existed in New Zealand,¹⁰⁹ evidenced over the last thirty or forty years by its visible and growing complementary and alternative medicine sector,¹¹⁰ traditional Māori healers (some

¹⁰⁸ For Māori, Laing's illness was seen as the result of a breach of tapu. The simplest translation for tapu is sacred or restriction, set apart (Barlow, 1991:128; Marsden [in Royal, 2003] and Shirres, [1997] give fuller explanations of this concept).

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Michael Belgrave's (1991) history of the rise of the medical professions in New Zealand from 1860 to 1939 that describes the wide range of orthodox and non-orthodox therapies employed by early Pākehā settlers.

¹¹⁰ Some complementary and alternative practitioners are seeking recognition within the orthodox health system and in 2007, the New Zealand Minister of Health approved Western Medical Herbalism for statutory regulation as a health profession under the *Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003*. However, the implementation of this approval was delayed due to a review of the Act and in May 2010, the herbalists were informed that they would need to re-apply for statutory regulation under the revised Act. Other practitioners express concerns that these professionalisation processes, with their corresponding drive towards evidence-based

working within the government-funded health system and some independently [O'Connor, 2008]), along with an influx of immigrants from the Pacific Islands, Asia, Africa, and other countries in more recent years. Many of these groups bring their traditional healing practices with them, and their different understandings of wellness and illness.

However, little has been written about the role of shamanic healers in New Zealand within this pluralistic healing culture. Neo-Shamanic healers are taking shamanism in new directions, developing 21st century forms of Western shamanic practices, evidence of the chameleon-like and novel abilities of shamanism to adapt and change, a theme I return to in Chapter 9. In this chapter, I describe core neo-Shamanic concepts of illness and healing (the dominant form of neo-Shamanism practised by my research participants), before discussing shamanic healing more broadly in relation to sex and gender, ecstasy and enstasy. I suggest that some contemporary healers work in enstatic altered states to access inner wisdom and knowledge. This leads into an analysis of the hazy boundaries between shamanic healers, complementary and alternative, and (some) biomedical practitioners. I argue that some practitioners consciously or unconsciously (and instinctively) incorporate shamanistic-like techniques and tools into their work, creating fusion models of healing. While at least some of these contemporary healers might be considered shamans in disguise, nomenclature issues around whether or not they are shamans are less important than the fact that their healing practices have widened to include implicitly or explicitly a spiritual dimension.¹¹¹

Core Neo-Shamanic Concepts of Illness and Healing

Firstly, I outline some neo-Shamanic healing practices in New Zealand, comparing them with the literature about indigenous shamanic healing and core neo-Shamanic healing in other Western countries. Comprehension of shamanic concepts of illness

medicine, might lead to a loss of the underlying vitalistic paradigm of alternative healing systems (Dew, 2003; Sanson, 2001).

¹¹¹ Some Christian medical practitioners who use prayer are also overtly incorporating spiritual elements into their healing work; they would not consider themselves shamans however, and I am not including this group of practitioners in the following discussion.

requires suspension of an approach to understanding knowledge derived from dominant biomedical and scientific paradigms, and a willingness to consider the possibility of subtle psychic energy and spirits as 'real' entities that shamans and some other categories of healers manipulate for healing. Neo-Shamanic healing rituals are therefore intimately related to, and flow from their cosmological beliefs about spirits and the potential for spirits to cause harm, or to heal. Neo-Shamans work within a tripartite model of a person composed of body, mind and spirit, with an emphasis on the spiritual aspect. All illnesses are perceived as being spiritually based. One woman said her clients' ailments 'could be emotional, physical, mental, or spiritual; quite often, it is all combined. We use those terms, and yet it is just one'. For this woman, the different categories all represent aspects of a person's being and cannot be compartmentalised or separated from the whole person. She heals by journeying on behalf of her clients to find the spiritual cause of their illness, whatever ailment they present and wherever they are perceived to originate from. However, as I show later in this chapter, neo-Shamanic practitioners work in various ways, and some combine trance journeying with other healing modalities such as psychotherapeutic and energy work, or the use of herbal medicine to create individualised healing systems for each client or patient.

Core neo-Shamanic concepts of illness, as taught in other Western countries and by neo-Shamanic teachers in New Zealand, describe the following categories of illness:

- Shamanic extractions to remove spiritual intrusions or energetic blocks, after power loss or soul loss that leaves a void in the afflicted person. A shaman detects intrusions during a diagnostic journey or some other divinatory process;
- Power loss manifested as depression, chronic misfortune or illness, suicidal feelings. Remedied by power animal retrieval, retrieval of a symbol (spiritual gift), or by vision questing;

- Soul loss as the result of shock, deep grief, an accident or abuse all of which manifest as feelings of not belonging, depression, psychological dissociation, addictions. Soul retrievals return the lost soul part and, as one teacher said, they are central to understanding spiritual illness.

These illness categories are similar to those recognised by shamans in many other cultures, although there are numerous regional and cultural variations (see Vitebsky, 1995:98-103 for a summary of several shamanic healing systems worldwide). Appleton (2006:158-159), in her study of Melanau healers of Sarawak, identified three general classes of illness that largely mirror neo-Shamanic perspectives: 'soul loss' (requiring soul retrieval); symbolic attack or invasion by non-human forces or spirits (healed by driving out the invading force through sucking, massage, or bathing with water); and symbolic attack by other humans ('black magic', which requires invoking a stronger power to overcome the attacking forces). Anthropologist Forest Clements worked with Native Americans in the 1930s and outlined their concepts of health and illness, describing such categories as disease-object intrusion, soul loss, spirit intrusion, sorcery or breach of taboo (Ellenberger, 1974:5). The extraction of intrusions is almost universal practice amongst Native American traditions, the foreign object or disease spirits sucked, bitten, or stroked away with a wing feather (Hultkrantz, 1992:89). Many neo-Shamans, trained within core shamanism, follow practices derived from Native American traditions. Neo-Shamanic extraction rituals are described shortly but, firstly, I discuss diagnostic and divination techniques commonly used by neo-Shamans in New Zealand as a means for accessing knowledge.

Diagnosis and Divination

As with shamans and diviners from many cultures who routinely use divination as a tool to retrieve hidden knowledge, neo-Shamans in New Zealand learn to use divining skills as a diagnostic aid, and to assist them when performing healings.¹¹² They use a

¹¹² The symbolism and sociocultural significance of Ndembu divinatory rituals, for example, have been analysed in detail by Victor Turner (1968: 25-51). See Winkelman & Peek's (2004) edited volume, *Divination and Healing*, for a series of contemporary descriptions of divinatory

variety of divinatory methods as a means of gaining subtle information that is not otherwise available. This may include a diagnostic trance journey to meet the spirit of the patient, to ask what healing is required. At other times, information is gathered intuitively through multiple sensory channels, and often several forms of divination are combined to triangulate, and verify or confirm the knowledge obtained. In my experience, assessment of empirical information often suddenly and surprisingly unites with a strong sense of inner certainty and 'rightness'. One neo-Shaman expressed this to me as being in alignment with her body, mind and heart. My experience, and that of this participant parallel Tedlock's proposal that intuition is a 'form of instant interpretation, or "tuning in" that pushes into...conscious awareness...[as a result of] "opening up" to inner promptings deriving from deep psychodynamic forces' (Tedlock, 2009:8).

The neo-Shaman's body becomes a divinatory tool in some situations. During one workshop, in response to yes or no questions posed by themselves, participants learnt to 'feel' the answers viscerally as heat, goose bumps or some other physical manifestation. The purpose was to develop their intuitive abilities; divinatory information is thus 'deeply-embodied insight' (Tedlock, 2009:8; 2006), the 'gut instinct' recognised by many people, not only shamans or other intuitive healers. Information received when in altered states of consciousness, may combine with intuitive insights, or through mechanical procedures such as the observation of omens, patterns and symbols (Tedlock, 2009:7-8). Neo-Shamans in New Zealand observe omens and signs in nature, such as during a rock divination process (see Chapter 5), or by noticing the presence and movements of birds or animals. (The sound of a grey warbler singing outside my window captures my attention as I write this.)

By working to expand their senses and develop other ways of knowing using a combination of divinatory techniques, neo-Shamans are challenging Western science and 'paying extra' to shamanism as they validate indigenous knowledge (Harvey, 1997:107). Moreover, some scientific evidence appears to support what shamans have always known. Drawing on the work of biologist and geneticist Mae-Wan Ho and her

practices amongst people from areas as widespread as Africa (Tanzania, Zambia, the Congo, Kenya and Nigeria), Central and North America, Thailand, India, Buryatia and Tuva.

co-workers that suggests cognitive information is stored within a protein matrix throughout the body, and citing current mind-body research, Tedlock has developed a theory of divination. Sudden intuitive insights occur when streams of information stored in the protein matrix are released (2009:9). Divinatory processes combine intuitive, inductive and logical-analytic cognition so that 'jumbled ideas, metaphors, and symbols suggest various possible interpretations which slowly give way to an ordered sequencing and to more limited interpretations' (2009:6-7). In this model, divinatory information is obtained from information physically stored in the shaman's body, in combination with intuitive and cognitive knowledge gathered during the divinatory procedure. Sometimes this might occur as a delicate two-way process of questioning and answering, with subtle energy exchanges occurring between neo-Shaman and client as they move backwards and forwards in a gentle dance until an answer becomes clear. This process is perhaps similar to that observed during Ndembu divination rituals where Ndembu diviners balance their spiritual inspiration or intuition with a 'shrewd reading' of their client's situation in a 'subtle, interactive process' that aims for 'transactional revelation' (Brown 1997:86).

Extraction of Spiritual Intrusions

Shamanic illness schemas include concepts about harmful spirit 'stuff', detected through a combination of divinatory methods, which becomes lodged in someone as an intrusion, usually after some form of trauma. The belief is that unless intrusions are removed, they will cause illness. Intrusions are foreign energetic particles that do not belong in someone's energy field; they transgress the boundaries of the body, although the person affected will usually not be aware of their presence until they become sick, or they are detected by a shaman. One participant told me she clairvoyantly 'sees' intrusions as 'entities' she likens to 'magnetic viruses' that 'weave their way into the human body.' Her description is not unlike that which French anthropologist Jean-Pierre Chaumeil (2001:272-276) employs to describe the invisible projectiles or darts of Amazonian shamans; he writes that the darts are living entities equivalent to viruses.¹¹³

¹¹³ Spirit helpers or darts are given various names by different Amazonian cultures (for example, *tsentsak* or *yachay*); they are only visible to the shaman under the influence of a

In some instances, neo-Shamans told me they interpret an intrusion as a spirit belonging to a dead person that has entered the patient's body. This may involve depossession work, a particular form of extraction work to remove the spirit, followed by a psychopomp ritual to send the lost or confused spirit away.

There are some correspondences between shamanic perspectives of illness and healing and that of Catholic Charismatic healers, as described by Csordas (1994, 2001), although Charismatic practices are situated within a Christian cosmology and Charismatic healers do not think they are practising shamanism. Both groups of healers work to discern and then remove spirits that have breached the boundaries of the body. The 'space' left when the spiritual intrusion is removed must then be filled by a power animal retrieval or soul retrieval in the case of neo-Shamanism, or with 'God's Love' in Charismatic healings. Table 7.1 summarises and compares the steps in neo-Shamanic and Catholic Charismatic healings.

Table 7.1 Comparisons of Stages in Neo-Shamanic Healing and Catholic Charismatic Healing as Described by Csordas (1994, 2001)

Neo-Shamanic Healing	Catholic Charismatic Healing
Diagnosis and Divination	Discernment of Spirits and their Manifestation
Extraction of an Intrusion	Dispatching the Spirits, or Deliverance from Evil Spirits (exorcism or 'casting out')
Power Animal Retrieval and/or Soul Retrieval	Filling the Empty Space 'with God's Love' or 'fruits of the Spirit' (Peace and Joy)
Integration of Healing	Incremental Efficacy, i.e. gradual improvement

There are other differences between the two systems: Catholic Charismatic healers work towards the deliverance from the effects of evil spirits (Csordas, 1994:168-176); they perceive of intrusions as 'intelligent, nonmaterial being[s] that [are] *irredeemably evil*' (Csordas, 1994:225-227, my emphasis), whereas shamanic intrusions are not

hallucinogenic cocktail (Harner, 1972, cited in Johnson, 2003:352; Harner, 1990:16, 2001; Luna, 1992:232). However, the virus-like spiritual darts of these shamans have the capability of being either pathogenic or therapeutic. They are part of a complex cosmological and social system that is very different to that of this New Zealand neo-Shaman and I am not implying there is an equivalence, beyond similarities in terminology used by her and Chaumeil.

necessarily viewed by all neo-Shamans as evil so much as misplaced energy (Ingerman, 2003:79). Individual perceptions of the nature or origins of the 'misplaced' energy vary amongst neo-Shamans, however. One woman, for example, told me she 'sees' spirit entities who display different personalities just as humans do: there are 'funny ones, bastards, tricksters, [some] evil, [some] good...' but the ones with the most malign personalities are those most likely to attach themselves to humans. Her perspective is possibly more aligned with indigenous shamanic cosmologies rather than more New Age-like interpretations.

Prior to performing an extraction, the neo-Shamanic practitioners I observed carry out a diagnostic 'scan' of the patient's body to detect any intrusions, by moving his or her hands close to the patient's body. The hands, sensitised to energy changes, detect 'hot' or 'cold' areas that may indicate an intrusion.¹¹⁴ Alternatively, the neo-Shaman, while in an altered state of consciousness energetically 'enters' into, and 'moves' through the patient's body to sense and detect any intrusions. Working with, and directed by her or his spirit helpers, the practitioner then 'removes' any intrusions by 'pulling' them out energetically using their hands, or with an object such as a feather or crystal, or by sucking. For both indigenous shamans and for neo-Shamans, there are risks inherent in using sucking techniques during extraction procedures. Wallis (2003:72) mentions that the practice of extracting a malignant entity by physically sucking and then spitting it out was stopped in some core shamanic workshops in the United Kingdom as it was thought to be too dangerous; hands were used to work the spirit out in one workshop extraction healing he observed. In spite of the risks, I have observed practitioners in New Zealand using sucking to remove spirit entities. More recently, however, I have heard experienced neo-Shamans say they have stopped the practice of sucking out intrusions, as they felt it was too dangerous for the practitioner. The risk is that the intrusion will then attach itself to the shaman, who may become ill her or himself.

Some neo-Shamans said there are still risks involved when applying other methods to extract intrusions. After attending a weeklong soul retrieval training, one woman

¹¹⁴ This is similar to a process described in the previous chapter, in which the practitioner used a rattle to 'track energy' in the patient's body. In this case, the practitioner's hands are the diagnostic tool.

told me about an incident when the group had not (energetically) 'cleaned up' properly after some extraction work, meaning that they had not completely released the extracted entities from themselves and the room. The next day she and several other participants felt ill and could not breathe; one woman went outside and vomited. Workshop participants had to 'cleansed' the room. Removing malign energies from a room might include procedures such as using crystals to 'capture' the unwanted spirit stuff; later, the crystals are purified in fresh or salt water, or by placing them outside to be cleansed in the elements. The woman told me 'it was a real lesson' for her about the importance of 'spiritual hygiene' and the need for psychic energies to be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately; she now has 'real respect' for shamanic work.

Stories such as these may stretch the credibility of Westerners not familiar with 'spirit' or 'energy talk'. They challenge me to examine my multiple roles, to balance my personal experiences and knowledge gained from both my shamanic explorations and from my naturopathic clinical work, with that of mainstream Western scientific paradigms. At times, the tensions seem irresolvable as I endeavour to take seriously my human and other-than-human participants. I take comfort from anthropologists, such as Turner (1998, 2005, 2006), Blain (2002, 2004) and others, who provide courageous role models with their ethnographic writing that includes personal unusual experiences in the field, shattering the previously unspoken taboos and 'unreportable mysticism' (Tedlock, 1991:71) of earlier ethnographic accounts. Rather than accepting at face value the stories I hear, I can weigh them against my own embodied knowing and the experiences of other anthropologists. Ultimately, however, the experiential and embodied knowledge of neo-Shamans themselves define the 'realities' of their practices and cosmologies, whatever I or other scholars might think (just as it does for Catholic Charismatics or indigenous healers). I return to the puzzle of indeterminate spirit and subtle energy phenomena later in this chapter.

Power Animal Retrieval and Soul Retrieval

Power animal retrievals and soul retrievals have similar ritual formats but serve slightly different purposes. In core neo-Shamanic cosmology, both are about the restoration of personal power. Something has been 'lost' through some form of trauma.

Core neo-Shamanic concepts about power animals or guardian spirits derive from northwest Native Americans, and relate to a mythological past when people from shamanic cultures thought humans and animals were able to communicate with each other (Harner, 1990:58). The belief is that everyone has a guardian spirit or power animal that protects and 'empowers' them, and helps them resist intrusions. A power animal retrieval is performed to energise and restore vitality to someone.

In soul loss, neo-Shamans believe part of the soul, the 'vital essence' (Ingerman, 1991:11) or life force of a person leaves when they are traumatised, perhaps best understood within a Western psychological framework as 'dissociation', or '*spiritual emergencies*' (Winkleman, 2000:262, emphasis in original). Ideas of soul loss are embedded within our language when terms such as 'dispirited' are used to describe a person who is depressed or downhearted and discouraged. Belief in a soul that fragments through shock, physical or emotional trauma causing soul parts to leave the body is not uncommon. Clifton (2004) has traced early shamanic threads in the Western world, including influences from Central and Northern Asian shamanism from whence came the notion of a soul that could separate from the body in dreams or during a shamanic trance. Many indigenous peoples have cosmological concepts that have been translated by Westerners as 'soul' or 'spirit', representing aspects of the psyche that can in some circumstances leave the physical body (see Appleton, 2006:158-159; also Harvey & Wallis, 2007:207-209). The anatomy of the psyche can be complex and the numbers of souls each individual has varies from culture to culture (Vitbesky, 1995:13-14).

I described the format of a typical neo-Shamanic trance journey in the previous chapter. Power animal retrievals or soul retrievals are particular specialised forms of neo-Shamanic healing that require the concentrated intent and presence of the practitioner. The neo-Shaman enters non-ordinary reality and travels through an imagined landscape with her or his spirit helpers to find a power animal or lost soul part/s. The shamanic journey might entail negotiating with potentially harmful or dangerous forces (see the final section of Chapter 5). The neo-Shaman visualises and energetically holds the retrieved items as he or she conveys them back to ordinary reality, and transfers them by physically blowing them into the patient's heart area,

and the crown of their head. This process completes the ritual healing, although the healing process itself continues for sometime afterwards.

Typically, and in a departure from indigenous shamanic healings, the practitioner teaches their patients to journey for themselves, to meet their power animals and spirit helpers who can support their on-going healing journeys; the initial healing is a beginning rather than an end in itself. This is consistent with Csordas's notion of 'incremental efficacy', where the patient notices small improvements dependent on the level of their engagement with their own healing process (Csordas, 1994:72; 2002:49-52). It does not pay to draw too 'strict boundaries around the ritual event' itself, as the 'imaginal performance' continues for sometime afterwards, Csordas says (1994:119). I agree with his assessment, based on my observations of neo-Shamanic healings for other people, and my own experiences of receiving shamanic healings.

Ecstasy and Enstasy, Sex and Gender in Shamanism

I turn now to consider how ecstatic and enstatic states possibly result in different healing methodologies used by shamans and some other healers. The ecstatic shamanic soul journey to the spirits has become the defining feature of so-called classical shamanism ever since Eliade (1972) popularised this notion. However, I suggest that some neo-Shamans work from enstatic states of consciousness, a less visible or dramatic form of shamanism. Enstasis has been defined as 'standing within', a state of inner wisdom by going deeply into the body.¹¹⁵ Differentiating between enstatic and ecstatic states is important because it supports my argument that some complementary and alternative, and biomedical practitioners work enstatically, and could be categorised as shamans in disguise.

I begin the discussion by, firstly, noting confused and mobile sex and gender-related issues within shamanism. There has always been ambiguity about gender-roles, seen in the androgynous identities of some shamans in Siberian cultures where the shaman transcends and balances earth/sky, male/female energies (Halifax, 1991: 22-28; Balzar, 2003a). Other shamans are accomplished at gender shifting or gender reversal,

¹¹⁵ See <http://www.members.shaw.ca/jgfriesen/Definitions/Enstasy.html> (accessed 21 July 2010).

and may have sexual relations or 'marriages' with spirits of either gender (Tedlock, 2005:90-91, 247-254). Shamans' ability to work within fluid gender categories has created a 'third gender', allowing them to mediate between community and family members (Harvey & Wallis, 2007:90, 249-250). In fact, as Wallis (2003:73-74) has observed, shamans can, and do, confront and challenge contemporary gender stereotypes because of their gender switching abilities.

In addition to the blurring of sexual identities, some anthropologists have remarked on apparent differences between the ways in which women and men operate as healers or shamans. Bonnie Glass-Coffin (1998), for example, studied five women *curanderas* in northern Peru and noted differences in approach between the male and female healers. The women tended to work co-operatively, they did not heal 'on behalf of their patients' but required them to actively participate and take responsibility for the causes of their suffering. Rather than being passive victims whom the shaman heals, patients must positively engage in "'getting right" with the forces of the universe' (Glass-Coffin, 1998:185-186). Glass-Coffin argues that just as gender differences are evident in representations of religious symbols and the divine, there are also gender differences in therapeutic strategies and philosophies (1998:184-189), and these gender differences are more marked in a patriarchal society such as in Peru (1998:174). In their model of healing, the *curanderas* pay less attention to transcendence and more to 'coessence', which locates shamanic power neither beyond this world or within it but in the spaces between healer and patient; that is, it is relational, 'facilitating energy flow between spirit and matter' (1998:188-189). In different social and cultural circumstances, men might also be capable of working in these relational ways.

Tedlock (2005), in her study about the roles of women in shamanism, identifies 'feminine' and 'masculine' forms of shamanism. She theorises that men and women trained in the feminine tradition tend to have an interpersonal orientation, and work with their clients co-operatively to encourage them to be actively involved in their own healing process, as with the *curanderas* Glass-Coffin (1998) studied. Women and men trained in masculine traditions tend towards heroic and dramatic performances centred on initiatory dismemberment, death, re-birth and the shamanic flight

(2005:282), the classic form of shamanism described by Eliade (1972). Drawing on healing wisdom learnt from her Ojibwe grandmother and her later initiation into the K'iche' Mayan shamanic tradition during her doctoral research, Tedlock cites historic and contemporary examples of women shamans from cultures worldwide fulfilling numerous healing tasks. She demonstrates that they serve in a wide range of shamanic arts, including day-to-day tasks of nurturing their communities and environment, along with more specialised tasks such as midwifery, bonesetting, and herbal medicine. Her arguments are of interest, because they support my observations of some contemporary healers in New Zealand (both women and men) who work within parameters characterised by her as a less visible but no less powerful 'feminine shamanic' tradition.

Tedlock's identification of masculine and feminine shamanic traditions opens the vexed and contentious debate around essentialism. Essentialising, in which women are attributed with a particular set of qualities (nurturing, gentle, intuitive, close to nature) while men have other qualities (strong, intellectual, rational), has become a pejorative term for many feminists. Tedlock, however, argues that biological, physiological and hormonal differences do indeed result in differences between the ways women and men heal. This is a complex and difficult area; biopsychological researchers continue to investigate the relative balance between the effects of biology/nature/sex versus social conditioning/nurture/gender on human behaviours. For example, a group of psychologists has theorised that females have a different stress response to males, exhibiting tend-and-befriend behaviours rather than the better-known fight-or-flight effect. They hypothesise that the differences are hormonally-based (Taylor et al, 2000; Taylor 2002). Writing that she has been 'encouraged' by her experiences of shamanism in North Asia and North America, Tedlock says she is adopting a position of 'strategic essentialism' in her thesis of 'feminine' and 'masculine' shamanic traditions (2005:304, n.22). Strategic essentialism, originally coined by deconstructivist theorist, Gayatri Spivak (1988), is a resistance strategy used by marginalised groups to put aside differences while focusing on a common political goal (Dobson, 2007). Theorists such as Spivak (with Rooney, 1997) and Butler (1999) propose strategic essentialism is an appropriate strategy for women to adopt, as a tool that draws attention to women's

struggles for recognition (cited in DiPalma & Ferguson, 2006), in this case perhaps women shamans.

Rather than attempting to determine the rightness or wrongness implicated in this particular debate about essentialism, I propose categorising the differing ways of working as 'enstatic' and 'ecstatic' shamanic forms. Tedlock developed her theory on the basis that (mostly) male scholars have ignored evidence that women have always practised as shamanic healers, frequently classifying women shamans as less powerful than males (if they recognised them at all). This is possibly because these shamans work in a less visually dramatic and enstatic manner.

Tedlock (2005:73) argues that Eliade, with his emphasis of the ecstatic shamanic soul flight, overly influenced people such as Hultkrantz, the Swedish religious scholar. Consequently, Hultkrantz failed to recognise many women healers as shamans amongst the Native Americans he studied. Hultkrantz (1992:18) identified three general classes of Native American healers: firstly, the 'noninspirational' wise men and women healers who set bones or use herbal medicines. The second group included medicine men that possessed some supernatural powers, and had the ability to enter a light trance for healing purposes. Hultkrantz labels the third group as the shamans or ecstasies, those who are visionaries and capable of entering a deep trance. He seemingly implies that the true ecstasies are the shamans, and the most important of the three categories.¹¹⁶ The latter two categories that he identified were almost exclusively male roles, although he does note in relation to the Shoshoni people that there were a 'few' post-menopausal medicine women with lesser powers (1992:83).¹¹⁷ I

¹¹⁶ Native American Indian healing traditions are complex and variable. Anthropologists have long debated these differing forms, and which of them (if any) constitute shamanism; Hultkrantz (2007) has summarised this discourse.

¹¹⁷ Tedlock (2005:74, 299 n.34) writes that, when she checked Hultkrantz's sources, his statements did not hold up; other ethnographers have found equal numbers of women and men shamans. Likewise, I speculate that Donald Joralemon and Douglas Sharon (1993) possibly didn't recognise the shamanic powers of women healers when conducting their extensive research on the northern coast of Peru. The male *curanderos* they studied performed rituals in front of their *mesa* or altar with a complex layout of objects and symbols, including the ingestion of *san pedro* cactus and tobacco by themselves and their patients, whereas female healers, they say, mainly work as herbalists, diagnosing and treating from market stalls. Glass-Coffin's (1998) research, however, demonstrates that women do work as shamanic healers, although within a different model.

mention Hultkrantz's three categories of healers because I consider some complementary and alternative healers work within the first two of these groups; Tedlock's schema is expansive enough to include these categories as being within the 'feminine shamanic' tradition or, as I am suggesting, an enstatic way of working.

Lack of recognition of some healers' work as 'shamanic' is a direct result of an emphasis on ecstasy. Ecofeminist, Gloria Orenstein (1994:176-177), has pointed out that amongst the Sami people she worked with, shamans use their psychic powers without necessarily journeying out of their body: they are, she says, 'expanding our concept of what a body is and relating to the body as an energy field composed of both spirit and matter.' Orenstein seems to be describing an enstatic way of working. Acknowledging enstatic states of consciousness broadens the parameters of what constitutes 'shamanic healing' beyond solely the ecstatic. Some American neo-Shamans are exploring enstasy as an alternative way of working (Proudfoot-Edgar, cited in Ingerman & Wesselman, 2010:282-283). Enstatic states, in which the shamanic practitioner or healer goes within to receive power and knowledge, appear to be as important as ecstasy. I contend that some contemporary Western healers are working from enstatic states of consciousness.¹¹⁸ Dr Alan Davis, a medical doctor and shamanic practitioner, in his closing address at the 2008 conference held by the *Society for Shamanic Practitioners* I attended in England, noted a shift in Western shamanism towards the enstatic, saying that neo-Shamans need to enter into their own inner world to develop their healing powers. 'The fulcrum of healing is who you are, you are the medicine', he said. The shaman's initiation, according to Davis, thus becomes a life-long process of shedding the ego to develop a powerful shamanic presence, an inner pathway of paring down and honing their enstatic shamanic skills. Several of my research participants would recognise and name these processes in their development as shamanic practitioners.

Predominantly male scholars have over-emphasised ecstasy and the shamanic soul flight. Evidence suggests, however, that enstatic states are just as important in

¹¹⁸ To observers, the distinction between the two states is not always straightforward. Sarbacker points out, for example, that an ecstatic state in which the shaman has gone into a cataleptic fit may be mistaken for an enstatic state. The two states are not mutually exclusive; ecstasy is an extroverted, numinous state of hyperarousal whereas enstasy is an introverted state of hypoarousal, and there may be a dynamic balance between each state (Sarbacker, 2002:22, 27).

shamanic healing. It seems that some previously unnoticed shamanic healers work from these inner states of altered consciousness. At times male and female shamans work within different models of healing but this is not to say that all women work solely in a 'feminine' tradition, and that all men work solely in a 'masculine' tradition. Some neo-Shamans are consciously exploring enstatic ways of working and, in addition, other groups of complementary and alternative healers, and some biomedical practitioners, consciously or unconsciously work enstatically. I turn to examine these other groups of healers and their relationships with neo-Shamans in New Zealand in the following section.

Nebulous and Shifting Boundaries: Shamanic Healing, Complementary and Alternative Medicine, and Biomedicine

The burgeoning field of holistic medicine shows a tremendous amount of experimentation involving the reinvention of many techniques long practiced in shamanism, such as visualisation, altered states of consciousness, aspects of psychoanalysis, hypnotherapy, meditation, positive attitude, stress-reduction, and mental and emotional expression of personal will for health and healing. In a sense, shamanism is being reinvented in the West precisely because it is needed (Harner, 1990:136, emphasis added).

* * * *

Shamans and neo-Shamans are a unique category of healer, but not all healers are necessarily shamans. There are degrees of overlap between the numerous types of healers and those whom people regard as a 'shaman'. This will vary in different societies and over time, and depends on who is doing the categorising, perhaps confirming MacLellan's perspective that, since there is no generally agreed definition, maybe it is sufficient that the term be applied whenever someone feels it is appropriate (2003:365). However, I agree with Harvey's observation that 'the word "Shaman" can be short-changed and used as a new label for doing whatever it was people did before' (Harvey, 1997:125). He argues that such terminology denies the depth and fullness of

possible meanings for neo-Shamanism. Clifton (2004:348) draws a similar conclusion when he notes that moving from ritual practices with “shamanistic elements” to shamanism is a long jump’ or, I would add, from a particular healing modality to re-packaging it as ‘shamanic healing’.

On the basis that in small-scale societies maybe one person in twenty-five or thirty receives a shamanic calling, journalist and spiritual-seeker, Daniel Pinchbeck (2002:274), calculates that approximately ten million people in the United States are potential shamans (although he acknowledges this estimate is difficult to accurately quantify).¹¹⁹ Those people, he hypothesises, who are unable to adjust to, or integrate their unsolicited altered state experiences, exist in mental hospitals and prisons, and feature amongst the homeless; others work as alternative healers, artists or psychologists. His argument seems plausible; shamans in traditional societies have always occupied many of these liminal spaces outside of mainstream society. In addition, Pinchbeck’s category of ‘alternative healers’ could be extended to include some healers working within the orthodox biomedical health system.

From my naturopathic practice, I have long been aware that some complementary and alternative practitioners consciously or unconsciously incorporate what might be considered shamanistic practices within their healing work, creating fusion models of healing. Some are blending shamanic methodologies with modern psychological insights (Kent, pers. comm. 24 March 2008). Massage therapists and other bodyworkers frequently tend to have a developed sense of energy systems within the body and the potential for healing by working with those subtle energies. Still other healers can readily ‘click over’ from ordinary consciousness to altered states, and work as medical intuitives or practitioners of vibrational medicine; they work intuitively and are frequently telepathic with extra-sensory perceptions (Kent, 2007:236). They often call on spirit guides to work with them. These healers are working enstatically, perhaps less obviously recognisable as shamans.

Neo-Shamanic identities remain ambiguous and fluid; moreover, the boundaries between neo-Shamans and other healers are unclear, with individual practitioners

¹¹⁹ Bourguignon’s and Evascu’s extensive research suggests that almost ninety percent of any given population has the potential to experience altered states of consciousness (1977, cited in Budden, 2003:31), although this is not to say these people are all shamans.

mixing and matching, and combining several healing modalities within their healing practices. Neo-Shamanic techniques 'trickle out' into mainstream culture (Lindquist, 1997:279), but neo-Shamanic practitioners also incorporate other healing systems such as nutrition, herbal medicine or bodywork into their practices. The key feature of their practice, the neo-Shamans tell me, is that they always work within sacred space. For one woman, a shaman is a 'technician of the sacred' and this is the starting point for her, whereas other alternative and complementary practitioners may begin to move towards the sacred as their awareness expands. Healers using other modalities can thus incorporate shamanic sensibilities into their work by introducing ritual and ceremony to create sacred space. Other neo-Shamans work with complementary and alternative practitioners to 'ground them' and to help them integrate shamanic perspectives into their work. A pivotal difference, these neo-Shamans say, is that they are always aware of other realities and the inter-play of subtle energies, whereas other healers may move in and out of their awareness of other realities. In the rest of this chapter, I outline empirical and theoretical evidence in the areas of subtle energies, herbal medicine, psychotherapy and biomedicine to illustrate ways in which some complementary and alternative, and biomedical practitioners may be working within enstatic shamanic frameworks.

Subtle Energies

Shamanic concepts of illnesses generally imply that people have permeable boundaries (Appleton, 2006:159). People with permeable boundaries both gain and lose energy from their surroundings in the form of intrusions or soul loss. Neo-Shamans manipulate and work with energy in sacred space, my participants say. One neo-Shaman said the shaman she worked with in Peru always combined vibrational healing with sound and touch to move energy. 'Energy' is thus a useful tool for discussing and conceptualising shamanic illnesses and healing, and an understanding of subtle energies is implicit in the healing work of many complementary and alternative practitioners. These are the mysterious psychic energies shamans have typically worked with throughout history, given numerous names in other cultures: !kia, ka, ki, chi, qi, kundalini, prana and so on, all describing subtle parapsychological

phenomena (Swartz, 1994:232-233). Anthropologist Charles Laughlin's biogenetic theory draws on neurocognitive and neuro-endocrinal models in combination with his own experiential explorations to understand anomalous phenomena. Psychic energy, according to Laughlin, occurs within the consciousness, mind or soul, and then passes through channels in the body. It may be experienced as heat or breath (1994:106), and he likens this to the states !Kung Bushmen enter during their dancing when psychic energy n/um is released (1994:126-127).

All healing touch — craniosacral therapy, massage, reiki, laying on of hands to name only a few forms of bodywork practiced by Western healers — is shamanistic in its roots when it engages subtle energies to reach the human consciousness and psyche, according to osteopath and visionary craniosacral therapist, Hugh Milne (1998: backcover, 4-6). Some practitioners have written of craniosacral therapy as a shamanic process in that practitioners remove themselves from ordinary reality to enter other domains of extra-sensory perception while with their clients, which may sometimes give them a direct experience of the numinous and a sense of a mystery greater than everyday life (Shea, 2008:469). Such experiences, particularly if they arise spontaneously, arouse curiosity about shamanism for many practitioners; one New Zealand craniosacral therapist expressed his interest in shamanism to me, telling me he used to think he would have to go away somewhere to find some indigenous people who could teach him their healing rituals. He no longer thinks that is necessary, and says he has now come to understand shamanism as a way of life, a 'way of being in harmony' with himself and the world around him; working from within this state allows him to access other realities and energies when working with his clients.

The very notion of a mysterious and nebulous 'energy' that may be either destructive, or harnessed for healing, is a puzzle for many people schooled within positivist sciences (as noted in Chapter 6, when I discussed spirits as energy forms). Belief in subtle healing energies is an historical and cultural aberration in a biomedically-dominant Western world, according to religious studies scholar, Robert Fuller (2005:375). This is a fair comment; however, from my insider standpoint as an alternative healer and bodyworker, I argue that practitioners such as those practising various forms of bodywork, therapeutic touch or numerous other similar therapies, do

not merely *believe* in subtle energies in the body. Rather, it is a matter of embodied experiential knowledge just as divinatory knowledge is embodied. The energies are sensed, felt as tingling, heat or cold and are not just (or only) metaphorical, as Edith Turner (2005:389) came to understand through her own explorations of energy healing. Detection of proprioceptive sensations or *plasmaciones* emanating from their clients as heat, cold, pain, tingling, or emotional states such as fear or grief is not uncommon amongst *espiritista* healers (Csordas, 2002:248-249), and neo-Shamans and other healers frequently report sensations such as these. I have experienced these phenomena myself when carrying out craniosacral therapy. Healers working in these areas of subtle energies are practical manifestations of the 'huge unofficial laboratory of spiritual healing' as identified by Edith Turner (2005:387). As with the bodyworkers cited above, many are curious about the energies they sense and feel, and welcome opportunities to examine these phenomena reflexively (Turner, 2005:393-394).

Admitting to the 'poverty' of standard anthropological analytical categories in the face of non-ordinary phenomena such as those observed in religious or non-religious energy healing, and working within an embodiment paradigm, Csordas examined indeterminate phenomena and subtle energies from four perspectives: intuition, imagination, perception and sensation (2002:252-255). He concluded that:

Approaching cultural phenomena from the standpoint of embodiment has allowed us to define a construct of somatic modes of attention, which has in turn led us to a principle of indeterminacy that undermines dualities between subject and object, mind and body, self and other (Csordas, 2002:258).

The 'principle of indeterminacy', he writes, 'poses a profound methodological challenge to the scientific ideal' (2002:255); moreover, he says, it has disclosed 'the rather slippery notion of the essential indeterminacy of existence' (2002:255). This is exactly where neo-Shamans (and other healers working with subtle energies) are

challenging orthodox science, and it then becomes useful to consider alternative conceptualisations of 'energy' that include recent quantum mechanics theories.¹²⁰

One New Zealand medical doctor and acupuncturist envisages the human body as an aerial that both captures and responds to subtle electromagnetic forces, in an attempt to explain, understand and validate his healing practice (Kelly, 2006). His private quest to merge science and spirit led him to examine quantum and sub-atomic physics, entanglement and string theory, theories about DNA as a superconductor, connective tissue microtubules that receive and transmit subtle energy, morphic resonance and non-local fields. Biologist and geneticist, Mae-Wan Ho's research addressing the 'edge' between spirit/energy/matter, indicates that cellular and extra-cellular protein matrices behave as electronic conductors and store cognitive information; Ho and other researchers suggest consciousness resides within these matrices (cited in Tedlock, 2009:9; also Ho, 1993, 1998). Research such as this potentially provides a mechanism for scientific understandings of subtle healing energies, while also acknowledging this is a difficult area with the risks of misreading science to develop pseudo-scientific theories.

There is potential for some healers, who may not always understand the complexities of scientific theories, to enthusiastically adopt new understandings and analytical tools derived from biology and physics as scientific validation for their work, as illustrated by Lynne McTaggart's (2001) book, *The Field*, a journalist's account of scientists' theories about a complex quantum physics concept, the zero-point energy field. 'The Field', according to McTaggart (2001:xxiv, 46-47), represents a 'unifying concept of the universe' in which everything is connected and in balance, providing scientific confirmation in areas previously the 'domain of religion, mysticism, alternative medicine or New Age speculation'. Two physicists who claim to have a 'love of spirituality', write that while they 'understand and applaud' McTaggart's work, her conclusions go 'well beyond the current state of physics' (Clarke & King,

¹²⁰ Not only neo-Shamans are exploring these realms. The programme for an up-coming *Science, Consciousness and Spirituality* conference will be examining understandings of quantum physics and the benefits of accessing non-ordinary states of consciousness. Organised by the Auckland-based MindBody Trust (a collective of medical doctors, psychotherapists and alternative therapists), the conference will be held at Auckland in October 2011.

2006:1,6). Clarke and King call for a balanced viewpoint that takes into account the 'open and paradoxical nature' of both physics and spirituality (2006:6), a perspective also expressed by a New Zealand neo-Shamanic explorer and former scientist when I asked for his opinion about these matters. He wrote to me, 'I think it is important to "wonder" and generate ideas from theory and to hold to "ideas" loosely. After all, the cosmos is an enormous unknown...' (pers. comm. 4 Dec 2007). In the face of this unknown, I can only return to Jack's comment about mystery (cited in Chapter 5), which echoes the 'indeterminacy of existence' identified by Csordas (above).

Herbal Medicine

Shamans receive direct information about medicinal plants through their communication with plant spirits while in an altered state of consciousness. Several participants work with plant spirit allies in this manner, their knowledge gained by being with the plants in their natural habitat. I attended a plant spirit medicine workshop during the 2008 shamanic conference in England; we walked the land to find a plant ally and journey to its spirit. We were instructed how to 'diet' the plant over a period of three months, by drinking an infusion made from the plant three times daily and carefully observing its effects.¹²¹ One neo-Shaman and homeopath has evolved a similar way of working with plants, fauna and minerals in New Zealand after an 'overwhelming and prolonged spiritual experience' on a beach one night, not long after his arrival from his native Holland. Following this initiatory-like experience, he attended neo-Shamanic training workshops in New Zealand before teaching his own seminars. He told me his experience bestowed an awareness 'of the sacredness of things around me, of earth, the trees, ancestors', and a sense of belonging to this land that he felt gave him permission and the confidence to go on and develop his own range of homeopathic remedies prepared from New Zealand flora, fauna and minerals. He has coined the name 'homeotherapy' to describe his method of combining homeopathy with shamanic journeying to enter the essence of the medicine. He now

¹²¹ Dieting a plant to discover its medicine is a practice derived from the South American *vegetalistas* (Luna, 1992:231).

facilitates workshops to teach his students subtle sensing techniques and the use of sacred intent to work with the medicines.

Information gathered by these methods is rather different from that of medical herbalists trained in the Western herbal medicine school, who learn traditional herbal knowledge in conjunction with modern health sciences, and research about plant constituents. However, my medical herbalist colleagues frequently speak of their relationship to plants in shamanic terms. During a medical herbalists' conference in May 2007, a Swiss-New Zealand herbalist described her traditional herbal medicine training in the Swiss mountains. She reminded those present of their shared Western herbal heritage, derived from ancient European mystical connections with the plants and the earth, and of the importance for contemporary herbalists to re-connect with those herbal energetic qualities rather than relying entirely on their scientific knowledge about plant constituents. She painted beautiful and timeless images of going out to collect the plants, observing the animals, feeling the intrinsic inter-relatedness and sacredness of plants and humans. A second woman told me she occasionally experiences altered states of consciousness when working with someone; she sees the image of the herb they are to have move across the client while she is sitting with them. A male herbalist I know wrote of his feeling that the spirit of Ginkgo (*G. biloba*) wanted to speak to him 'but my mind is still too noisy to clearly hear what it has to say' (pers. comm. 27 Jan 2009). Another felt that his recently deceased father's presence and wisdom guided him to find and touch his first Pukatea (*Laurelia novae-zelandiae*) tree, a 'profound and memorable experience' (Rasmussen, 2009:13); he interpreted the experience as giving him permission to harvest the bark of the tree for preparing medicine. These herbalists are enstatically seeking to develop a relationship with each plant, in the spirit of honouring and respecting their healing powers.

Neo-Shamanism and Psychotherapy

I would love to share what goes on from the perspective of being a shaman, being a representative of the "invisible", the energies, the spirits, the dead, the subconscious (Genevieve, research participant).

* * * *

As Genevieve indicates in the above quote, she includes the subconscious within her shamanic scope; some neo-Shamans consider the psychological aspects of an individual's life as well as utilising the more classical components of shamanism (such as working with the spirits). This perhaps lends veracity to Vitebsky's claim that neo-Shamans are 'psychologizing the realm of the religious...to take the cosmos into oneself and use it as a tool for therapizing the psyche' (2003:287). However, neo-Shamanic exploration of shamanic worlds within a psychological framework need not necessarily be a negative thing. I know of Christians and Buddhists who also psychologise their religion, and maybe this has become one avenue people in late-modern Western societies adopt to further their understandings of the spiritual; Csordas (1994, 2001) has observed these processes with Catholic Charismatics. During the yearlong shamanic training course I attended, we were repeatedly told that we were not a therapy group but, on the other hand, by being challenged to 'go deeper' into the spirit realm, we all inevitably met with our own internal fears and resistance to the process. This caused the group to take on the energy and appearance of a psychotherapeutic session at times.

Moreover, such processes are not limited to contemporary spiritual searchers alone: an examination of several indigenous shamanic teachings reveals that they include trainings about awareness and self-development, 'to change attitudes and assumptions', as described in Serge Kahili King's outline of traditional Hawaiian kahuna healing (1983, cited in Sheikh, Kunzendorf & Sheikh, 2003:5-6; Webb, 2004:56-65; Wesselman, 1995:161-165), for example. Indigenous shamanic traditions do have their own psychologies. Leslie Gray (1995:172), an American ecopsychologist who has studied with native shamans and medicine people for ten years to create her own form of shamanic counselling, claims that often the 'primal therapeutics' of the Native American shamans she has met were more 'powerful and effective' than many of the techniques she learnt during her Western clinical psychology education (1995:176).

Shamanism has long been associated with mental illnesses (I discussed the relationships between the notion of the wounded healer, mental illness and shamanism in relation to some participants' experiences in Chapter 4). Historically, some anthropologists considered shamans to be mentally ill and deranged, suffering from

psychopathology and neuroses (Vitebsky,1995:138-141), the 'schizophrenic model' of shamanism (Krippner, 2002:5). Such notions have largely been superseded by the concept that shamanic healing is like psychotherapy, and that shamans are in fact 'prototypical psychologists' (2002:19). Some researchers have compared shamanic healing with psychoanalysis (Langdon, 1992:6; Lévi-Strauss, 1963). Soul loss and other shamanic illnesses have been re-framed by some scholars as 'contemporary religious experiences and psychological crises', perhaps best viewed as '*spiritual emergencies*' (Winkelman, 2000:262, emphasis in original). Boyle's (2007) Australian-based experiential doctoral study of neo-Shamanism as a journey into creativity and the Jungian shadow-self was overtly a psycho-spiritual journey for himself and his six other participants. On the first shamanic workshop Boyle attended, he had a surprising and rapturous experience that encouraged him to later enrol in a soul retrieval training workshop. This second training left him 'expanded psychically and somewhat psychically permeable...[he] had spiritually emerged, and was teetering on the edge of spiritual emergency' (2007:12), possibly an example of some of the concerns Ruth-Inge Heinze expressed when she wrote that people 'should be taught the pitfalls of psychic openings that require closing' (1991, cited in Orenstein, 1994:177).

European and American neo-Shamans have written about integrating neo-Shamanism and psychotherapy (Hammerman, 2008; Harner, 2007); others have some reservations about shamanic traditions becoming diluted as a result (Ingerman, n.d. SSP eNews). In New Zealand, there are psychotherapists who teach their clients shamanic journeying; one told me some of her colleagues consider shamans to be their ancestors. For one participant, shamanism is not about personal growth; it is about 'doing difficult and dangerous work for [her] community', but other neo-Shamans work within a 'psycho-shamanic' model. A second practitioner, for example, told me that while her work might sometimes look like psychotherapy to an observer, the difference as she perceives it, is that by working within sacred space and in non-ordinary reality, she journeys into her clients' bodies to gather information, which she senses through her own body as *plasmacione* sensations.

Shamanic Healing and Biomedical Practitioners

Harner's vision is that modern Western shamans will work alongside the biomedical health system (Harner, 1990:138), a vision that offers a large challenge to a conservative profession whose gold standard research tool is the double-blind placebo trial.¹²² In effect, Harner is saying that neo-Shamans are leading the way in confronting Western biomedical and positivist scientific 'realities'. Harner and his wife, Sandra Harner (2000), have outlined the principles of core shamanic healing in a chapter originally planned for publication in a medical textbook, perhaps slight evidence of a softening of attitudes towards shamanism and shamanic healing, at least in some quarters.¹²³ However, irrespective of a broadening attitude by a few practitioners, the power differentials remain with biomedicine the dominant healthcare system throughout the world, including in many developing countries, in spite of the World Health Organisation's strategy to facilitate the integration of traditional medicine into national healthcare systems.¹²⁴ The reality for many complementary therapies is that as they are integrated into the orthodox health system, the underlying mystical and vitalistic components are diluted, as Kevin Dew's (2003) case studies of chiropractic and acupuncture in New Zealand illustrate.

I give a few examples of the ways in which some biomedical practitioners in New Zealand have become sensitised to, and are working with, subtle energies. In each case, it seems that orthodox biomedical practitioners can and do occasionally experience altered states of consciousness and shamanic-like phenomena, although they may not be named or recognised for what they are. However, some practitioners do actively seek to learn about neo-Shamanism, as in the case of the general practitioner I have communicated with by email. Moreover, life and death situations enhance awareness of other realities, as with the hospice nurse who has shared with me unusual spirit experiences she has had when patients are nearing death or have just died.

¹²² This challenge is not one confronted solely by shamanic practitioners, as appropriate research methodologies are an issue for all complementary therapies (see for example, Braud & Anderson, 1998; Cassidy, 1994, 1995; Krippner, 2002).

¹²³ In the event, it seems that the planned book was not published, as I have been unable to trace a citation for it.

¹²⁴ <http://www.who.int/medicines/publications/traditionalpolicy/en/index.html> (accessed 12 Oct 2010).

Some midwives have an awareness of other realities that reflect in their midwifery practices. Of course, I am not suggesting all midwives are shamans; nonetheless, one midwife has shared with me some events she has experienced when present at births that suggest she enters an enstatic state as she breathes, rocks and sounds with the woman giving birth, both of them together in shared altered space. During water-births, when she senses the mother is beginning to panic, she has found that wordlessly putting one finger into the water is sufficient to calm the mother. Apparently, her finger provides an energetic connection between her and the mother, through the medium of water. Her stories point to the importance of intersubjectivity, intention, presence and touch in healing, whatever the modality – all qualities I have previously drawn attention to.

The next few paragraphs are an extensive quote from a New Zealand biomedical practitioner who has explored alternative forms of healing; at my request, she wrote about some of her unusual experiences within the context of a bodywork conference and, on another occasion, during a ‘visionary craniosacral therapy’ workshop that she attended. I include them because I think she has succinctly articulated the nebulous nature of altered state phenomena within a society that tends to discount non-rational events such as these, and because they illustrate the larger context within which neo-Shamans work beyond the complementary and alternative healing, and New Age environments. She begins by defining shamanism, as she understands it:

To me a shaman is someone who is consciously and deliberately able to access and utilize spiritual dimensions for the purposes of facilitating a profound healing and/or teaching. I sense that operating from this ‘other dimension’ is associated with a collapse of the customary Western distinctions between subject and object, and self and non-self – enabling a heightened awareness of a universal existential field in which all ‘things’ are known as different facets of an interconnected whole. When I first read about them, I associated the terms ‘shaman’ and ‘shamanism’ with something unusual, strange, magic, and potentially dangerous. However, my experiences have resulted in my knowing the ‘extraordinary ordinariness’ of this state of being.

My first (of many) experiences of what I understand to be shamanic practice, was at a bodywork conference in Florida. The speaker was describing how she and some colleagues had used drums and feathers to work with a herd of wild horses. When she demonstrated her technique, the energy in the room changed – subtly yet powerfully, dropping me into a deeper, peaceful, joyful level of consciousness. As with all my other experiences of this state of being, it happened very simply, quietly, and without fanfare or fuss. To me, the ability to access and navigate this level of self feels like it is a natural and normal aspect of life that can be used to promote health. Conversely, I consider our contemporary Western ignorance and distancing of this aspect of life is an expression of societal dysfunction and dis-ease – shaped by, to some extent at least, our collective attachment to Cartesian philosophical principles.

The next time I was consciously aware of being in a shamanic situation was during a craniosacral therapy workshop. The purpose of this 4-5 day class was to develop the students' ability to use 'visionary craniosacral therapy' as a vehicle for working, healing, and growth. [The course was based] on the mandible, a bone [the teacher] considers plays a key role in corporeal and energetic body dynamics. During the first part of the course he focused on teaching a range of mandibular release techniques that we were subsequently to put into practice during three, three-hour long 'treatment' sessions. He organized the class into groups of three, so that every student got to receive one [treatment], and help facilitate two treatments – though the therapists were free to move around the room and work with other clients as required. Each of the three therapy sessions began with [the teacher] guiding the class through a meditation that essentially got us all ready for, and focused on, the work that was to follow. During this meditation, we were instructed to close our eyes and focus on our client...and what their needs might be.

[When] it was my turn to be a therapist I was sitting meditating with my eyes closed, quietly waiting for clues about my client's condition and/or treatment requirements...when, all of a sudden I sensed an unusual yet extraordinarily complex and beautiful smell. At this time [the teacher] was explaining to the

mediating class that we might 'see', 'hear', or just 'know' the information – emphasising the necessity for us staying open to receiving it in whatever form we accessed it. The fragrance was so powerful, yet didn't smell like any flower that I knew, that I opened my eyes to see where it might be coming from. [The teacher], right across the other side of the crowded room, caught my eye, grinned, and told the class that sometimes this information might be perceived through the sense of smell. I hadn't said or done anything that would have conveyed my experience to him in a conventional way – yet he knew exactly what I was experiencing in my meditative state. I re-closed my eyes, and settled in to being with the smell, and accessed a rich and relevant understanding of what I needed to focus on during my client's treatment session.

It was in the moment that our eyes met and I caught his grin that I realized he knew what I was experiencing, and that he used this knowledge to guide me into accessing trustworthy and useful information. It was as if he had helped me open a door inside myself. It was in that moment I recognized he was operating as a shaman.

The salient points this practitioner makes are, firstly, the 'extraordinary ordinariness' of non-ordinary states of being, and that it offers a space in which healing can occur. She experiences such phenomena as simultaneously special, and normal, natural human functions.¹²⁵ Secondly, she draws attention to the limitations of a Cartesian mind/body dichotomy on which the biomedical model is predicated. The shaman/teacher apparently catalysed her sensory perceptions, allowing a doorway or portal to open within her while she was in a meditative or altered state of consciousness, giving her access to information she might not otherwise have retrieved. In some circumstances, it is possible to change our perceptions. As one neo-Shaman told me, 'our perception is created by us personally, by our culture, by the cultural rules that we have learnt, and it is possible to shift that perception'. This is

¹²⁵ It is worth noting Kent's (2007:11) assertion that, in some circumstances, ontological shock can occur when one's own personal experience clashes with consensual reality. In this case, the practitioner was in an environment that supported and affirmed her unusual sensory experience.

possibly one function of neo-Shamans in contemporary Western societies as they challenge mainstream perceptions of 'reality'.

Neo-Shamans trained in core shamanism work to heal within a particular cosmology; nonetheless, each practitioner develops their own unique methodology that may include syncretic blending with different healing modalities. In addition, shamanic practices leak into other healing systems, such as naturopathy, herbalism, bodywork modalities, psychotherapy, and (on occasions) biomedicine. Some of these practitioners work enstatically and might be construed as shamans in disguise. This is not to say all complementary and alternative healers (or biomedical practitioners) are shamans. However, some practitioners spontaneously or consciously seek out shamanic altered state experiences that lead to an acknowledgment of the spiritual and ritual aspects of healing, thus developing understandings that potentially enrich their work. The examples I have provided suggest there is some degree of crossing-over between shamanic healing and other modalities, although I cannot provide a quantitative estimate of the extent of the overlaps. This is perhaps an area for further research. The examples and stories cited here illustrate the innovative fluidity of shamanism, and the ability of shamans to shape-shift, thereby contributing to the evolution of multiple forms of 21st century Western shamanism, an argument I develop further in Chapter 9. Firstly, however, in the following chapter, contemporary Māori healing is introduced as an indigenous system of healing, situated within its own particular spiritual, cosmological, historic and global contexts. Māori healing might be considered a locally specific form of shamanism, although only some Māori healers use this descriptor. While some present-day Māori healers follow their traditional practices, others are combining an eclectic mix of local and global influences to create innovative and unique healing systems.

CHAPTER 8

CONTEMPORARY MĀORI HEALING: TRADITIONS AND INNOVATION IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

The times which saw the rising of the matriarch, Artemis Riripeti Mahana, were strange and turbulent ones. She herself seems to have been born of whirlwinds. There is a story that at her birth the midwife saw one eye, swimming in blood, staring out from the mother's vagina, as if the child was in haste to be born (Ihimaera, 1990:45-46).

* * * *

The whare wānanga¹²⁶ sees and interprets the world as a kahu, a fabric comprising of a fabulous mélange of energies. Accordingly, it was the preoccupation of the whare wānanga to view the world as a music, a singing, as 'rhythmical patterns of pure energy' that are woven and move with cosmological purpose and design. Our concern, therefore, should be to pay attention to how this fabric is woven and the nature of our place within it (Royal, 2003:xiii, emphasis in original).

* * * *

Because this thesis is a New Zealand-based ethnography mapping a local landscape of shamanic knowledge and healing, it is appropriate that I consider the boundaries between shamanic healing and the healing practices of Māori, the tangata whenua (indigenous people) of this land. How are Māori healing traditions similar to or different from what elsewhere might be known as shamanism, as presented in the literature and summarised in Chapter 2? Māori healing might be construed as a locally specific form of shamanism, although 'shamanism' is not a word Māori healers generally use to describe their healing work; however, there are some exceptions to this, as I show later in the chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to examine contemporary Māori healing in relation to shamanism within a local and global context, describing the healing practices of some Māori healers. I have drawn on historic readings about traditional Māori practices particularly in relation to spirituality

¹²⁶ House of learning.

and healing, contemporary writers (Māori and Pākehā) within and without academia, the internet, emails, conversations and formal audiotaped interviews with Māori healers. In addition, my understandings have expanded through observation of some healers working with their patients and from personal experience of receiving healings.

While some contemporary Māori healers continue to follow traditional teachings and combine practices such as ritual use of *karakia* (prayer), *wai* (water), *rongoā* (plant medicines), *karanga* (to call out), *waiata* (song) and *mirimiri* (massage), others have modified their healing work to incorporate Western and other indigenous customs. They blend many influences with their traditions, inter-weaving local *iwi*-based knowledge with ancestral understandings, following Māori-centred protocols and *te reo* (Māori language) with borrowings from imported medicines, practices, and religions (Reinfeld & Pihama, 2007:26, 37, 39, 88). Contemporary global flows of healing knowledge have accentuated these processes, and healers mix and blend multiple local and global influences to create individualised healing systems. Charles Royal's words (quoted above in the 2nd epigraph) were included in his introduction to the writings of the late Māori Marsden. He describes Marsden as a 'tohunga, scholar, writer, healer, minister and philosopher' (2003: backcover), someone whose innovative thinking extended traditional Māori cosmology as taught to him in the *whare wānanga*, to develop 'a sophisticated model of a Māoritanga'¹²⁷ for modern Māori (2003:x). Innovation is a recurring theme apparent within many aspects of the lives of modern Māori (George, 2010a), and in this chapter I show that this is true of contemporary Māori healers too. The 'multiplicity' of Māori society (George, 2010a:254) is evident in the innovative, eclectic and creative ways that many Māori healers are working. As with other healing traditions, there is no one 'authentic' Māori healing tradition; to make such a claim minimises the work of individual healers or *iwi* (tribe) in favour of generalised collective descriptions of what such an imagined tradition might look like (O'Connor, 2008:44).

Some might consider it inappropriate that I embark on this exploration of Māori healing: I am a Pākehā¹²⁸ woman who, by virtue of growing up in Aotearoa (New

¹²⁷ Knowledge of the Māori culture, a Māori perspective.

¹²⁸ Non-Māori, especially of European descent.

Zealand), may have osmotically gained some understanding of Māori culture and Māori healing practices, but I have not been deeply immersed in Māoritanga and do not speak te reo Māori. I have needed to be cognisant of on-going tensions arising from the colonial history of New Zealand that has created power and cultural differentials in relation to Pākehā anthropologists studying Māori. I empathise with Tony O'Connor's comments about his experiences as a Pākehā researching Māori healers practising the tradition of Te Oo Mai Reia:

My consciousness of myself as a Pākehā, the research participants as Māori and the broader context of the cultural politics of this land and its people, left me with a low-level but indelible anxiety about how I would be received by people I had not met before; largely because I felt some people harboured a "suspicion of neo-colonial intellectual imperialism" (Jackson 1987:8; Smith 1999 in O'Connor, 2008:34).

All anthropological research involves a delicate process of fostering relationships that will bridge the inherent power imbalances between researcher and the researched. As I negotiated these relationships, I unexpectedly discovered how 'foreign' it could feel conducting fieldwork in my own country even in situations when other Pākehā were present too, and where we were welcomed to observe, experience and participate in the healing sessions. This aspect of my research, studying contemporary Māori healing, does not involve a large study of Māori per se. I am not detailing a comprehensive study of the healing practices for a particular iwi (tribe) or hapū (sub-tribe); rather I aim to present an overview of a few individual contemporary Māori healers. I soon learnt that by introducing myself firstly as a healer (naturopath, medical herbalist and bodyworker), and secondly as an anthropologist that Māori healers I met were very willing to contribute to my study. In some cases, mutual sharing of healing practices meant that I could also offer them something in exchange.

This chapter begins with a description of the interplay between Māori spirituality and cosmology, the role of tohunga (spiritual leaders and healers) within a complex colonial history, all of which contribute to the shaping of contemporary Māori healing practices. The healers work within two broad categories: those who are 'hands on'

using various forms of massage or energy work in combination with karakia or the use of rongoā, and those who work within an oratory tradition. Finally, I situate the healers in a global context, noting the willingness of some to include other indigenous and eclectic New Age-like practices within their healing work, while still retaining, innovating and modifying their Māori traditions and tikanga (customs).

Māori Cosmology, Spirituality and Healing

This thesis describes shamanism and shamanic healing both as diverse religious phenomena, and as systems of healing. Religion and medicine are not necessarily at opposite ends of a spectrum, and healing frequently involves an inter-weaving of these strands. The complex interfaces between spirituality and healing are no less evident in all Māori healing traditions. It is not my intention to repeat detailed descriptions of Māori cosmologies already documented by many other scholars; such a task would extend beyond the parameters of my study, and is one that I am ill qualified to undertake. On the other hand, given the inseparability of spirit and matter in all Māori healing traditions (past and present), it is necessary that I acknowledge those cosmological teachings that deeply influence contemporary healing practices. The corpus of existing literature includes accounts of creation mythologies, myths and legends, the historical origins of the Māori people, and their customs and knowledge recorded in writing from the time the first Europeans arrived (see for example, the writings of Best, Colenso, Grey, Smith, or White – all cited in Salmond, 1985; Beattie, 1990; Reedy, 1993). Learned experts and chiefs gathered in whare wānanga to discuss and argue detailed doctrines and teachings in the oral tradition. There is considerable variation between the different iwi, and a ‘sceptical [epistemological] relativism’ allows for variations between different tribes’ creation stories and cosmologies, whilst holding to the truth of one’s own iwi accounts (Salmond, 1985:248-253).

Bearing in mind tribal differences in the telling, generalised cosmological genealogies describe Te Kore (the void, emptiness) which, over aeons of time begat Te Pō (the night realms, expressed by the tohunga Arnold Reedy as the ‘never-ending beginning’ [cited in Tawhai, 1996:14]), and from these realms eventually came light - the soft light, dawn light, broad daylight and so on. Later still, these regions of primal

energy, of light and dark spawned Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) whose children became the atua¹²⁹ of the present world. The atua represent the natural world such as the winds (the atua Tāwhiri), the sea and fish (Tangaroa), the trees and birds (Tāne), or are responsible for particular tasks such as those of overseeing war (Tūmatauenga) or peace (Rongomatāne). The children, quarrelling amongst themselves, eventually overcame the darkness and separated their parents, so beginning life in the light (Te Ao Mārama).¹³⁰ Numerous other spirit beings inhabit the realms of the heavens, the night, and the land - some beneficent and others malignant or demonic; some serve as kaitiaki (guardian spirits) left behind by deceased ancestors in the form of an animal, bird, insect, lizard or fish.

Māori Marsden's Ngā Puhī wānanga cosmology (Royal, 2003:16-23) begins with detailed references to Io (the Supreme God who is known by many names such as Io-matua-kore, the parentless one); this can be compared with the Ngāti Uepohatu account given by Tawhai (1996:14-18), which does not speak of a Supreme Being.¹³¹ Some scholars have debated the legitimacy of the Io tradition; while a number suggest that the knowledge was so sacred and hidden that only those attending the highest level of whare wānanga training received information about Io, others argue that it emerged as a response to the introduction of Christianity (see Shirres [1997] for a summary of these arguments). One Māori man with an interest in exploring Māori spirituality told me that he has difficulty viewing the complex mystical references within the Io tradition as simply an ad-hoc response to the arrival of Christianity. He believes intellectual debates will probably never completely clarify the situation, and that direct spiritual experience might be a more valid way to test or verify such material (pers. comm. 11 June 2008). Māori Marsden too speaks of his personal 'passionate, subjective approach' as the only path to 'taste... [the] reality' of the Māori universe (Royal, 2003:2).

¹²⁹ Commonly interpreted as gods, but Shirres suggests that it is more accurate to refer to them as 'created spiritual powers' (1997:26). Cleve Barlow, a Māori scholar, writes that there are around seventy atua in the Māori pantheon, of which eight are widely known (1991:11).

¹³⁰ The sphere of broad daylight.

¹³¹ Ngā Puhī is Marsden's iwi (tribal) affiliation; Ngāti Uepohatu is Tawhai's.

I return to this debate shortly, but the important point I want to emphasise here is that for Māori, the universe is not mechanistic, and a complex blend of monotheism (both the Io tradition, and Christianity as I discuss in the following paragraph), polytheism and animism informs contemporary Māori approaches to health, illness and healing. Māori Marsden summed this up when he wrote:

The Māori conceives of...[the universe] as at least a two-world system in which the material proceeds from the spiritual, and the spiritual (which is the higher order) interpenetrates the material physical world of Te Ao Mārama...In some senses...the Māori had a three-world view, of potential being symbolised by Te Korekore, the world of becoming portrayed by Te Pō, and the world of being, Te Ao Mārama (Royal, 2003:20).

Moreover, the natural order and laws of the physical world can be 'affected, modified and even changed by the application of the higher laws of the spiritual order' (Royal, 2003:20). For these reasons, Māori healers generally hold the belief that healing occurs when someone re-connects specifically with their own whakapapa (genealogy) and with their Māoritanga in general. In doing so, the patient affirms their direct descent from Ranginui and Papatūānuku (Reinfeld & Pihama, 2007:21).

With the arrival of Europeans from the late eighteenth century, Māori culture was irrevocably changed. Early Māori converts to Christianity supported the Crown's proposal for a Treaty,¹³² which they viewed as a new covenant similar to the New Testament of the Bible (Orange, 1987:49-50). Māori did not abandon their own cosmology as they embraced the new religion, however, and have blended their own spiritual understandings to create a unique form of Christianity, a process that has at times been traumatic and difficult (Henare, 1996:122-126). In addition, a number of messianic Māori prophets and visionaries who identified with the displaced Children

¹³² The Treaty of Waitangi, signed on 6 February 1840, was a treaty between the Māori people and the British Crown. Substantial differences between the Māori and English versions of the text resulted in divergent interpretations of the significance and meaning of the Treaty, and these differences continue to be played out and hotly debated in regard to Māori sovereignty, land rights, and access to resources (Orange, 1987).

of Israel of the Old Testament emerged in response to the suffering of Māori people through colonisation. Te Kooti and Wiremu Ratana each established independent Māori Christian churches, Ringatu and Ratana respectively (1996:124-126).

More recently, some Māori women have realised they too have a powerful cosmological legacy. They have challenged patriarchal systems that they perceive as dominant both within and outside of their culture, and have called on Māori women to reclaim their mana wahine,¹³³ taking pride in their heritage of Māori women's achievements long hidden within their myths, legends and cosmology (Te Awekotuku, 1991:60-65). Te Awekotuku (2003) has re-created and re-presented some of these myths and legends to show Māori women in their power. A contemporary Māori feminist perspective suggests that, in spite of their marginalisation over the last two centuries, goddesses (atua wahine) once served important roles, particularly in the areas of childbirth and death, balancing the roles male gods served in the Māori pantheon (Yates-Smith, 1998). Yates-Smith concludes that learning about the goddesses could have implications for Māori women in the areas of education, religion, and the arts. There could also be positive flow-on effects in terms of Māori women's health, and this in turn can only be beneficial for all Māori since good health implies that an individual's mana is secure within their whānau (family), and their mātauranga (knowledge). Such a woman or man thus becomes an authentic whole person (Marsden, in Royal, 2003:xiv).

Māori Healing Knowledge

Many Māori treat ailments within the whānau with physical means such as mirimiri or rongoā in conjunction with karakia. 'Extensive' knowledge about specific rongoā and wairākau¹³⁴ was apparent in recent research documenting Taranaki Māori traditions that indicated the 'centrality' of faith in traditional knowledge, and respect for the atua

¹³³ Mana: power, authority, prestige. Wahine : woman. Durie (1994:47-51) has described the period 1931-1974 as *Mana Wahine*, an important period in terms of Māori health development during which Māori women formed firstly the *Women's Health League* and then, later the *Māori Women's Welfare League* both of which promote public health measures for Māori families and liaise with the Department of Health. These organisations, however, do not usually challenge patriarchal systems already operating.

¹³⁴ Natural medicine (Ryan, 1994:92), such as the use of water (wai) and plants (rākau = tree), for example, in herbal baths.

and their associated domains for healing (Reinfeld & Pihama, 2007:92-93). Being healthy is not generally about the state of the physical body. As the previous discussion about Māori cosmology shows, knowledge of one's whakapapa and the support of whānau are regarded as more important than physical measures of what constitutes good health (Laing, 2002; McGowan, 2000:67-73, 86-87; O'Connor, 2008; Parsons, 1985:215-216). Wellness is about balance and healthy relationships between the individual, the universe and the gods (Reinfeld & Pihama, 2007:37).

For Māori, the causation of illness is attributable to a number of factors such as those arising from accidental or natural causes (measles or a heart attack, for example) but the underlying issue is usually thought to be supernatural, or mātē Māori (Māori sickness).¹³⁵ Mātē Māori can be the result of a breach of tapu or makutu (black magic or sorcery) applied by an outsider (Parsons, 1985:217; Voyce, 1989:100). A breach of tapu might involve breaking some prohibition such as gathering food in a forbidden area, or hara (wrongdoing). According to Te Rangi Hiroa (1987:404-405), traditionally 'any departure from normal health was ascribed to attacks by malignant spirits', and a tohunga would be called in to determine the nature of the tapu breach and to locate the particular offending demon before then exorcising it. Hiroa was describing practices dating from pre-European contact until the early twentieth century; however, such beliefs continue to underpin contemporary Māori healing practices (McGowan, 2000; O'Connor, 2008).

After several years of serving as a Pākehā Catholic priest within a Māori community, Robert McGowan was invited to participate in Mareikura healing sessions during the 1980s.¹³⁶ His role was to say the karakia while the Māori healers worked directly with their patients applying 'massage, chiropractic type manipulation, and

¹³⁵ The Māori novelist, Witi Ihimaera, in his book *The Dream Swimmer* describes a modern-day Māori family whose members come to believe that the eldest son, Tamatea, is responsible for a series of illnesses or misfortunes and deaths amongst their hapū. When the father is diagnosed with cancer, he falls to his knees in front of Tamatea, begging him to have mercy: 'Must I also suffer the mātē?' he asks Tamatea (1997:123).

¹³⁶ Hori Enoka Mareikura was a noted Māori healer and visionary in the early 1900s from the Whanganui region who, together with a Māori prophetess, Mere Rikiriki, founded the māramatanga movement. Sinclair (2003) likens this to other prophetic Māori movements of the late 19th /early 20th centuries such as those established by Te Whiti, Te Kooti, Rua Kenana and Ratana.

such practices as “polarising” (McGowan, 2000:70).¹³⁷ His exhaustion, and that of the other healers at the end of the sessions, he ascribed to the sense that ‘we were battling with the illness, not so much a physical affliction as a non-physical power that in some way was attacking the patient, even if it manifested itself in the form of a particular illness’ (2000:71). It seems both Hiroa and McGowan are describing processes that in a different cultural context might be categorised as ‘shamanic extractions’.

Some scholars believe that, due to the underlying beliefs of pre-European Māori about the spiritual causation of illness, Māori did not have a large pharmacopoeia of plant medicines (Parsons, 1985:213). However, Riley (1994:8) suggests otherwise, writing that Māori had a ‘vast storehouse’ of botanical knowledge and that the spiritual and medicinal uses of plants were interwoven. Whare wānanga pupils were taught the appropriate karakia and tikanga for each ailment, and how to administer herbs and other non-vegetable remedies as part of the healing rituals; some of this knowledge was also generally available and commonly used within the whānau by women. Knowledge about the chemical constituents of the plants was not relevant: healing with plants occurred within this spiritual context, and was dependent on the mana of the tohunga or healer (although it is of interest that research often confirms traditional plant usage in terms of plant chemistry).

McGowan’s (2000) analysis of contemporary use of plant medicines illustrates the embeddedness of taha wairua¹³⁸ within this system of healing. In response to his frequent questions about the medicinal uses of plants, one kaumātua (a male elder) said to him:

“Why do you want to learn about medicines from the trees? You already have the main medicine.”

“What’s that?” I asked, knowing full well the answer I was about to receive.

¹³⁷ I assume the karakia were Christian since McGowan’s role was as a Catholic priest during the healing ritual (see Shirres [1997] for an extensive interpretation of traditional karakia, their nature and forms). McGowan does not expand on ‘polarising’ but I interpret this to mean some form of energy healing.

¹³⁸ Spiritual side or dimension.

“You have the karakia (the prayers). Without karakia nothing else matters. It is the most important medicine” (2000:vi-vii).

McGowan makes the point that many modern Māori are alienated from the land (whenua) and the bush (ngahere), and questions whether urbanised people can retain a body of knowledge that demands such an intimate understanding and connection with their natural environment. Nonetheless, or perhaps because of this, large numbers of Māori and Pākehā continue to attend the *Rongoā Māori – Traditional Māori Medicine* classes that McGowan has facilitated for many years through the University of Waikato Continuing Education programme.¹³⁹ Some years ago, I attended one of these courses in the bush near Tauranga, and was impressed with the range of people there. Participants included Māori of all ages, some proficient in te reo, others re-claiming their heritage and language, Māori parents wanting to learn rongoā to share with their children, interested Pākehā, and Western-trained herbalists wanting to extend their knowledge to include native plant medicines.¹⁴⁰

Before he died in 2007, the tohunga Hohepa Kereopa shared his extensive knowledge of food and medicinal plants, and the environment with Paul Moon (2003, 2005). The *Waka Huia* television series (New Zealand Television, 1991) filmed Hohepa Kereopa and a second tohunga, Tawhao Tioke (both Tuhoe iwi), in the bush. They spoke of the whakapapa of the trees, the sacred forest that they were taught to respect as children, and the importance of the bush as a source of rongoā while also honouring the kawa (protocols) around the gathering and use of the medicines. In the Ureweras, a Tuhoe woman offers a retreat for Māori women. Their healing, she says, comes from the peace and calmness of the bush and surroundings. The women are taught to pay

¹³⁹ McGowan now works for *Nga Whenua Rahui* a fund established within the Department of Conservation for the protection of indigenous ecosystems on Māori land. As a mark of respect for him and his work, many Māori in the Tauranga area know him as Pa Ropata.

¹⁴⁰ It seems that Māori seek this knowledge regardless of the ethnicity of the teacher: Jules, a neo-Shamanic participant in my study, is a Pākehā naturopath and medical herbalist who has taught rongoā on an urban marae in Auckland for several years. She told me that after travelling overseas for ten years and working with many indigenous healers, on her return to New Zealand she wanted to meet and learn from Māori healers. The way opened for her to do this, and she met and worked with several Māori groups.

attention to their nightly dreams as they absorb healing from the land, connecting to the atua and their whakapapa (Tahana, 2008a).

By the 1980s, some Māori health professionals were beginning to speak out about the consequences of ignoring Māori health beliefs in terms of poor Māori health outcomes within a dominant Western health system not attuned to the cultural and spiritual values of Māori. They noted that cultural concepts such as tapu, mana, ihi,¹⁴¹ mauri¹⁴² all play pivotal roles in Māori health and healing, expressing the underlying vitalistic philosophies of the Māori cosmos (Henare, 2001:204). Contemporary and more appropriate models for Māori health were proposed, such as te whare tapa wha (the four-walls of a house representing the wairua/spirit, the hinengaro/mind, the tinana/physical body and the whānau/family) (Durie,1994:70-75), or te wheke (the eight tentacles of an octopus, representing eight dimensions of life).¹⁴³ Some traditional Māori healing groups have contracted with the Ministry of Health to provide health services, and a national organisation of traditional Māori healers, *Nga Ringa Whakahaere o te iwi Māori* (NRW) was established in 1993. In 1999 national standards of traditional Māori healing practice were developed and published by the Ministry of Health in consultation with NRW.¹⁴⁴ Other groups of Māori healers, however, have expressed some wariness about being locked into contracts with the Ministry that might require them to subscribe to the 'official' whare tapa wha health model, and to practise a modified or 'sanitized' version of their healing (O'Connor, 2008:19, 66-78).

Categorising Māori Healers: Tohunga and Other Healers

Amongst Māori healers, tohunga are a particular group of specialist healers; others may not be named 'tohunga' but still perform a number of tohunga- or shamanic-like

¹⁴¹ Vitality, unique quality present in all living things that they can develop and grow (Barlow, 1991:31).

¹⁴² Life-force immanent in all creation (Marsden, in Royal, 2003:44).

¹⁴³ The eight dimensions include the four aspects of the whare tapa wha model (spirit, mind, body and family) plus mana ake/uniqueness, mauri/vitality, ancestral and cultural heritage, whatumanawa/ emotions. Waiora (total well-being of individual and family) is represented by the eyes of the octopus (Durie, 1994:75, 77; Pere, 1997).

¹⁴⁴ See <http://www.nrw.co.nz/> and <http://www.maorihealth.govt.nz/moh.nsf/950284e05722fc25cc25710300036c2c/93e60c71f7d36041cc2571bd00682785?OpenDocument> (accessed 1 July 2008).

healing functions in their communities. Others still have chosen to take on the name 'shaman' for various reasons, as I discuss in the following sections. Tohunga have been shrouded in mystery for centuries, their knowledge tapu and not available to ordinary people. The name 'tohunga' is sometimes a misunderstood term in much the same way as 'shaman' is and, as with shamans, tohunga have been romanticised and demonised by Europeans. Historian Paul Moon (2003:12) expressed some anxiety about publishing his collaborative work with the tohunga Hohepa Kereopa; he was concerned that 'unveil[ing] the tapu knowledge of the tohunga which has been built up over at least a millennium' might cause the knowledge to be misused or exploited in some way. Kereopa reassured him on this point: it was not something lightly undertaken, and he had had a vision about Moon before physically meeting him that provided Kereopa with confirmation that their project was the right path to follow.¹⁴⁵

Tohunga serve in many roles and one Māori healer wrote to me that 'Māori healing has its own forms of shamanism through the tohunga lineages. Many types, from rongoā medicine-makers through to land healers through to psychic readers' (pers. comm. 6 Aug 2008). Following Best (1972:1023), the usual definition given is that a tohunga is 'an adept, an expert' in any field of knowledge and a descriptor usually follows to clarify the area of expertise of any one tohunga, as in tohunga tā moko (tattoo artist). In the pre-European era, ritual and religious priests were classified according to the atua they served, such as tohunga matakite (seers into the future) or tohunga makutu who carry out black magic or sorcery. The highest class of priests were the tohunga ahurewa. Te Rangi Hiroa describes the activities of priestly tohunga as follows:

Though...[tohunga] may have used ventriloquism, hypnotism, possession, and other aids to impress the people with the belief that they had super-natural powers, they used their power wisely in helping the chiefs to govern the people aright. They were the repository of tribal lore regarding myths and tribal history, and they were expert genealogists. They studied natural phenomena and learned much regarding

¹⁴⁵ Hohepa Kereopa died in September 2007.

the stars, the seasons, and weather conditions... Thus the high-class tohunga were scholars, scientists, and philosophers as well as theologians (Hiroa, 1987:476).

Marsden, however, disputes translations of tohunga as 'expert', saying that the word is derived from the verb 'tohu', which means 'a sign or manifestation'. A tohunga was thus a person 'chosen or appointed by the gods to be their representative and the agent by which they manifested their operations in the natural world by signs of power (tohu mana)' (Royal, 2003:14). Tribal seers watched for the signs to manifest in the young men as they grew up.¹⁴⁶ By these means, their calling to a particular skill or occupation became apparent.

Moreover, Paul Moon suggests (2003:17-18) that understandings of the role of a tohunga, as outlined by early observers such as Elsdon Best are somewhat fragmentary and possibly show no understanding of their deeper underlying functions. Hohepa Kereopa supplied Moon with a very different definition: 'tohunga', Kereopa offered, derives from two words:

Whakato is the first word. It means to plant, or if you are at a hui¹⁴⁷ or something, you lay out the thing, like an issue – you plant it before everyone. Then you take away or hide your personal feelings or your personal interest in that issue – that is to kahunga,¹⁴⁸ the second word. So whakato kahunga is where you get the word tohunga from. And all the things that tohunga do are based on this principle of identifying the issue and then letting it be dealt with without any personal interest. So a tohunga then acts to guide people with the issue that has been laid down, but it is not for the tohunga to decide for others (Moon, 2003:18, emphasis in original).

Such a functional definition conveys the community service aspects of being a tohunga as Kereopa saw his role, but it says nothing about the special skills or tools a tohunga might employ to fulfil this role. These could include a mixture of 'natural

¹⁴⁶ One Māori woman told me 'tohunga' applies equally to men or women but most accounts of tohunga refer to men only. Best (1972:1087) mentions a priestess role that selected women (ruahine) play in some rituals such as whakanoa (lifting of tapu).

¹⁴⁷ To gather people together, a meeting.

¹⁴⁸ The literal interpretation of kahunga is a slave (Williams, 1997:85). I interpret this to mean that Kereopa saw his role as one of subjugation and service to his community.

healing, the diagnosis of physical or emotional ailments, particular perspectives on the natural and supernatural worlds, aspects of Māori religion, prophesy, interpretation of events, and a myriad other abilities and gifts' (Moon, 2003:17). It seems that Kereopa displayed many of these abilities in a typically under-stated and modest manner, and he was reluctant to claim the title 'tohunga' for himself (2003:24).

Given the contamination arising from the arrival of Europeans and the influence of Christianity, together with the extreme sacredness of the teachings that made the knowledge tapu and available to only selected higher-born boys, it is difficult to gauge what is authentic information concerning the practices and traditions of pre-European tohunga. Tuhoto Ariki was regarded as the last of the old tohunga around the time of the Tarawera eruption in 1886, and he resisted conversion to Christianity.¹⁴⁹ He was buried in his house by ash from the eruption and died after he was discovered and taken to hospital some days later, possibly because his tapu status was destroyed when hospital staff shaved off his matted hair (Andersen, 2005:3-4). Others received some traditional teachings in their youth, but were later influenced by Christianity in ways that caused them to 'forget' their earlier training. One such man said to Elsdon Best 'E Peehi!¹⁵⁰ – you are making me remember things that your Pākehā fellows have been forty years trying to make me forget' (cited in Andersen, 2005:5-6).

A few Europeans went native and some of their stories have been recorded. In *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, for example, James Cowan (1975) describes Bent's life as a Pākehā-Māori amongst Taranaki Māori in the 1870s and 1880s. From tohunga he encountered, Bent learnt about Māori occult beliefs and practices such as the use of makutu and powerful karakia to place a curse on someone. Such accounts no doubt fuelled the fears and horrified fascination of many Pākehā settlers. Newspapers ran

¹⁴⁹ The Tarawera eruption was a volcanic eruption that destroyed the world-famous Pink and White Terraces on the shores of Lake Rotomahana near Rotorua, and killed over 100 people. <http://www.natlib.govt.nz/collections/highlighted-items/the-mt-tarawera-eruption> (accessed 29 July 2008). Te Awekotuku (1991: 161) says Tuhoto Ariki was from the iwi Tuhourangi and Te Arawa, and refers to him as a shaman giant who was 'acutely aware of his psychic and material environment', implying that he would have been aware that the disaster was about to occur. A New Zealand man, self-identifying as Pākehā but with distant Māori heritage has written about the psychic experiences he began having spontaneously, and says that Tuhoto Ariki now serves as an ancestral spirit guide for him (Campbell, 2005:127, 132-133).

¹⁵⁰ Māori name for Elsdon Best.

stories that sensationalised aspects of the 'tohunga craze...pandering to an interest [by] Pākehā settlers [who] wanted to be shocked by accounts of Māori gullibility and inferiority and thus be reassured their own superiority' (Voyce, 1989:101-102, emphasis in original).

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Māori seemed to be under threat of extinction and in the midst of the social and cultural turmoil of that era, traditional healing practices employed by tohunga were frequently not effective in combating infectious diseases introduced by the Europeans. Inappropriate use of traditional practices such as immersion in water to remove tapu often resulted in deaths in cases where tohunga were treating new and unfamiliar conditions such as measles or typhoid fever. The new illnesses ravaged the Māori people; their immune systems had no in-built defences, and traditional diets and living conditions were under threat (Hiroa, 1987:409; Voyce, 1989:101). Political re-framing of Māori approaches to health and healing as merely a belief system (as opposed to 'factual' medical knowledge) allowed Pākehā to dismiss their traditions as quackery (Laing, 2002:155), which ultimately brought the *Tohunga Suppression Act* (TSA) into being in 1907. The TSA only restricted those who claimed supernatural powers from practising as healers though; massage, herbs or application of poultices were allowable (Voyce, 1989:111) and, as Durie (1994:46) observes, while the TSA outlawed tohunga it did not prevent them operating, it simply drove them underground. The Act was not repealed until 1964, and it has taken Māori healers some years to become a little more visible within the wider New Zealand culture. Tohunga such as Māori Marsden and Hohepa Kereopa, who were graduates of the old whare wānanga, grew up in the 20th century but their elders were of the 19th century (Moon, 2003, 2005; Royal, 2003). Both learnt the old traditions and then went on throughout the course of their lives to adapt and articulate a model of Māoritanga relevant to modern Māori. They were tohunga whose insights and understandings have been recorded, their teachings from the past a rich legacy for Māori and others in the 21st century.

Samuel Robinson (2005) is a contemporary Māori (Kati Irakehu iwi from Banks Peninsula in the South Island) who advocates a tohunga revival. The complex cosmological knowledge he outlines, passed to him through oral traditions from his

elders and recorded in family manuscripts held by him, breaks tradition by including information not revealed to the public before, he says.¹⁵¹ His teachers include other unnamed metaphysical sources, and Robinson says he wrote the book *Tohunga the Revival* while in his early twenties after several years of extensive personal spiritual explorations. He describes rituals of divination and the final sacred ritual of the initiate's tohunga training, the tokotauwaka ritual of 'binding the karakia', the three chants that complete the Io teachings. Robinson writes:

For some the old tokotauwaka method will be doubted and I expect that it will invoke a lot of argument because as far as I know I am one of the last persons with knowledge of this method (2005:291).

He recommends that people gather in groups of three, each person singing one of the three chants, to test the information practically.

In addition, Robinson draws on other sources and traditions when he likens teachings about Io and the kore periods (voids of nothingness or '*potentiality to be*') to the Hebrew Kabbala concept of 'ain' or 'not periods' (periods of negative existence) (2005:296-297, emphasis in original). He further breaks tradition, and says he is possibly leaving himself open to criticism he is imparting sacred knowledge that should be retained by Māori, when he advocates that everyone should 'arise to their own tohunga status' and claim their own spiritual power instead of using spiritual experts (such as tohunga or ministers) to mediate with the gods on their behalf. Just as neo-Shamans are taught to shamanise for themselves, Robinson urges everyone to become their 'own tohunga, say...[their] own prayers, see...[their] own visions and know...[their] own gods on a very direct basis' (2005:11). His invitation is not for Māori alone; by publishing this material, he is opening the information up for use by anyone who chooses to follow his protocols and rituals.

Robinson appears to be very open and honest about his sources, and the authority given to him to write and publish his accounts. Ultimately, it is for Māori to determine the authenticity of his work and perhaps, as one Māori man told me (previously cited

¹⁵¹ Pere (1997:3) makes a similar assertion about the information given in her book, *Te Wheke*.

in the paragraph about the Io debate), such matters are best decided experientially with people performing the rituals outlined by Robinson, and assessing their effectiveness for themselves. In spite of Robinson's concerns about his revelations being contentious, I am not aware of any widespread debates within Māoridom about his book. His work is noted by two Māori researchers (one of whom is also a healer), as an example of 'iwi based kōrero (talk)' about tohunga and rongōā Māori (Reinfeld & Pihama, 2007:36). They do not question his authority to publicise key concepts relating to tohunga and wānanga from his own iwi perspective, but they do criticise his work for presenting a gendered and Westernised romantic rendition of mythology in some places. Their criticism, however, does not appear to be about Robinson going public with sacred healing information, breaking from what might be construed (in a different cultural context) as a 'traditional' shamanic system of healing for use by the few chosen ones, to a 21st century democratic approach that empowers and encourages everyone to become their own tohunga-shaman. Robinson's innovative eclecticism, a kind of neo-tohungaism, is typical of some other contemporary Māori healers.

Contemporary Māori Healers

Fieldwork material for this aspect of my research came from attendance at healing wānanga and clinics that are open to members of the public (Māori or Pākehā), audiotaped interviews, and informal conversations. I have also had telephone and email communications with several other Māori healers living and working in New Zealand and overseas, and draw on information about other healers gained through the internet. Some healers are 'hands on' with their work, using various forms of massage and energy work while others work indirectly, healing spiritually through the use of oratory, song, chants, and dance. I begin with a discussion about the first group of healers, including a group of Te Oo Mai Reia healers trained by Hohepa Delamere (Papa Joe) in the early years of this century, whom O'Connor (2008) also worked with.¹⁵² Other healers work independently following a similar tradition.¹⁵³ They use a

¹⁵² Hohepa Delamere died in September 2006.

¹⁵³ See for example <http://www.ata-rangi.com/> and <http://māorihealers.wordpress.com/> (accessed 14 Sep 2010). A New Zealand Sunday paper has published an overview of some

combination of methods such as romiromi and mirimiri,¹⁵⁴ working with subtle energies, kōrerorero (talking and discussion, counselling), various forms of prayer or invocations to spiritual powers, and rongoā. These healers generally tend to be more 'traditional', following teachings that they say have been passed down orally for thousands of years from their spiritual home of Hawaiiki (see Pere, 1997).

O'Connor's research was an examination of the political interfaces of the New Zealand government, its colonial history, the bicultural state and its impact on one group of Māori healers. He explored how these historical and political issues impinge on the ways the healers embody their practices, and the ways in which they view the body. To facilitate his understandings of the healers' practice, O'Connor drew on Anthroposophical philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), and mind-body medicine and quantum mechanics theories proposed by a contemporary medical and Ayurvedic doctor, Deepak Chopra, to explain the subtle and intangible spiritual and energetic concepts embodied by the healers. Such comparisons highlight the similarities between notions intrinsic to the 'traditional' work of these Māori healers and much New Age thinking, principles that are also familiar to shamanic, and complementary and alternative practitioners who work within subtle energetic healing realms. These concepts all push the boundaries of Western rationality and epistemologies (Kent, 2007:iv) but, as Hume points out (1999:5-6), 'ideas of alternate realities that have woven their way through Western occultism for centuries' begin to become avenues for Westerners to comprehend indigenous worldviews.

Unlike O'Connor, who analysed macro-concerns relating to a particular group of contemporary Māori healers, I was interested in individual healers and the similarities or differences between their practices and those of shamans and shamanic healing. I attended the weekly clinic in West Auckland where the Te Oo Mai Reia healers operate, which is open to all members of the public by koha (donation), on four

Māori healers, raising complex issues of accountability and the challenges of incorporating rongoā into the government-funded health system. See

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/sunday-star-times/features/2520594/Body-and-spirit-a-glimpse-into-the-world-of-traditional-Māori-medicine> (published 21 June 2009, accessed 14 Sep 2010).

¹⁵⁴ Types of massage or bodywork: romiromi is deep tissue work including manipulation and alignment; mirimiri is gentle massage.

occasions in 2007 and on one occasion in 2008. I received healings myself on three of those visits. On my first visit, I arrived as instructed while the training wānanga was still in process, before the clinic opened to the public. A Māori man was dictating a chant or prayer in Māori and some of the group were writing it down before he then discussed the meanings of the words: they were about 'breaking the ties that bind' to release the spiritual and emotional blocks of the past. Later, he told me that he had been dictating an ancient karakia, 'over 5,000 years old, in classical Māori', an older form of te reo transmitted orally.¹⁵⁵ The words in karakia have been passed down since the time of the separation of Rangi and Papa: '...from that time...life-giving chants, chants for child-birth, chants for the weather, for sickness, for food, for possessions, and for war, came down to us' (Grey's New Zealand Māori Manuscripts, cited in Shirres, 1997:65). They are therefore strongly traditional and complex in their structure, symbolism and imagery, and require dedicated study to understand their hidden meanings, one healer explained to me.

I had previously seen a television documentary about a group of Māori healers centred on the work of Hohepa Delamere,¹⁵⁶ which familiarised me with the Te Oo Mai Reia way of working. Superficially, at least, their bodywork seemed similar to a practice I know as Rolfing or Structural Integration, a form of manipulating connective tissues in the body to release held-in stress patterns.¹⁵⁷ Romiromi or deep tissue massage used by the Te Oo Mai Reia healers involves firm pressure and is frequently cathartic, a way of working I am also familiar with, for myself and when working with my clients. Nonetheless, the experience of being present in a room with five or six

¹⁵⁵ It seems that the language tohunga speak is a vernacular special to them. Charles Royal (2003:viii-ix) describes a meeting between two tohunga, Māori Marsden and Dr Henare Tuwhangai, that he was privy to witness. Although Royal says he was relatively proficient in te reo, their conversation was largely unintelligible to him. He felt 'as if an invisible veil had been drawn between us for they spoke a Māori language that I could only assume was the language of the tohunga, understood and used by the initiated only.'

¹⁵⁶ An Inside New Zealand documentary called *No Ordinary Joe*, directed by Jane Reeves (12 May 2005). The documentary showed Papa Joe and his team of healers working during their regular trips to California. An American woman, Iris Loesel (2006), has written about her meeting Papa Joe in a romanticised New Age interpretation of his work, although it does seem that she also had a genuine spiritual/energetic relationship with Papa Joe, and her writing was authorised by him (see <http://www.healthequilibrium.com/papajoe.html> accessed 14 Jun 2011).

¹⁵⁷ For an authoritative and detailed account of Rolfing, see Maitland (1995).

massage tables, each occupied by a client simultaneously attended by two or three practitioners was initially an overwhelming experience. As I watched, another healer, a Scottish man who has worked with the group for several years arrived.¹⁵⁸ After he had greeted each of the healers in turn with a hongi (pressing noses together), he introduced himself to me and together we surveyed the room: there was chatter, laughter, tears, and I had a sense of psychic energies unseen and unknown (to me) swirling intensely around the room. He talked to me about the intimacy and privacy that is present for each patient, despite the communal nature of their healing sessions; both aspects, he said, were important. My own experience of being on the healing table confirmed the apparent contradiction of feeling private within one's own healing process while in a very communal space. The sense of shared humanity and pain, physical or emotional, adds another healing dimension that connects people to their community and whakapapa, and plays a major role in the healing process within Māori spiritual and cosmological systems.

Indeed, concerns about, and the need to re-connect with one's whakapapa, is one critical aspect of the Te Oo Mai Reia healers that distinguishes them from Western deep-tissue bodywork modalities, such as Rolfing. Whakapapa is more than just genealogy; it also links people into the history and stories of the landscape and their ancestors, and 'it is those stories that ensure our tupuna (ancestors) live on in us and around us. They connect us to the physical features of our landscape, which become imbued with spiritual meaning through the narratives' (George, 2010b), 'innately and organically link[ing] the past, present and future' (Graham, 2008, cited in George, 2010b). On one occasion, I observed a healer tell the woman he was working with that she was disconnected from her whakapapa: 'The pain in your body is within you already; I wasn't working so hard on your hamstrings'. He had been raising her legs

¹⁵⁸ This particular wānanga was inclusive, open to anyone who wished to learn the Te Oo Mai Reia healing traditions. The term 'wānanga' is evolving to include any forum for the transmission of reliable knowledge, particularly in the area of healing. The knowledge may be specific to a hapū or iwi, or for a broader range of people but the central focus is on kaupapa Māori (following and privileging Māori methodologies and protocols) as an avenue to re-claim and affirm Māori healing knowledge and power (Reinfeld & Pihama, 2007:25). This is different from earlier concepts of the whare wānanga as a place for a selected few to learn esoteric and sacred knowledge.

one at a time to stretch her tight muscles, causing her to cry out. He explained to her that the pain in her body was held in her DNA cellular memory, which carries her spiritual heritage. I was interested in his languaging of this concept as it sounded remarkably like New Age reasoning to me. Later, a Māori woman explained it to me thus: the grandparents (tipuna or tupuna) carry the tikanga or traditions and imprint or mark it (moko) on their grandchildren (their mokopuna).¹⁵⁹ As O'Connor (2008) found, traditional Māori notions, when re-interpreted for a wider audience can sound very similar to the terminology and concepts used within some New Age circles; much current thinking within mind-body medicine includes ideas of cellular memory (see, for example, Broom, 2007; Chopra, 1994). In this case, it seems the healer was suggesting that the ancestors mark their grandchildren with their spiritual heritage, in much the same way as the genetic material passed on through the DNA marks a person.

As with neo-Shamans and shamans from numerous other cultures, Māori healers draw on subtle psychic energies. One Māori woman, Ngawaiata (Ngā Puhī), worked with a group of healers on an urban marae from 1997 to 1999. This group worked differently from the Te Oo Mai Reia healers, applying mirimiri, a gentle energy massage, and freely blending other New Age-like practices with more traditional ways of working. Healers are encouraged to find and develop their own healing gifts: some 'see', some 'hear', some have spirit guides, some do 'energy work'. Healing sessions begin with a group meditation, each person drawing golden light and energy down from the universe, their body serving as a conduit for those universal sources they work with. Spirit guardians or guides may be present in the form of animals or tipuna. When Ngawaiata is healing, she says she 'downloads information' that 'just appears' in her head about the person she is working with. Twenty-two guides have shown themselves to her over the years including two totem animals: on her left shoulder, a tuatara¹⁶⁰ and on her right shoulder a seagull. The tuatara is said to be the guardian of

¹⁵⁹ The suffix 'puna' means spring or fountain of water, from which the source of knowledge (puna) arises. 'Matapuna' is the fountainhead; all three words – matapuna, tipuna/tupuna and mokopuna - are strands of a complex whole that arises from the source of knowledge (pers. comm. 28 Oct 2008).

¹⁶⁰ An endangered ancient reptile found only in New Zealand.

the esoteric knowledge of the upper jaw. In some wānanga, the teachings were traditionally divided into Te Kauae-runga (the upper jaw), which imparted knowledge of the ancestor gods and Te Kauae-raro (the lower jaw) where knowledge of human history was taught (Salmond, 1985:243; Royal, 2003:58). Ngawaiata's spirit guides are culturally specific in the context of her work as a Māori healer on a marae.

Although I have characterised these groups of healers as working primarily with their hands, karakia and connection to cosmological and spiritual origins are the cornerstone from which all else flows. Some groups are more traditional in their approach, following oral traditions that are apparently thousands of years old, while others integrate different esoteric practices and concepts into their culturally based healing methodologies. All aim to bring about cosmological balance within an individual, (re)connecting them to their whānau/iwi/whakapapa.

Healing with Oratory and Performance

I indicated earlier that a second group of Māori healers works with oratory, song and movement, while others use ritual and ceremony. I consider this second category of healers now. Many of them blend and incorporate other teachings and traditions into their own cultural matrix. They often have internet websites to promote their work, developing and extending their traditions in creative ways that borrow eclectically, syncretically mixing and matching healing elements borrowed from numerous global sources, including other indigenous cultures, Western psychological and esoteric sources, or Eastern martial arts and healing traditions. Some are exporting their healing work overseas, especially to Europe and North America. Others are conducting spiritual tours within New Zealand that encourage international and New Zealand (Māori and Pākehā) spiritual seekers.¹⁶¹ Two women have adapted a traditional myth to create a workshop that combines the story with Jungian-like concepts of self-transformation, inner light and shadow energies to heal ritually such things as family violence and abuse.¹⁶² Some healers are seeking to promote their practices as an act of

¹⁶¹ See, for example, http://www.worldviewz.net/dreaming_spiritofyouth_ruthtai.html (accessed 5 Aug 2008).

¹⁶² <http://www.poutama.com/index.php> (accessed 6 Aug 2008).

ethnic pride and renaissance. One Māori woman told me that if the innovators are well-grounded in their tikanga, paradoxically they are then able to innovate 'authentically', building on their traditions, extending or adapting them for modern Māori and non-Māori audiences alike.

Hirini Reedy is one such Māori person who grew up steeped in Māoritanga. As an adult, he has had diverse careers that have given him new concepts and language to explain and expand his cultural understandings. He spent eleven years as an officer in the New Zealand army in the 1980s and 1990s, working extensively with Māori warrior energy, and was instrumental in establishing the culture of Ngati Tūmatauenga¹⁶³ in the army. Subsequently, he completed his Masters thesis about the art of the Māori warrior (Reedy, 1996). His other skills include training as a civil engineer, neurolinguistic (a method of re-programming communication) and reiki practitioner (a form of energy healing), hypnotherapist, and 'practitioner of Māori and South Asian martial arts and medicine'. Is Hirini a shaman or a tohunga? One Pākehā woman personally acquainted with him described him to me as a 'shamanic character who enters other realms'. However, Hirini has no labels for himself, writing 'I am just me' (pers. comm. 6 Aug 2008). From his websites, I perceive him as charismatic, constantly shape-shifting and changing, a storyteller, possibly a trickster, projecting varying images of himself and his work. He has been described as a 'modern Māori mystic', a practitioner of a 'shamanic martial arts practice' he calls Aio Koa – sleeping seed, wild flower - that he evolved after having visions of flowers, seeds and trees. This led to a yearlong odyssey and initiation process in nature, living and sleeping in the bush, on beaches, in trees, caves and sometimes his car (Paterson, 2008). More recently, Hirini has offered a weekend workshop entitled *Shaman-Healer-Warrior: Ancient Earth Teachings for the Modern New Zealander*. According to his web page, the course covers (amongst other things) training in sensing energy fields, sharpening intuitive and sensory perceptions, tracking and other warrior skills, reiki, hoponopono (a Hawaiian technique for clearing energy and emotional pain), te wao Tāne (time in the bush,

¹⁶³ People of the god of war. Tumatauenga is the Māori atua of warfare.

utilising the healing available in nature).¹⁶⁴ These are skills designed, he says, for people to find their own 'inner formula' to equip them for future changes in the global environment, a similar process to that of New Age followers and neo-Shamans who seek paths of self-spirituality, and one that fellow neo-tohunga, Samuel Robinson (2005) also advocates in his book *Tohunga the Revival*.

Other healers ritually use water (wai). Two Māori women, for example, perform water-healing ceremonies that energetically and physically extend around the globe in very different ways. One is married to a Swedish man, and she has lived in Sweden for twenty-seven years. Her years in Sweden, she told me, have deepened the teachings she absorbed during her childhood, growing up in New Zealand as a Māori. Her ceremonies reflect her deep spiritual and environmental concerns, and have led to her creating *Declarations for the Mother Earth and for Water* that were ritually signed at her Swedish hometown in 2007.¹⁶⁵ The second woman, Nuori, has mixed ancestry that includes Māori, French-German (these ancestors settled in England in the 18th century), Inuit and Sami (from her great-great-grandfather's lineage); as a result, she says, she is compelled to visit particular places whenever she is in Britain. She collects water from the Chalice Well in Glastonbury and, back in New Zealand mixes it with waters from her lake (Waikaremoana), the Waiwherowhero stream that 'runs deep red' into the Waikato River, and from the spring of Tawhiao.¹⁶⁶ The waters are used in small private rituals or ceremonies enacted for such occasions as house openings, naming ceremonies, for cleansing, protection or defence.

I return to the theme of global influences that informs the work of many contemporary Māori healers in the following section, but firstly, I conclude this description of their practices with a mention of matakite (clairvoyance). Many healers are recognised for their matakite abilities. Some people (not only Māori) have the

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.hirinireedy.com/> and <http://www.hirinireedy.com/shamanwarriorhealer.htm> (accessed 5 August 2008).

¹⁶⁵ See <http://www.heartofmotherearth.net/> and http://www.heartofmotherearth.net/html/the_declarations.html (accessed 15 Oct 2008). Her *Declaration* seems to have foretold the recent signing of the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* by the Bolivian government in April 2011, when politicians working with grassroots organisations and indigenous social activists agreed to enshrine the rights of 'Mother Nature' in law (*The Guardian Weekly*, 15-21 April 2011, p.7).

¹⁶⁶ The second Māori King (1825–1894).

potential to develop extra-sensory perceptions, and these gifts are more prominent in some people than others; however, given the inter-weaving of the spiritual and the profane in Māori society, there is perhaps more acceptance of such phenomena amongst Māori people. Dr Rangimarie Turuki (Rose) Pere has written that 'My old people were all psychic and that wasn't unusual' (1994:166-176). Ron Ngata (Ngati Porou), who has received funding for his doctoral research about matakite phenomena amongst Māori people, is investigating the ways that those with matakite abilities tend to be pathologised within the orthodox mental health system. The consequences of this for Māori are large, affecting all areas of their lives (Tahana, 2008b; see also Durie, 1994:51, 133-135; Lapsley, Nikora & Black, 2002), in a pattern that is similar to the pathologising of people with shamanic abilities in other cultures.

Even amongst Māori, however, psychic gifts may not always be recognised in children. Ngawaiata, for example, had frightening supernatural experiences as a child that she felt unable to speak to anyone about until, as an adult, she met and worked with healers on an urban marae who were able to reassure her and normalise her experiences. A male tohunga, whom she met on the marae, once saw her deceased grandfather standing behind her and, on another occasion, her late aunt. The aunt was the last tohunga to be trained in the traditional whare wānanga, and she told the male tohunga to 'pull her [Ngawaiata's] ears to make her listen'. The aunt wanted to pass her mantle on to Ngawaiata who did not want it, and was 'freaked out' by it. She felt 'self-conscious about being a "healer"'; she now feels she serves her people in other ways, through her writing and mentoring work.

Ngawaiata told me that she has heard it suggested that Māori people did not have psychoactive drugs because they did not need them. Is this because they innately possess psychic gifts and therefore do not need entheogenic assistance to enter other realities, I wondered, or is it that, because there were no readily available psychoactive substances in New Zealand flora, they learnt other ways to access subtle realms? According to one healer, Hohepa Delamere (Papa Joe) told his students that Māori did sometimes make a psychoactive wine from the roots of a particular tree but he would not divulge the name of the tree to his students. Some Māori people can enter different realms using karakia or chants: during class or in conversation, the healer said, 'Papa

Joe would frequently “go”, sometimes for five minutes or so before “returning”.’ He told me that he himself found it was a ‘real buzz, quite intoxicating’ to tune into other realms but:

...at the end of the day, you have to live in this world: ultimately, we have a physical body and have to engage with the physical world. If we spend too much time on the other side, our physical body begins to disintegrate.

Nowadays, he can ‘switch it on’ at will, as required. As with neo-Shamans, who move in and out of different realities in their day-to-day lives, this healer has learnt to use his gifts in pragmatic and realistic ways that normalise matakite phenomena.

While some contemporary Māori healers continue to follow traditional teachings and customs, others eclectically expand their healing practices; nonetheless, immersion in their cultural and cosmological traditions provides the bedrock for their work. This foundation imparts knowledge and power that allows them to confidently innovate and develop their practices, and to share them with others in multiple global cultural healing exchanges. Few healers claim the title of ‘tohunga’ for themselves, although some are recognised as such in their communities. Perhaps the notion of the tohunga as a tapu and sacred religious specialist recognised from birth is changing, just as some contemporary whare wānanga are becoming more democratised and open to Māori and non-Māori. However, gifted children are still recognised, encouraged and taught by their elders. The website for one healer includes photos of her instructing her pre-school aged grandson as they both work with a patient at a Māori healing clinic in New York in 2006.¹⁶⁷ These examples are all evidence of cultural traditions changing, developing and adapting to a modern environment, observable too in the numbers of Māori seeking out, learning about and reclaiming their traditions and healing knowledge (for example, by attending rongoā courses).

¹⁶⁷ <http://māorihealers.com/kiwa-muru> (accessed 13 Jun 2011).

Contemporary Māori Healers in a Global Context

Amidst a world of countless global interactions, cross-fertilisation of cultural, artistic and healing practices are commonplace. Māori healers play a role in these processes as they build relationships with other indigenous peoples and shamans, from North and South America and parts of Northern or Eastern Europe. In doing so, they discover correspondences between their practices and those of others, with their shared holistic worldviews and colonial histories. Cultural exchanges between indigenous groups can potentially result in the modification of practices to suit new local situations. Some Māori, for example, lead sweatlodges and sundances in New Zealand, following Native American traditions taught to them by a visiting Native American man (pers. comm. 19 Oct 2007; 22 Oct 2008). These events are open to all who wish to attend and participate; the Facebook page for *Aotearoa Sundance*, a non-profit organisation, includes information about events in New Zealand and internet addresses for various international sundance organisations and indigenous councils. This is an area ripe for future research.

International links have resulted in other Māori healers travelling overseas to meet people from numerous cultures, exposing them to an array of spiritual and healing practices. In 2006, one kaumātua told me, he travelled with a group of about twelve other indigenous people to India, to attend the Oneness University where they received the Deeksha Oneness Blessing.¹⁶⁸ He found this to be similar to the Māori practice of 'hono' (literally, to join), where the healer places their hands in close proximity to the patient's head, saying a karakia as they do so (see Riley, 1994:60 for one version of a hono karakia). Hono are used to mend physical (visible) fractures, and this man performs hono to help heal (invisible) fractures within families. The mingling of cultures and healing traditions continued during his visit to India when he met a shaman from Peru, who invited him to attend an international shamanic conference in Peru later that year; he accepted the invitation and travelled to Peru. He took part in ceremonies and rituals using *ayahuasca*; he discovered similarities between Māori

¹⁶⁸ The University was established by Sri Amma and Bhagavan in 2002. The Blessing 'transfers physical energy, awakening our connection with the oneness in everything'. Thousands of people from around the world receive the blessing and are taught to give it to others. See <http://www.onenessuniversity.org/oneness/cms/home/> (accessed 21 October 2008).

healing and many of the healing practices of other indigenous people, noting that 'We [Māori] have tohunga'. In 2007, accompanied by his son and several other Māori people, he went to Mexico for the second *Intercontinental Encounter on Shamanic Ethnomedicine and Ethnopharmacy*.¹⁶⁹ The conference, attended by shamans and healers, anthropologists and other academics from North and South America, and Europe, was organised by the *Institute for Tradicional and Alternative Medicine Mexico-Peru* (IMTAMPAC). IMTAMPAC works to promote the medical systems of the Mexican, Mayan and Inca people and explore a variety of themes relating to the legalisation of shamanism, the use of sacred plants, neo-Shamanism, and the inter-relatedness of other alternative and traditional healing systems, psychiatry, psychology, and medical anthropology. The Māori healers were able to impart some of their knowledge and traditions at the conference.

Given the power imbalances and histories of oppression endured by many indigenous peoples, cultural exchanges between indigenous groups are less controversial and perhaps less complex than issues relating to indigenous people sharing their practices with Europeans. Nonetheless, some Māori healers do teach and work overseas with Europeans in North America and Europe, passing on cultural information and traditions. Te Waimatoa Turoa-Morgan (Wai) is a Māori woman who has worked extensively in Europe for twelve years, and self-identifies as a shaman and tohunga, descriptors she uses inter-changeably.¹⁷⁰ Through the eyes of her culture, she is a matakite; through the eyes of the world, she is a shaman, she told me. She travels and teaches in the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Germany for six months of the year, collaborating with an international group of indigenous shamans. She says she is the overseeing matakite/tohunga, wisdom teacher and elder for a 'universal shamanic' three-yearlong *whare wānanga* she has established, with eighteen students including homoeopathic and medical doctors, counsellors, psychotherapists, dance therapists. In Chapter 2, I noted the ways that some indigenous shamans have modified their practices for a global world and how, in certain circumstances, this includes adapting their work and re-framing it for Westerner consumption (for,

¹⁶⁹ See <http://www.shamanismoencuentro2007.com/themes.html> and <http://www.shamanismoencuentro2007.com/history.html> (accessed 26 June 2008).

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.wai-shaman.com/index.htm> (accessed 15 Oct 2008).

example, the work of the Peruvian shaman Eduardo Calderón [Joralemon, 1990:117]). Likewise, Wai believes that it is now time that sacred knowledge, once taught to only a privileged few within Māori culture, should become available to others outside the culture. She translates traditional Māori concepts to sit within a broader spiritual context, a 'universal archetypal practice of the tohunga' (pers. comm. 19 June 2008); specific cultural teachings are simplified and universalised for an international audience. However, she notes, there are some traditionalists who do not accept these changes; I return to this theme in the following chapter.

This chapter has examined the practices of some contemporary Māori healers within the context of their rich and complex cosmologies and history, with the view to ascertaining how present-day Māori healing practices might be like, or not like, shamanism. In Chapter 2, I defined 'shamanism' as a term representing a broad discursive complex, one that has 'astonishing similarities' across very diverse cultures world-wide (Vitebsky, 1995:11), an ancient and universal phenomenon with common shamanic motifs found amongst numerous indigenous cultures. Are those Māori healers whose work I have described shamanic in their practices? Certainly, many of them demonstrate the key motifs of shamanism: they enter different realms, they communicate with ancestors and other spirit guardians, pay attention to their dreams and visions, and they work amongst their communities for healing. 'Shaman' is not a name many of the healers I have spoken to identify with, although some healers working overseas have adopted that title, perhaps as a way of making their work accessible to Europeans who are more familiar with the word 'shaman' than 'tohunga'. It is likely too that this terminology appeals to European and American senses of the 'exotic' or 'primitive', all useful marketing tools.

Finding her identity and an appropriate name for her healing rituals, has led Nuori to think that 'shaman' best describes her practice. On occasions, she has classified herself as Wiccan/Pai Marire¹⁷¹ but since meeting two women shamans in Norway –

¹⁷¹ Meaning 'goodness and peace'. The Pai Marire movement was also known as Te Hauhau Church (hau hau = the breath of God), the first organised independent Māori Christian church that grew out of land conflicts in Taranaki in the 1860s. See <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/politics/pai-marire/pai-marire-intro> (accessed 15 Oct 2008).

one was Inuit and the other Norwegian - she has been considering 'shaman' as an appropriate identity:

It was like, they do stuff that I do. We performed a ceremony on a Bronze Age barrow in a circle of silver birch trees, and it was extraordinary. I thought, yeah this feels like me!

As I left Nuori, we joked about her 'coming out' as a shaman: 'My Sami ancestor is by my shoulder here, grinning!' she laughed. Taking on the title 'shaman' has been a private process of identity construction for herself, rather than responding to a need to explain her healing methodology to others.

In the 2nd epigraph for this chapter, Royal wrote that ancient Māori viewed the universe as a fabric woven from a 'fabulous mélange of energies' (2003:xiii). In the physical world manifested by those energies in this time and place, Māori, in common with other indigenous peoples, are subject to, and participate in complex global flows that have the potential to both challenge and extend or enrich their traditions. They are discovering commonalities between their traditions and those of other indigenous peoples. Some contemporary Māori healers are eclectic in their practices, borrowing from others' teachings and creating new practices and traditions. Others, however, do not feel the need to bring in new methods, telling me that the traditional teachings they have received work for them and the people they treat. In addition, some Māori healers work with neo-Shamans as their patients and, conversely, other Māori have approached neo-Shamans for healing for themselves. Well-known tohuna, Dr Rangimarie Turuki Arikirangi Rose Pere, for example, collaborates with the Pākehā/Cherokee shamanic co-creator of a range of New Zealand native plant essences, serving as the official spiritual patron of the range. I enlarge on the relationships between Māori healers and neo-Shamans in the following chapter, when I turn to issues of appropriation and syncretism, traditions, authenticity and bricolage, all of which feature in the manifestation of evolving 21st century forms of eclectic neo-Shamanism.

CHAPTER 9

NEO-SHAMANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: ISSUES OF APPROPRIATION, SYNCRETISM AND BRICOLAGE

It is early morning, and I am one of only four New Zealanders¹⁷² amongst a group of men and women, many of them with Native American ancestry visiting New Zealand and eager to learn about Māori traditions. We are standing barefooted on the lawn in front of Mana Retreat Centre with its magnificent views across rolling farmland and bush to the headlands of Manaia Harbour. Distant islands float on the waters of the Hauraki Gulf. The bush-clad mountain Puketaratarā towers over us. Two local Māori women have arrived to teach us their traditional ritual to greet the four directions.

Beginning with the east, arms opened and raised to the sky, we greet the guardians of each direction in turn, moving anti-clockwise. We honour our wahine (female) ancestors, and our tane (male) ancestors. We offer ourselves up to be of service. We give thanks for the separation of Rangi (the sky) and Papatūānuku (the earth), and gather the three baskets of knowledge, offering them up, bringing them into our heart and spreading them throughout the land (Fieldnotes, 27 Oct 2007).¹⁷³

¹⁷² Actually, I was the only New Zealand-born participant at the workshop, a fact I felt the need to point out when introducing myself as a fifth-generation New Zealander at the beginning of the workshop. ‘Ah,’ said the facilitator, ‘bringing in the ancestors’.

¹⁷³ Esoteric teachings about the three baskets (kete) of knowledge obtained by the atua Tane when he travelled to the heavens, representing three ways of gathering or obtaining knowledge (or ‘food’), vary from tribe to tribe. The content of each kete varies too (Shirres, 1997:16-19; see also Barlow, 1991; Salmond, 1985:243-244). The ritual was of particular interest to me as I had previously experienced a similar version of honouring the directions when attending neo-Shamanic workshops, usually performed outside with tai-chi-like movements. I understood that the tohuna, Dr Rose Pere, had created it. However, one of the women leading the ceremony on this occasion, told me that she has known this ritual form for some time, and that she first met Rose Pere only a year ago, perhaps indicating an independently derived but common tradition amongst different iwi. (An alternate explanation could be that someone who had previously learnt the ritual from Rose Pere taught her). The point I wish to make here is that this ritual has been widely disseminated amongst New Zealand neo-Shamans, and that it also bears many similarities to those performed by neo-Pagan groups in New Zealand and overseas (see, for example, Arrien’s [1993] explication of the Four-Fold Way, which draws on her Basque-heritage and those of many other indigenous ‘earth-based’ people). A further example of the

* * * *

One of the interesting aspects is that in spirit or in those other worlds, there is no ethnicity. I'll never forget at Avebury Stones [in England] three or four years ago, [when a couple of friends and] I walked the Avenue. We were heading for the actual village, and coming towards [us] was this extraordinary group of people, raggle-taggle Gypsy-looking people except that their draperies and chains were 18ct gold and Italian silks. They were being led by this huge Native American with a drum (laughs). All these dancing individuals were European and guiding them along the Avenue was this Native American - he was an actual ethnic, huge, reddish-brown, long braids, eagle feathers, blue jeans, squash blossom necklace Native American! We made eye contact. He looked at me and I looked at him, and it was very odd. And I thought 'Bro, what are you doing?' [It] was May Day, the 1st of May and earlier that morning they had a series of rituals around the stones and along the Avenue.

In the village, there's a pub on the corner and there were three guys in Druid outfits (laughs). British men with beards, longish hair and strange jewellery, and white robes over which were draped these bright, bright emerald satin Church-like vestments but they weren't vestments, they were just – Oh God, I don't know what they were, but they were very, very bright and emerald and satin and gleaming and embroidered with runes and Celtic knotwork in gold. And I thought, 'They're really interesting!'

In my head, this thing happened: why is a Native American (laughs) drummer with a group of hurdy-gurdy Gypsies in very expensive Gypsy clothing up the Avenue at mid-day while, having lunch at the pub are these three guys in their Druid outfits? And it is things like that which – umm, the juxtaposition, and the ad hoc-ery, discordant craziness of events like that which really excite me, which really intrigue me (Nuori, Māori healer, her emphasis).

* * *

widespread dissemination of ritual material is the song said to have been given to the Scandinavian neo-Shaman, Jonathan Horwitz, by his spirit helpers (Lindquist, 1997:69); I recognise the song from workshops I have attended here in New Zealand.

The preceding chapters have introduced key participants in my study, provided an historical overview, contextualising and mapping the neo-Shamanic landscape of New Zealand, noting comparisons between traditional indigenous shamans and neo-Shamans in other Western countries, and examining shamanic practices in New Zealand, in the form of core neo-Shamanism and contemporary Māori healing, and in relation to other healing modalities. In this penultimate chapter, I address issues concerning appropriation, syncretism, traditions and authenticity in terms of neo-Shamanic practices in New Zealand, in particular examining the relationships between (some) Māori healers and (some) neo-Shamans. Using Lévi-Strauss's (1966:16-33) concept of bricolage, I argue that neo-Shamans in New Zealand, as with neo-Shamans in other Western countries, are eclectic bricoleurs who skilfully adapt, adopt, and work with whatever tools they have on hand. This discussion then leads into a portrayal of neo-Shamanism as a complex cluster of cosmological hybrid systems pertinent for survival in the 21st century.

Appropriation, Syncretism, Traditions and Authenticity

Cultural borrowing, blending and mixing are not recent phenomena. The issues with regard to neo-Shamanism are not about appropriation or syncretism as such, but the politics surrounding them (Bowie, 2006:252), including issues of purity or contamination, the authenticity or otherwise of 'traditions' (Shaw & Stewart, 1994:1), and perceptions of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, universal or generic cultural tropes, in combination with neo-colonial discourses. Magliocco (2004:26) gives examples of syncretism going back to the third century C.E.: 'Greco-Roman Egypt...like contemporary North America, was a meeting place for many cultures and religions – a fertile medium for religious syncretism and the emergence of hybrid forms', she writes, likening these historic processes to those occurring amongst modern Pagans in America. Cross-pollination and the sharing of traditions between people is an unavoidable result of human movements around the world, heightened and magnified in the contemporary era by rapid technological changes and globalisation. Nuori (at the end of the 2nd epigraph, above) has summed up the idiosyncratic, and sometimes unexpected or unintended nature of these processes that lead to, for example, a Māori

healer I observed wearing a knitted jacket with a large Native American-inspired dream-catcher and feather design on the front and back. I wondered if my reaction would have been different if I had seen a Pākehā wearing a similar motif; instead, I interpreted it as an example of indigenous people legitimately mixing their cultures, without the complications of neo-colonial undertones.

In Chapter 2, I considered several scholarly critiques of neo-Shamans. The arguments suggest neo-Shamans are neo-colonialists who appropriate and steal from others' traditions, romanticising, psychologising and de-contextualising them as they go. Neo-Shamans in New Zealand are not exempt from these criticisms, and are implicated by the political sub-texts even if they are not consciously aware of discourses about appropriation and post-colonial power issues within the academe; some are perhaps politically naïve in this respect. Nonetheless, issues of appropriation and power inequalities between neo-Shamans and indigenous people troubled other participants, often those with some tertiary education that had introduced them to these concepts. While living in South Africa, one participant attended a weekend ritual, led by a white man trained in the Zulu *sangoma* tradition. The ritual was held in a mountain cave with Bushmen rock paintings on the walls, and she told me she felt uncomfortable when they were encouraged to place their hands on the paintings, using them as doorways to access other realities; she felt it was encroaching on something she didn't fully understand, and that she shouldn't be doing it. Another person told me he was beginning to feel awkward with the apparently uncritical appropriation of others' traditions by some members of the group he belonged to; he would have preferred the group to come together to find their own traditions and explore shamanism in their own way. However, the facilitator of this group had received teachings from someone with Native American heritage, which perhaps gave some authority to the group's activities. 'It is about respect', the facilitator told me: 'Some of my journeys are about Native American Indians. I am not Native American but it comes through me. I can't help that; that's reality but I don't want to take away [from their traditions or culture]'.

It is possible to conceive of appropriation as being located at one pole on a continuum of cultural borrowing, with syncretic blending positioned at the other pole.

The following example illustrates this idea: anthropologist Joan Metge (2008; 2010:55-105), in her paper examining increasingly common usage of Māori words as part of the New Zealand English lexicon has suggested that 'appropriation' is a 'beginning word', in this case describing the start of a process of incorporation and modification of te reo (Māori language) into mainstream New Zealand culture. Wider usage by non-Māori speakers, she says, blunts and reduces the depth or richness of the original meanings of a word, which are then sometimes 'fed back' into Māori usage in their diminished form. Metge is exploring whether incorporation is inevitable, and if the negative and positive consequences matter – negative consequences in terms of lost nuances in te reo, but positive if they help keep the Māori language alive. Her discussion raises complex issues that have no simple solution. Similar processes occur with shamanistic practices as neo-Shamans embrace, modify, and self-consciously select from several traditions, with the risk of diluting others' practices (as has been argued by a number of scholars – see, for example, Johnson [2003] and Vitebsky [2003], both cited in Chapter 2). Indigenous shamanic traditions become de-contextualised and weakened but at the same time, there are situations where Westerners are helping to keep alive shamanic traditions that might otherwise be lost. These are delicate paths to negotiate; neo-Shamanism and neo-colonialism are multifaceted concerns with many nuances, and these competing factors require balance and commonsense to negotiate fairly for all parties (Wallis, 2003:218-226). The current situation is perhaps a little different from when Johnson (2003) wrote his critique, and some indigenous people are now openly sharing their traditions. Moreover, they invite non-indigenous people to participate in their rituals, and they are learning from Westerners in a global exchange of knowledge and shamanic practices. (I pick this discussion up again in the section about Māori healers and neo-Shamans.) Returning to Metge's thesis that 'appropriation' is a beginning word, I suggest that exchanges between indigenous shamans and neo-Shamans are a further example of the type of incorporation processes she describes, in relation to the Māori language and the New Zealand English lexicon.

The notion of 'traditions' as pristine and unchangeable practices is contestable. Indigenous people such as the Ojibwe in North America continue to create their traditions dynamically from within their own culture, based on ancestral ways that are

responsive to their contemporary situation 'regardless of academic constructions of and qualms about "tradition", "authenticity" and "syncretism"' (Harvey, 2005:34). This is also the case amongst contemporary Māori healers, who are creatively and innovatively expanding and modifying their healing practices, as I have shown in Chapter 8. Additionally, Hobsbawm and Ranger argue, at least some 'traditions' are invented:

The term 'invented tradition' is used in a broad but not imprecise sense. It includes both 'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period...and establishing themselves with great rapidity (1983:1).

Neo-Shamanic 'traditions' are 'patently invented', writes Swedish anthropologist, Galina Lindquist (1997:127-128), in her study of European neo-Shamans. She argues that reference to an extrinsic supposedly unbroken 'Original Tradition' (be it Native American, Siberian or any other indigenous group) is initially used to legitimate neo-Shamanic practices. Repeated group and individual ritual experiences then creatively modify and transform it into something else that takes on its own energy, with occasional reference back to the original but now distant 'tradition'. For these reasons, some academics question the authenticity of neo-Shamanism as a spiritual path (see, for example, Johnson, 2003:347-348; also Wallis, 2003:31). Undoubtedly, neo-Shamans are in a difficult, no-win situation, judged whatever they do: on one hand, they are criticised for being inauthentic because they creatively change and build on a perceived 'Original Tradition' (whatever culture this may have originated from) while, on the other hand, they are charged with cultural theft for 'borrowing' others' traditions. In some instances at least, they are also unwitting casualties caught between the crossfire of academic and indigenous debates about what constitutes 'authentic traditional shamanism', and their own desire to (re)construct or create a legitimate form of contemporary shamanism relevant to their Western post-modern lives while still respecting indigenous traditions.

Yet another thread to this complex discourse emerges when some scholars and neo-Shamans propose that shamanism has universal spiritual values and therefore belongs to all humans.¹⁷⁴ This argument denies or minimises inbuilt assumptions about ownership and appropriation: 'Is it appropriation or an adaptation of a universal phenomenon?' asks Robert Boyle (2007:291), in his Australian based study of neo-Shamanism as a journey of the soul. His answer is both 'yes' and 'no', as he differentiated between the inner experiences of neo-Shamans that exist 'independently of questions of appropriation', and external political concerns. As Nuori observed (in the 2nd epigraph of this chapter), there is no ethnicity in the spirit worlds.

In the following discussion, I draw on examples from my fieldwork to illustrate further considerations and highlight the sensitivities and complexities of this debate. Firstly, apparently some neo-Shamans feel a spiritual yearning that is not satisfied within their own culture that draws them to seek out and copy or appropriate others' shamanic traditions. One participant, Elaine, told me the following story: in 1990, she was invited to be a Pākehā representative at a conference in Oregon called *First Nation, First Voices*. She said, 'It was an incredible gathering of Elders, mostly First Nation...[with] shamans everywhere...(laughs)'. At the conference, she witnessed tensions between some Native American people and a white American man who was seeking a blessing from an Elder, Arvol Looking Horse, for a peace pipe he had carved, a beautiful piece of artwork; the man was told to find his own traditions.¹⁷⁵ The matter

¹⁷⁴ Goddess feminists are in a similar position to neo-Shamans, eclectically invoking deities from numerous cultures, accused of 'poaching' and de-contextualising the beliefs and practices of others (Rountree, 1999:144). As with neo-Shamans, many Goddess followers do not see this as problematic, claiming that:

There is universal value in great diversity of spiritual beliefs and practices, and that indigenous cultures in particular are the repositories of valuable spiritual knowledge which has been lost and should be retrieved by Western civilization. These women would see themselves as learning respectfully from, rather than poaching from, other cultures...[O]ne senses a strong mixture of romantic nostalgia for the "primitive" or exotic with cultural ignorance... (Rountree, 1999:145).

¹⁷⁵ I have not told the complete story here as it is rather long and convoluted, but it is of interest that Elaine, a neo-Shaman from New Zealand, has had some connections with Arvol Looking Horse, guardian of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe, the most sacred pipe of the Lakota people. Galina Lindquist (1997:43) has cited an article from the Swedish neo-Shaman magazine, *Gimle*, recording how the same Elder, following a vision in which the White Buffalo Woman turned

was eventually resolved in a wonderful and unexpected way, but Elaine told me that during the resolution process:

I just sat there, quite traumatised actually because I realised that Māori spirituality had really attracted me - my experiences on marae, Māori studies [at University], a lot of experiences with people of this land awoke something in me that my own heritage hadn't (or that I didn't know about). I just sat watching, thinking 'Oh God, there are huge implications for this'.

The experience became a consciousness-raising exercise for Elaine as she realised the political implications of her attraction to Māori spirituality. At the same time, she is expressing a sense of nostalgia, something that has apparently been lost from her own culture, or something that she didn't know about and hadn't been taught, and that she had found within Māori spirituality in much the same way as other Westerners are attracted to Native American spirituality. This seems to be a common driving factor for Westerners turning to shamanism, a search for the numinous that they feel is not generally found within modern Western culture with its emphasis on the rational and institutionalised Christianity. Along with many other Westerners, neo-Shamans are spiritual seekers. My fieldwork evidence suggests they are responding to an inner (and apparently innate) drive to experience other realities; they do not necessarily want to plunder the spiritual heritage of others so much as to find a spirituality that satisfies their inner hunger. When confronted by their unaware and politically naïve behaviours, at least some are shocked into examining their actions and beginning the process of finding their own spiritual practices, as in the case of this American man and Elaine who was an unwitting observer as events unfolded.

Elaine struggled in balancing these issues as her social activist work continued to take her into prisons and amongst indigenous communities in New Zealand, North America, Africa and other places around the world. She was experiencing visions and unusual events in her life but felt uneasy naming her work as shamanic (although she had been identified by an 'educated prison inmate' as a shaman): 'it almost felt like

against false medicine men, convened a meeting of two hundred Lakota pipe-bearers in 1986, resulting in a black list of false medicine men.

another layer of colonisation' and, in addition, she was 'a wee bit nervous about New Age glamour stuff'. However, as I have previously observed, the flows are multi-directional and, as Elaine was questioning herself, the people she was meeting and working with began to thank her:

Wherever I went in the world, and especially as I began my group work with a inclusive formal greeting...I've done a lot of work in Africa – people [would] just burst into tears and say, for example, 'You are the first person who has named my ancestors, they're calling me again. You've opened the door again for me to connect to the traditions'...A huge variety of acknowledgements have come that I have been able to re-awaken that spark in many people, in prisons, and communities...

In such instances, Elaine has served as a catalyst, re-igniting peoples' memories, allowing them to re-connect with, and re-claim buried cultural and spiritual information. The situation she has found herself in appears to have some similarities to that of the FSS, which has had indigenous people from Native American, Sami and Inuit groups approach asking for support to re-claim their lost traditions (Wallis, 2003:221-222). Thus, while on one hand, she may be seen as taking from indigenous peoples, she is clearly also giving back in a way that finds enormous gratitude.

Secondly, Westerners who adopt the outer paraphernalia of cultures such as Native American ones are apparently searching for meaning or spiritual fulfillment, but they may be mistaking the external material paraphernalia for 'shamanism' rather than recognising them as culturally-dependent tools that are not necessarily applicable or even necessary for contemporary shamans in a Western culture. As Arvol Looking Horse told the Euroamerican man, Westerners (including neo-Shamans in New Zealand) need to find their own traditions and ways of working shamanically. My observations suggest this is happening to some extent amongst the neo-Shamans I have worked with as they forge a new identity as contemporary Western shamans. For example, two neo-Shamans told me they consciously work with their clients to demystify shamanism without 'dressing it up' with overt shamanic paraphernalia; they are developing their own form of shamanic healing that is relevant to this land and era,

a theme I return to later in this chapter. Nonetheless, some other groups of New Zealanders do follow and mimic Native American traditions, living in tepees, and conducting sweatlodges, as I showed in Chapter 4.

Thirdly, Westerners who undergo spontaneous altered states of consciousness and anomalous experiences frequently have no internal spiritual vocabulary to understand the event or make meaning of it. Furthermore, they may feel unable to speak of their experiences because conversations about the paranormal are generally excluded from everyday discourse. To say that (all) modern Western people have *carte blanche* appropriated rituals from indigenous people is simplistic and denies the possibility of an inborn human drive. For a number of participants such as Shen, the discovery of shamanism was felt as a 'coming home', a validation of unusual phenomena they had experienced throughout their lives, and a naming of something they were already familiar with but had no language for.

Many of my participants experienced spontaneous extraordinary events in childhood, and indigenous cosmologies and traditions frequently provided an explanatory structure that supported their experience, once they discovered them (usually through books, the internet or attendance at shamanic workshops). Often, they expressed a sense of relief at 'coming home'. Shen, for example, was ten years old when he first began to see apparitions, having recurring sightings over many years of a Chinese boy, Tan Shen (whose name he has since taken for himself), and meeting an animal guide, Wolf, who is with him still. This is around the same age that budding shamans in indigenous societies often begin to have their first unusual experiences. The Washo shaman, Henry Rupert, is reported to have had a series of dreams during his early years (Handelman, 1977:428-429). In addition, at times the spirits seek out the future shaman (Vitebsky, 1995:57) and, Boyle (2007:288-289) suggests, on occasions this is the case with neo-Shamans too: he claims he and some of his fellow-participants were seemingly 'spiritually waylaid'.

However, Shen's childhood experience does raise intriguing questions around why a small boy growing up in England in the 1950s should have visions of a Chinese boy or a Native American totemic animal. In Chapter 6, I described the nature of neo-Shamanic imagery and cited researchers who concluded that at least some imagery

accessed during altered states of consciousness is not socially constructed, and this seems to be the case with Shen.¹⁷⁶ It could be argued that it was his way of coping with a difficult situation when he was at boarding school, an escape from reality, although this does not explain why he had a vision of a Chinese boy or a Native American animal.¹⁷⁷ Shen told me that he was not exposed to television, and other outside influences would have been minimal. He now thinks the visions may have been a 'support system' since he was far away from his home: 'I was testing out my mental sanity', he said.

Canadian anthropologist, David Young (1998) has developed a 'creative energy model' to help explain his own extraordinary experiences of spontaneous visions of figures that appeared before him at night over several weeks. He hypothesises that:

...apparitional figures are some type of energy field which is projected and given form by an individual...something like a holographic projection... [that] may be formulated in an unconscious dimension of the person which needs expression or which has information to offer concerning a critical problem facing the individual. For a limited period of time, an anthropomorphic figure comes into being and has life of its own (1998:183).

This explanation makes sense of Shen's situation although, in his case, the apparitions have remained with him. Nowadays, on looking back, Shen considers his visions were a form of shamanism, an initiation into something that he didn't understand at the time, but which never frightened him. When he went to his first shamanic workshop as an adult, it was like 'coming home, in the sense of walking

¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, when Henry Rupert acquired his second spirit helper in the form of a young Hindu male, he had previously seen a skeleton of a Hindu at high school, which may have triggered an unconscious association thus allowing the spirit figure to emerge. The appearance of this spirit precipitated internal conflict for Henry between his Washo heritage and non-Indian knowledge. He eventually resolved the matter through a 'sophisticated' internal process that allowed him to synthesise both sources of knowledge under the single rubric of 'healing' (Handelman, 1977:432).

¹⁷⁷ Grey wolves once ranged extensively throughout Europe and the United Kingdom, so it is possible that Shen had been exposed to some knowledge about wolves that his unconscious mind was tapping into. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wolf_distr.gif (accessed 14 Jun 2011).

through the door and people talking the same language'. He had never before met others who were 'doing the same inner journey I was doing', and he had been unable to speak about it to anyone else until that point. I discussed the nature of shamanic apparitions and spirits in Chapter 5.

Neo-Shamans and Māori Healers Meet

The 're-embedding' (Lindquist, 1997:217) of neo-Shamanism in a local New Zealand context must unavoidably include discussion about the relationships of neo-Shamans and Māori healers. The flows of information and practices go both ways: several of my participants have worked closely with Māori healers, to learn from them and sometimes for their own personal healing and, on other occasions, Māori healers have approached them for healing sessions for themselves. In one instance, a Māori kaumātua approached Jules, a Pākehā neo-Shamanic healer with an affinity for rongoā, for healing in preference to seeing a Māori healer.¹⁷⁸ The kaumātua, she said, had been physically wasting away after attending many tangi (funerals) over a six-month period; later on, when he knew 'something wasn't right', he was able to pinpoint the exact tangi after which his illness began. It was as if he had been suffering from mātē Māori (Māori sickness) as the result of a makutu (curse). When she is working, Jules 'sees' with her eyes closed as she runs her hands close to the patient's body, conducting a diagnostic journey through their body, a classic shamanic practice. In this case, she found an intrusion or an entity, which was 'feeding' on the man and she had to fight it energetically to extract it. Afterwards, she gave him some rongoā to take and he began to heal, gaining weight and slowly becoming healthier. She was able to match the kaumātua's understanding of his illness with her shamanic awareness, so that she could help him; he told her that her mana (integrity) was such that he knew she was the healer he was to work with.

Within the context of New Zealand's colonial history and challenges by Māori about appropriation of their intellectual property, the neo-Shamans I have met are aware of the delicacy and sensitivity that is required in these circumstances. They are

¹⁷⁸ I briefly mentioned Jules, who teaches rongoā to Māori women on an urban marae, in Chapter 8.

conscious of the politics of biculturalism and indigeneity that do not permit them to appropriate Māori 'shamanic' healing traditions, and have generally been cautious when talking to me about their relationships with Māori. Shen thinks the spiritual reason he has come to New Zealand is to work with Māori healers for his own healing but he also wants to learn from them: 'I would love to explore [Māori spirituality] but I don't want to take it away and put it into a workshop', he told me. When I asked a group of neo-Shamans if they thought tohunga were shamans, one woman was very careful in her response, saying that it was a question that could only be asked of Māori healers. She said, 'I feel very presumptuous but all I know is we do the same things, in my experience of being around them and with them'. Her experience of working with Māori healers is that her shamanic perceptions and their healing traditions meet within their mutual understandings of working psychically with spiritual energy.

The Māori tohunga-shaman, Wai, whose work in Europe I described in the previous chapter, told me she believes it is time for indigenous people to impart their sacred knowledge to others outside their culture. This can be controversial, as Wai herself pointed out to me. However, in spite of the controversy, there are several examples of indigenous people choosing to share sacred teachings with Westerners, in the belief that they have information Westerners need for healing the earth in an era of environmental degradation and climate change. Numerous indigenous elders and healers are using the internet to speak out to people in the West.¹⁷⁹ Members belonging to the *International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers*, for example, are planning a series of hui (meetings) to share teachings and perform ceremonies with the World Drum and medicine wheel in New Zealand in November 2010.¹⁸⁰ Their visit is being partially sponsored by the *Practical Mystics Centre for Contemporary Shamanism* (a neo-Shamanic school established by two New Zealand neo-Shamans, see Chapter 3). The elders from several different indigenous cultures all speak of ancient prophecies

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, <http://www.icewisdom.com/angaangaq/teachings/storytelling/>, <http://www.shiftoftheages.com/about>, <http://www.worldcouncilofelders.org/index.html>, <http://www.forthenext7generations.com/home.php> (accessed 17 August 2010).

¹⁸⁰ See <http://www.grandmotherscouncil.org/> (accessed 24 August 2010). The World Drum project began in Norway in 2006, and the Drum has been carried from group to group around the world several times, focusing on world peace and environmental issues. It was present, and used in ceremony, at the UK *Society for Shamanic Practitioners* conference I attended in 2008.

coming to fruition regarding environmental issues and the need for Westerners to 'wake up' and 'dream a new cultural story'. Dreams have always played an important role in many shamanic cultures (Krippner, 2009:33-40) and, Krippner suggests, Westerners beginning to engage with their dreams may promote a 'revision' of Western realities, and contribute to solving the 'social and global problems of waking reality...if *dreamtime* is entered and explored' (1994:22, emphasis in original).

Not all indigenous people feel like this. Wai told me some indigenous shamans practising in Europe are not happy with the FSS, as they feel their traditions have been appropriated without permission. Robert Wallis's (2003:195-226) chapter entitled *Invading Anthros, Thieving Archos, Wannabe Indians* outlines the complexities of the relationships between academic anthropologists and archaeologists, neo-Shamans, New Agers and Native Americans (I have summarised some of these arguments in Chapter 2). For many years, the Swedish neo-Shamanic community has had on-going and sometimes heated debates through the pages of the neo-Shamanic magazine, *Gimle*, about teachers of 'Native American wisdom', in particular relating to the activities of one man, Harley SwiftDeer, 'part-Cherokee [and] Irish...healer, trickster, joker, clown, magician, shaman, hunter, peace activist...PhD in psychology and comparative religion...' (Lindquist, 1997:34). A 1986 meeting of Lakota elders blacklisted SwiftDeer, along with other well-known teachers and authors, but they continue to teach and hold workshops and the arguments rage backwards and forwards (1997:43). SwiftDeer justifies his position, saying that:

I believe most Native American traditionalists do not understand the true purpose of tradition. When undertaken properly, tradition is a practice from the past to help people understand truths for living [in the present] in harmony and order, with purposeful direction for tomorrow...When the gourd or drum is lifted for the ceremony, tradition becomes alive and attuned to current times. Anything alive must change (Wahlberg, 1993:234, cited in Lindquist, 1997:45).

For SwiftDeer, traditions are something that change and move over time, informed by the past but not restricted by it. He is suggesting that 'traditionalists' are those who do not want change. This may or may not be the case. One Māori woman told me that

for some Māori it may be that they wish to preserve traditions of the ancestors without the 'taint' of colonising influences. In other circumstances, for some indigenous people the issue may be more about the ethics of sharing knowledge outside of their culture where it then takes on a life of its own and becomes disrespected, diluted, mutated or misused. A second Māori woman steers a middle path when she told me she doesn't think 'everything needs to be shared with everybody'. Her perspective suggests that some knowledge can be judiciously imparted to others outside the culture without those within the culture feeling they have been stripped of their cultural treasures. This option allows for a graduated sharing of information, in much the same way as not everyone indigenous to a specific culture knows or understands the deepest and most sacred teachings that are reserved for their religious specialists or shamans.

I have not come across controversies such as these surrounding Māori healers like Wai imparting their knowledge to non-Māori, but debates and confusion have arisen concerning the Waitaha people (a South Island iwi), alternative archaeologies and histories.¹⁸¹ Some Pākehā (including a number of neo-Shamans) and Māori have been inspired by the work and writing of former academic historian and archaeologist, Barry Brailsford. Brailsford, the Māori scholar Makere Harawira (1999:13) argues, exploited Waitaha after kaumātua entrusted him with their oral history by following his original authorised book, *Song of Waitaha*, with a series of workshops and unauthorised publications, partially fictionalised but also purportedly based on 'ancient knowledge'. 'Disinformation' (1999:14) distributed by people such as Brailsford confuses the distinctions between accurate factual historic information, esoteric teachings and myth when so-called 'traditional' knowledge is accepted as literal 'truth' by non-discerning Pākehā but also – and perhaps even worse – by Māori themselves, with sometimes serious political consequences, and resulting in dissension amongst Māori people. I have heard one Māori woman, identifying as Waitaha, say that people from Ngāi Tahu (the dominant iwi in the South Island) have accused some

¹⁸¹ The Kaimanawa Wall in the central North Island, for example, has attracted attention amongst some spiritual seekers, including several neo-Shamans. The Wall is said to be an ancient healing site; others just see a collection of stones in natural surroundings. Dr Robin Kelly, a New Zealand medical doctor and acupuncturist, has written about some unusual and puzzling experiences he has had at the Wall (2006:226-233).

Waitaha people of being 'New Age Māori'. When I asked a second Māori scholar about the Waitaha story, tellingly, she replied 'Do you mean Waitaha the people, or the new religious movement that has grown up around Barry Brailsford?' These complex issues are outside my research parameters and I have not investigated them further.

Nonetheless, in spite of some members of any one indigenous culture being resistant to knowledge-sharing (and for good reason, as the Waitaha experience seems to suggest), there are others who welcome the interest of respectful Westerners. Jules told me she and one Māori man she worked with both felt a sense of 'urgency' for her to 'get on with learning...[from] them and teaching [her rongoā classes]' (pers. comm. 17 Nov 2009). There is conceivably a sense of time running out as the elders age, and a need for the knowledge to be transmitted before it is too late. The Māori tohuna, Rose Pere, also believes it is time to share her knowledge but gives a slightly different reason, drawing on 'teachings that go back over 12,000 years to ancient Hawaiiki' (1997:58).¹⁸² She has been waiting, she says, for the return of the mother energy as the old Piscean age moves into the Aquarian Age, Te Waiahuru, the age of cherishing waters (1994:170). Dr Pere has travelled widely and worked with many other indigenous people and spiritual healers from around the world; her teachings are eclectic and she incorporates elements that might be categorised as 'New Age' by outsiders.

I have previously mentioned (in Chapters 4 and 8) the special relationship between Rose Pere and contemporary shaman, Franchelle, who has received strong endorsements from Dr Pere. Rose serves as the 'official spiritual guardian and protector in perpetuity' of the flower essence range co-created by Franchelle and her husband. Writing in Franchelle's recently published book, Dr Pere says:

In this lifetime Franchelle and I have chosen two different cultures to work from and within...We both wear our cultural cloaks with pride and integrity, but on a spiritual level we are one with each other... (Ofsoké-Wyber, 2009:13).

One Māori man, when I asked him for his comments about Dr Pere's words (above), wrote to me that 'Franchelle has certainly received an awesome reference from

¹⁸² Hawaiiki is the spiritual home for Māori.

Dr Pere and seems to have been initiated into some extremely esoteric Māori teachings. It is the closest connection I've seen between occult knowledge of the Māori with "new age" (for lack of a better word) wisdom, the two "cultural cloaks" referred to by Dr Pere' (pers. comm. 28 Sept 2009). In a second communication (5 Oct 2009), he continued: 'Dr Pere is surprisingly revealing of her kura huna/hidden world and Franchelle must surely be of the same soul group. It is powerful stuff indeed when the aspirations of a soul-group are able to manifest on the physical plane'. The relationship between Rose and Franchelle illustrates the complexities that can arise when traditional esoteric knowledge appears to be blended with neo-Shamanic and New Age notions – or perhaps it is the case, that they are *not*, in fact, neo-Shamanic and New Age notions. In some circumstances, it seems that previously hidden sacred indigenous knowledge, once revealed outside its own culture has some similarities to ideas found in Western esoteric traditions about the occult and astrology, now commonly disseminated within New Age circles.

Franchelle tells me she has received teachings from elders and 'wisdom keepers' from many other traditions beside Māori, including Aboriginal, Celtic, Bon, and Romany. One Aboriginal elder, whom she tracked down in Western Australia to meet physically after he 'called' her in a vision, imparted spiritual and tribal information to her over several days:

I said to him, 'Why are you giving me this information? You should be giving it to your son.' He was cutting across Law. He said, 'Look at my son'. His son was diabetic and alcoholic...that information and knowledge would be lost... Only a fraction of... [the information] is verbally transmitted; the rest is done in spirit.

Franchelle described a process she termed a 'mind meld' when she is able to receive information directly from an elder or teacher; knowledge is energetically transmitted, by-passing usual cognitive pathways, a phenomenon of 'mind transmissions' that sometimes occurs between disciple and teacher, neophyte and

shaman in special circumstances (Halifax, 1988:205).¹⁸³ Franchelle believes the information she receives is being returned to 'a pool of collective knowledge'; all traditions derive from this pool, she says, and she is able to access this knowledge directly. 'If you want access to that raw power and real knowledge, you have to pass challenges or tests', she continued, as demonstrated by her ability to track the Aboriginal elder. Her endorsement from Rose Pere comes because she has proven that she can spiritually contact the 'twelve heavens' of the Kura Huna Māori Mystery School and return with information that is subsequently verifiable only by Dr Pere.

To return to Graham Harvey's (2005:34) observation cited earlier in this chapter, neo-Shamans in New Zealand and the Māori healers they interact with are creating new, and breaking down old 'traditions', 'regardless of academic constructions of and qualms about "tradition", "authenticity" and "syncretism"'. Their practices intersect and syncretically merge when they communicate with mutual trust and respect for each other, and they are able to understand each other and communicate on subtle spiritual planes.

21st Century Neo-Shamans as Eclectic Bricoleurs

Firstly, a comparison between a group of New Zealand Buddhists belonging to the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) and neo-Shamans, both of whom provide examples of 'transcultural religious bricolage' (McAra, 2007:5). Sally McAra's study of a group of people, who raised money to buy marginal farmland on which to establish a retreat centre and build a stupa, draws attention to parallels between the interests of FWBO members and neo-Pagans. Although McAra does not specifically include neo-Shamans in her discussion, the themes are similar in terms of syncretism, globalised religious movements, Westernisation of others' spiritual practices, the desire to re-connect to nature (2007:66), concerns about healing (individuals, communities and the land), and personal development (2007:96-97). There are some similarities between the development of core shamanism and the establishment of the FWBO,

¹⁸³ Similarly, Jules described to me how she was able to 'have "conversations" [with indigenous medicine folk whose language she didn't understand] and I would notice that our lips weren't moving'.

founded by an Englishman, Sangharakshita, in London in 1968 after twenty years of practicing Buddhism as an ordained Theravadin monk in India. The FWBO website states that:

Bringing Buddhism into an entirely new culture implied to Sangharakshita that we needed to go back to basics – to look at the principles underlying all forms of Buddhism and work out how to apply them to this new context (<http://www.fwbo.org/fwbo.html> accessed 26 Sep 2010, emphasis added).

Michael Harner had similar aspirations with his development of core shamanism and the establishment of the FSS in 1985, writing that he was ‘engaged in extensive research on shamanism worldwide in order to discover its underlying cross-cultural principles and practices’ (Harner, 1999, emphasis added). Both men have adapted others’ spiritual practices for a post-modern Western context, pulling out what they perceive as the underlying essence or core practices of each spiritual system. Unlike the FWBO, however, neo-Shamanism is uniquely a Western phenomenon rather than a global organisation and, in spite of the wide influence of Harner’s core shamanism, neo-Shamanism is a more diffuse movement with no formal structures and no one way of practicing.¹⁸⁴ As Wallis has argued, it is preferable to speak in the plural of ‘neo-Shamanisms’ (2003:30). Nonetheless, given the overlapping issues and concerns, it is perhaps to be expected that several of my participants have explored Buddhist (although not necessarily through the FWBO), and pre-Buddhist Tibetan Bon teachings. Shen has taken Buddhist vows to a level short of becoming a monk. For one woman, shamanism and Buddhism are complementary paths that lead the ‘small mind’ of humans towards the Greater Mind, God-self, Buddha nature, Oneness (pers.

¹⁸⁴ The FWBO, on the other hand, has a hierarchical structure of Friends (Mitras) and ordained Western Buddhist Order (WBO) members. The Western Buddhist Order (WBO) consists of non-monastic ordained members who have undertaken a pledge and life-long commitment to follow Buddhist precepts. See http://www.fwbo.org/fwbo/order_members.html (accessed 12 Nov 2009).

comm. 29 Sept 2007).¹⁸⁵ Generally, however, shamans do not seek enlightenment (Peters, 1982:29).

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand are bricoleurs who are generally eclectic in their practice, and they draw on experiences they have had while studying and travelling overseas. One person's diverse studies, for example, range from Celtic shamanism and trainings with well-known English neo-Pagan Caitlin Matthews, to receiving teachings from a Puerto Rican woman shaman and Hopi people, medicine wheel teachings, pagan and goddess traditions, and Eastern martial arts. The majority of my participants have had some exposure to Michael Harner's core shamanism in various guises, overseas or in New Zealand. Many participants have undertaken tuition additional to the FSS (or similar) courses and have had several different teachers, learning other traditions or attending workshops such as vision quest trainings or outdoor wilderness survival skills. Once they have mastered the FSS form of core shamanism, the practitioners then generally evolve and develop their personal and unique ways of practising, freely mixing and blending old and new teachings, science and pseudo-science. This has been the case with Leslie Kenton, an internationally known writer, teacher and 'health guru' now living part-time in the Christchurch area, who has taught core neo-Shamanic courses in England (Wallis, 2003:46); I know several people who have attended her courses in New Zealand. Her web page describes her *Journey to Freedom* workshops as a combination of core shamanism learnt from the FSS with 'mythology, leading-edge physics, biology, systems theory... [and] science of consciousness'.¹⁸⁶

The bricoleur, says Lévi-Strauss (1966:16 -17), 'is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks', someone 'who works with his (sic) hands and uses devious means' (1966:21), always putting something of themselves into their projects, with

¹⁸⁵ Halifax (1988:201-207) has noted that the interfaces between shamanism and Buddhism are 'hardly new'. The Buddhist Vajrayana tradition, for example, has been heavily influenced by the shamanic Tibetan Bon religion. Samuel (1993:6) details the 'ancient matrix' of shamanism in Tibet that has 'continually reconstituted itself' in the face of repeated encroachments by Buddhism, leading to a shamanic form of Buddhism that existed alongside Tibetan folk religion and clerical Buddhism in pre-1950s Tibet before the Chinese invasion. See also Vitebsky, 1995:39; 135) for further examples of syncretic mixing of Buddhism and shamanism.

¹⁸⁶ See http://www.lesliekenton.com/activebar/aboutlesliekenton/whois_leslie_kenton.htm (accessed 29 July 2009).

unexpected, original, unusual or different results. Shen illustrated these skills when he told me he needs the vibrations of a drum or rattle to take him ‘really deep’ into an altered state but on one occasion his tools were not available while travelling on a train, and he used a set of keys as a rattle when he wanted to journey to the spirits.¹⁸⁷ The blending of the old and the new is normal human behaviour; this is what shamans have always done, several participants suggested to me, and neo-Shamans are no different. I contend that they are displaying an unconscious or organic form of cosmological hybridity (Brendbekken, 2003, cited in Lahood, 2008:168). Franchelle says she had a vision in which she was wearing a multi-coloured hat; she puts on whatever hat is necessary for any one time, place or purpose. She is not attached to which hat she wears (or what tools she uses) so long as she is ‘facilitating spirit’s agenda with integrity’. Franchelle, it seems, is a bricoleur in terms of techniques but a fundamentalist with regard to her principles and ethics.

During a conversation I had with Margaret, a Māori woman exploring shamanism, we mused about the implications for contemporary shamanism: if traditional or indigenous shamanism is ultimately about survival – ascertaining food supplies and gathering information for healing from the spirit world – how is it relevant now? What might ‘survival’ mean when the basic human needs of most Westerners have already been met? Our conversation continued:

Margaret: I think your study is really interesting. It raises more questions than answers about the differences between ancient shamanism and modern shamanism. I imagine traditional [shamans] didn’t do psychotherapy, didn’t sit around discussing childhood....It seems to me it’s exploded into so many different permutations of what it could be... I imagine right throughout time, it’s always been important for survival to be relevant. No point being an ancient shaman that is no longer relevant.

Dawne: That’s the thing. The bottom line of shamanism is about survival, survival of the tribe when food supplies were so important, and medical supplies were not around other than the tools they had with them in the plants and

¹⁸⁷ When he told this story, we laughed together about the possible annoyance of other near-by passengers, this man with a dreadful nervous habit of rattling his keys...

medicines available to them. And so now, it's what is relevant in [a] Western [context]...

Margaret: When other fundamental needs are getting met in terms of material issues anyway. So what is surviving? How is it meeting someone's depression? I guess that's where psychology comes in.

Dawne: I think a lot of Western shamanism is working in that area. Also the area of addictions, alcoholism. That blending of shamanic practitioners and psychotherapists...

Re-conceptualising neo-Shamanism in this way, as a pertinent technique and survival tool for Westerners in the 21st century provides a different perspective, and an alternative response to criticism that neo-Shamans psychologise shamanism.

Deborah told me she practices her own 'synthetic creation' of shamanism derived from the techniques taught to her by Alberto Villoldo and her own personal experiences: 'Shamans always work...[from] their own experience', she wrote (pers. comm. 9 Oct 2007). A second New Zealand woman, Christine, also trained with Villoldo while she was living in England. She travelled to attend his courses in Holland in the early 2000s. The courses, she told me, synthesise Peruvian traditions sourced from Villoldo's Q'ero teacher (allegedly trained and educated in Q'ero shamanic, Christian, and Western intellectual traditions), combined with some Native American teachings, and Western psychological modalities such as neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and Jungian concepts. Evidently, Villoldo displays many shape-shifting characteristics and multiple personas similar to Castaneda and other controversial shamanic figures such as Harley SwiftDeer (mentioned earlier in this chapter), or the Māori healer Hirini Reedy (whose work I described in Chapter 8). It is not always easy to separate myth and facts from Villoldo's writing, as Joralemon (1992:15-16) notes in his scathing review of Villoldo's (1990) early book, *The Four Winds*. Deborah and Christine's perspectives on Villoldo and the veracity of his story reiterate Joralemon's; however, it is more problematic for Joralemon, the academic, than it is for my participants. Deborah believes that Villoldo's Q'ero teacher, Don Antonio, is a 'mythic or synthesised figure' (pers. comm. 9 Oct 2007). His earlier books have a 'Castaneda-esque story-telling' feel, Christine told me, but this is not an issue for her

because she perceives myth and story-telling as tools for understanding concepts and experiences: 'it is our Western mind that is trained to try and identify fact from fiction', she wrote (pers. comm. 10 Oct 2007). She said:

He built a bridge between these traditions...and I think...[shamanism] will continue to evolve in that way. It won't get stuck; it will continue to grow and I think that's what shamanism has always been anyway.

For Christine, shamanism is an evolving and eclectic practice that changes over time according to peoples' needs. Shamans creatively work with what is available, the crucial difference being that contemporary neo-Shamans have a much larger pool to draw from for their improvisation than indigenous shamans once had. Western shamans, working in the 21st century, are developing a practical form of shamanism for their current era. Writing in her latest book (co-authored with anthropologist and neo-Shaman, Hank Wesselman), leading American neo-Shaman, Sandra Ingerman, sees it as a 'responsibility to upgrade this ancient tradition into a new form that is meaningful to modern spiritual seekers and visionaries' (2010:xiii). Wesselman describes the emerging neo-Shamanic sub-culture as an 'extraordinary social transition' that is developing a 'new spiritual complex' (2010:xv-xvi). These developments represent a 'modern hybrid manifestation of the ancient tradition of the universal shaman' Kent writes, in regard to neo-Shamans in Australia (2007:267), and this is the case for neo-Shamans in New Zealand too.

Of the neo-Shamans I have worked with, Elisabeth is perhaps the most innovative in terms of the obvious evolution and development of her idiosyncratic and spirit-directed way of working. She said her main spirit guide, Grandfather White Eagle, told her to stop relying on her notes (from her trainings in the United States), and that she was to teach in a 'new way' (see Chapter 5). Nowadays, she says:

I just do what comes through. I don't know how long I will keep on the name 'shaman' as it is a limitation. Shamanism is evolving and changing rapidly... Instead of [her students or clients] journeying and asking spirit help to come, or power animals to come into their 'medicine place', spirit is simply tuning into the

god-within-them and they are asking questions directly. I always encourage them, if they have spirit helpers [to] call them in as well. Basically, it is what Grandfather White Eagle calls 'the short form'. The 'long form' is for my spirit to leave my body and journey out, whether it is to the lower, middle or upper world, or the 'medicine place'. All these are actually within our chakra system. What is without is within, what is above is below. All those [spirit worlds] are within us, in our chakra system and our 'medicine place' is actually in our hearts!¹⁸⁸

The spirit realms have thus become internalised, and the spirits are energies that enter the body and manifest within the chakra system, an example of working enstatically. Some American neo-Shamans are making similar discoveries; formal journeying (as taught within core neo-Shamanism) may not always be necessary, one experienced practitioner and teacher writes:

I came to realize that the Ancestors, the Guardian Spirits and the entire invisible web surrounding and holding us were behaving differently. It is almost as though the spiritual work done in the last three decades [of following core shamanic methods] has opened doorways through which helping spirits are now moving with ease; we only have to quiet our minds, open our hearts, and make known our compassionate intentions in order to make contact with them (Proudfoot-Eagle, cited in Ingerman & Wesselman, 2010:52).

In her workshops, Elisabeth now includes material received through several channellers, along with information imparted to her directly from her own spirit guides. She told me this is not the same as channelling, as she remains conscious throughout this process and chooses not to leave her body.¹⁸⁹ Elisabeth's wide-ranging

¹⁸⁸ The 'medicine place' is a safe, sacred place reached on first entering an altered state of consciousness when journeying, in the cosmology Elisabeth learnt from her teacher, Tom Brown Jr (see Chapter 3).

¹⁸⁹ Michael Brown, in his study of American channellers defines them as practitioners who 'use altered states of consciousness to connect to wisdom emanating from the collective unconscious or even to other planets, dimensions, or historical eras' (1997:6). Channellers work on a continuum from conscious channelling while in a light trance to unconscious channeling;

discourses about the nature of the Universe and consciousness, astrological predictions and millennial ideas about the Mayan calendar and 2012, the zero-point energy field (see Chapter 7) are similar to material from many channelled sources, and appear to have some equivalence to courses in Galactic Shamanism offered by the American-based *International Metaphysical University*. The website for the University says it is developing 'shamanism to a galactic/stellar/multidimensional perspective'.¹⁹⁰ However, although Elisabeth's work is evolving, to the extent that she questions whether she can continue to call herself a shamanic practitioner, she says the essence of her practice remains the same. For Elisabeth, a shaman is someone who lives and works in the 'Web of Oneness', and the 'sign of a shaman is awareness', extending the senses, observing and working with subtle energies. As with Franchelle, she is a bricoleur in terms of her methodology but a fundamentalist with regard to retaining what she views as the primary shamanic principles that underpin her new and short forms of shamanism.

This chapter has been concerned with the emergence of multiple Western forms of 21st century shamanism in New Zealand amidst the complexities of political and neo-colonial issues about appropriation, syncretism, authenticity and the nature of 'tradition'. I have argued that the issues are not clear-cut. While some neo-Shamans in New Zealand appear to be unaware of the political implications regarding the appropriation of spiritual practices of indigenous people, others are sensitive to the delicate paths they tread as they aspire to develop a shamanic practice that is relevant to this time and land. Moreover, there is evidence of dialogue opening between those indigenous people who are willing to share sacred knowledge and neo-Shamans. Both groups are able to respectfully learn from each other, and meet on a spiritual plane, as is happening with some Māori healers and neo-Shamans in New Zealand.

however, he suggests, conscious channelling leaves the practitioner open to challenges that the information they bring forward is 'contaminated by ego' (1997:35-36).

¹⁹⁰ See http://www.internationalmetaphysicaluniversity.org/course_catalog_3.html (accessed 24 Aug 2010).

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

This thesis has mapped a landscape of shamanism in New Zealand. The landscape is far from static, however; a network of fluid local and global inter-connections fosters myriad exchanges of spiritual and healing knowledge amongst numerous over-lapping groups. I have argued that neo-Shamans in New Zealand are bricoleurs, contributing one thread to an evolving and global (re)construction process of emerging 21st century forms of Western shamanism. Secondly, I contend that some other categories of healers are consciously or unconsciously, and intuitively entering enstatic altered realities as they go deeply within themselves to receive wisdom and information. In fact, some might be considered 'shamans' in disguise, although whether or not they are known as shamans is perhaps less important than the fact that they are engaging in sacred science and are (overtly or implicitly) incorporating spiritual dimensions into their healing practices. Finally, contemporary Māori healing practices have been examined in their local and global contexts of changing traditions and innovation. The relationships between some Māori healers and neo-Shamans suggest the two groups meet at the interfaces of their mutual psychic and spiritual understandings.

I have considered shamanism as a complex of spiritual practices, and as multiple systems of healing. This study is a phenomenological and experiential exploration of the similarities and differences between shamanic phenomena as exemplified by my research participants, and in comparison with those practices described in the academic and popular literature about indigenous or traditional shamanism, and neo-Shamanism in other Western countries. My research aim was to meet those who self-identified as shamans, raising questions around identity. In Chapter 2, I posed the question 'Who or what is a shaman?', and noted the on-going semantic debates within anthropology over the last hundred years or more. (Neo)Shamans and (neo)Shamanism are academic constructs, the products of Western romanticism and a heightened imagination intrigued by the exotic and seemingly bizarre activities of 'others'. When the 'others' become one's neighbours so to speak, it is all too easy to dismiss them as followers of flaky New Age fads without taking their practices

seriously. Such a perspective denies the validity of neo-Shamanic spirituality and the animistic worldviews that inform their practices. For these reasons, my neo-Shamanic participants are (perhaps rightly so) resistant to labelling by academics. 'Shamanism' is just a word, they say; a word that, because of the ambivalence and layered meanings and associations attached to it does not necessarily accurately convey what their practice involves. They seek to demystify the notion of 'shamanism', to normalise it when working with individuals or within their communities. In traditional societies, they pointed out, labelling was unnecessary because everyone in the community already knew who the shamans were. They are acutely aware that in a modern world of fractured communities, there is no obvious place for them to stand and hold the role of the shaman. As a result, 'shamanic practitioner' has become the acceptable terminology for many, a term that implies they have learnt shamanism within a Western context by attending shamanic training workshops, although many have already experienced previous initiatory events as children or young adults.

Wrestling with definitions has therefore unavoidably been a pre-occupation throughout this study; however, shamans (as a concept and as individuals) remain elusive tricksters. I set out to speak to self-identified shamans but the neo-Shamans I have met, in common with many other Western neo-Shamans, are generally reluctant to claim this title for themselves, for the reasons outlined in the previous paragraph but also out of humility; it is not usual neo-Shamanic protocol to announce oneself as a shaman. Although some may internally think of themselves as a shaman, they do not state this publicly; rather, it is an honorific bestowed upon them by others, they say – and they are not always comfortable about this because of the baggage that they perceive goes with the title. On the other hand, some people do call themselves shamans, and advertise their services as such. This is of concern to at least some of my participants, who consider that there are potential dangers when unskilled practitioners work with an unsuspecting or gullible public. 'Shaman' has become a clichéd and trivialised term they fear, to the extent that some of them no longer wish to be associated with that terminology (as was the case for one person who withdrew from my study).

Nonetheless, in spite of the challenges of nomenclature and definitions, I propose that the shamanic complex includes commonalities that make it possible to speak of neo-Shamans as a discrete and recognisable group. These include the following:

- Neo-Shamans have a particular relationship with spirits, and this is integral to their healing practices;
- Neo-Shamanisms are hereditary or learnt, and may include a calling by the spirits or a definitive initiatory experience;
- Neo-Shamanic cosmologies are highly variable but all include understandings about other realities reached through entering ecstatic or enstatic altered states of consciousness or by dreaming;
- Neo-Shamans work in altered states of consciousness to receive knowledge or healing for themselves and others.

While these criteria are present amongst the neo-Shamans in New Zealand I have observed, perhaps the defining features of an individual shaman are better conveyed by such qualities as 'intentionality' and 'presence'. Presence, as I described in Chapter 6, is a way of being in the world, a grounded connection to the earth and centredness that embodies charismatic psychic power as the neo-Shaman engages with his or her spirit helpers. The intrinsic merits of a focused, grounded and centred presence manifest in divergent ways; hence, the power of individual shamans varies depending on their unique personal qualities, the nature of their spiritual calling, training and experience.

This still begs the question of 'what makes a shaman special or different from other people?' What are the qualities of a 'true' shaman? There may be no definitive answer to this question and, perhaps as Gordon MacLellan observed, maybe it is the term we use when we feel it 'is the right one, that is enough of a decision and that will have to do' (2003:365, 2nd epigraph in Chapter 1). Just as some individuals are born with special talents and abilities to sing, play a musical instrument, create magnificent artworks, or excel at a particular sport, so too are powerful shamans born with unique gifts, further honed and developed over a lifetime of devotion to their spirit helpers. Still others may

be able to develop these skills to some extent with appropriate training and support, in the case of neo-Shamans attending shamanic workshops, for example.

As with many other neo-Shamans throughout the Western world, neo-Shamans in New Zealand are motivated by two major forces: an apparently innate yearning and capacity for spiritual experience (the so-called God-module in the brain, discussed in Chapter 4), and ideas about a spiritual energy or power that is available for all people to access directly. Neo-Shamans subscribe to the existence of this power, in much the same way as most Native American Indian spiritualities assert a 'belief in the existence of unseen powers...[that] may take the form of deities or...may be more of a "feeling" that something exists and is sacred and mysterious' (Beck, Walters, & Francisco, 1996:9, cited in Makes Marks, 2007:3). This is a perspective common to many animistic cultures and, as I have shown, neo-Shamans are animists. Neo-Shamans' relationships with their spirit helpers provide them with direct experience and information and, they say, connect them to the Web of Oneness. They tend not to theorise about the nature of the cosmos or spirits; they work within the practical realities of interactions with their spirit helpers.

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand are part of a paradigm-breaking consciousness shift that has occurred throughout the Western world over the last forty or fifty years, pointing to the need for a 'new cultural discourse model' (Kent, 2007:vi). Without exception, participants have supported my research because they think it is important that the academy have an increased awareness and understanding of contemporary (Western) shamanic spiritual realities and sensibilities. They consider they are re-activating ancient wisdom and healing traditions that the West has forgotten. The Western world urgently needs to regain connection with the sacred within a Web of Oneness, they say, and they feel a sense of urgency about this as they listen to prophecies from indigenous people.

Mary Douglas (1966:14) comments that societies are not neutral, and 'that which is not with it, [or] part of it... is potentially against it', and is thus relegated to its margins or boundaries. Shamans, chameleon-like shape-shifters, have always dwelt in these liminal places, and neo-Shamans likewise occupy liminal taboo-breaking spaces. Shamans and other adepts have long extended the boundaries of consciousness,

threatening notions of perceived 'reality'. By bringing shamanic practices into Western society, neo-Shamans are embracing shamanism as a form of subjective sacred science, a science underpinned by a mystical/spiritual worldview, a sacred inquiry in which the experiential is valued as legitimate knowledge. In sacred science, information gathered from imagery and dreams or shamanic visions provides a link between experiential knowledge and propositional knowledge and understandings (Heron, 1992, cited in Reason, 1993), a perspective that deeply challenges positivist science. I argue that neo-Shamans confront Western hegemonies of rationality and science. They break taboos around science as an objective endeavour based on Newtonian and Cartesian concepts. They breach taboos around how they gain knowledge, by entering an altered state of consciousness to journey to the spirit worlds to gather information, 'to get glimpses of what lies behind the appearances', as one participant expressed it. Neo-Shamans aspire to bridge between the worlds, and to work with their spirit allies. In other words, they take the spirits seriously, thereby challenging the rational basis of mainstream Western thinking.

Nonetheless, animist beliefs and thinking patterns echo through our language: 'spiritual essence', 'vital force', or 'sacred force' are all attempts to express the concept of a living universe imbued with precious life force or energies which can be sensed and felt in certain circumstances (Hayden, 2003:52). We speak of someone being 'dispirited', as having 'lost their spirit' and so on. Neo-Shamans and others who are putting forward an alternative spiritual perspective are influencing mainstream Western society, one woman told me. With their taboo-breaking practices and cosmologies, neo-Shamans can potentially enrich and enliven our culture. Peter Berger (1969), in his book, *A Rumour of Angels*, observes that shamanic perspectives are hidden throughout all mystical traditions. Neo-Shamans are making this overt in our society as they co-operate with spirits as powerful allies that can be utilised for support in their work in this reality. Without overstating their influence – after all, neo-Shamans as a proportion of the New Zealand population are very small in number – I contend that they do have a potential role, particularly in relation to how Westerners approach healing, and their relationships with nature and the environment. In addition, some neo-Shamans are infiltrating the business and management worlds.

I have argued moreover that neo-Shamanisms in the 21st century are evolving into multiple and unique cultural variants of traditional forms of shamanism through processes of unconscious/organic hybridity (Brendbekken, 2003, cited in Lahood, 2008:68), and neo-Shamans in New Zealand are part of this movement. This is hardly surprising, given the features of a global post-modern world connected through easy access to the internet, the vast academic and popular literature about shamanism and neo-Shamanism, the pervasive influence of figures such as Eliade, Castaneda and Harner, and the teaching of core shamanism courses throughout the Western world. These influences have all been prevalent within New Zealand over the last thirty or forty years. One striking feature from my fieldwork is the number of participants who have studied shamanism, and other spiritual and healing practices while living and travelling overseas. New Zealanders in general travel widely, and neo-Shamans (along with contemporary Māori healers) visibly play a role in these trends, as they participate in global circulation and exchanges of spiritual and healing knowledge.

Neo-Shamans have been criticised because they psychologise, romanticise, and universalise the practices of indigenous people. While these critiques are valid in some cases, the issues are complex and I have shown they are not valid in all circumstances. Neo-Shamans are individuals covering a wide spectrum of practices and wide-ranging generalisations do not do them justice. Some New Zealand neo-Shamans have read extensively and have an awareness of these sensitive issues, while others are less so. However, as Johnson (2003:337) has conceded, criticisms such as these do not preclude the possibility that genuine healings can and do occur, and anomalous shamanic phenomena experienced by neo-Shamans remain real. I consider that the most relevant criticisms centre on the complex issues of appropriation. Academic concerns about appropriation and authenticity are persuasive but not all neo-Shamans in New Zealand have entered these debates, beyond acknowledging that they wish to honour all cultures and all shamanic paths, a perspective that is somewhat politically naïve. This is possibly because of their relative isolation from the intense arguments that have occurred (and continue to occur) in the United States and Europe, particularly in relation to Native American spirituality. In addition, several have received direct

teachings from Native American people (and other indigenous teachers) that they believe legitimates their practices.

The relations between neo-Shamans and Māori, my research suggests, have not been as tension-filled as those cases in which Native Americans accuse Westerners (including neo-Shamans) of stealing their culture. Although they may have less awareness of appropriation issues in relation to Native Americans or other indigenous peoples, neo-Shamans in New Zealand are very aware of potential sensitivities over these matters when it comes to Māori. In addition, it is likely that changing social and political processes in New Zealand over the last twenty or thirty years have resulted in a shift amongst Māori themselves so that they are less possessive of their cultural knowledge, at least in some instances. Waitangi Tribunal settlements of Māori Treaty claims,¹⁹¹ and an increased awareness of the negative impacts of colonisation have contributed to a Māori renaissance resulting in different management systems for tribal assets, new Māori enterprises in forestry, fishing, farming, broadcasting and the arts, tourism and business, along with a re-vitalisation of te reo Māori (Royal, 2009). This renaissance is also evident in the area of contemporary Māori healing and the desire of Māori to reassert their healing knowledge as a means of re-claiming power and their 'cultural and intellectual estate' (Reinfeld & Pihama, 2007:25). Some, however, are doing this in an inclusive way that allows Pākehā to attend wānanga, for example, to learn Māori traditions.

To provide a personal example of these changes, when I studied naturopathy in the mid-1980s, there were no relationships (that I was aware of) between the *South Pacific College of Natural Therapies* (SPCNT) where I trained and Māori healers or their healing traditions. Nowadays, the SPCNT has implemented a *Bachelor in Natural Medicine* degree programme with four major options, including Traditional Māori Medicine, and has fostered relationships with the local Māori community and healers.¹⁹² The

¹⁹¹ The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 by some Māori chiefs and the British Crown, has been contentious because of differences between the English and Māori versions (see Orange [1987] for a detailed account of the events leading up to, and after, the signing of the Treaty). The Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975 to process claims brought by Māori relating to breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi.

¹⁹² The other options are Western Herbal Medicine, Traditional Pāsefika Medicine and Homeopathy. See <http://www.spcnt.ac.nz/> (accessed 13 May 2010). There are issues that arise

programme is open to anyone who wishes to attend whatever his or her ethnicity. It was developed in consultation with local iwi and the College Māori Advisory Committee, and is believed to be the only degree course offered in New Zealand that incorporates traditional Māori healing as an option (pers. comm. 8 Oct 2008). This may be partly because of a *New Zealand Qualifications Authority* requirement that the College fulfils its Treaty obligations and fosters relationships with iwi, but it is perhaps also an indication of a changing political climate that has resulted in some Māori healers being more willing to share their knowledge with Pākehā.

Innovative and creative changes incorporating traditional concepts have empowered Māori, shifting them from positions of victimisation to one of self-responsibility that embraces multiple perspectives. Lily George's case study of an urban marae in Auckland is an example of Māori from many different iwi committed to a vision of sharing a space with non-Māori. Through the development of a 'third space', conceived of as an evolving, organic and dynamic space, 'Māori and Pākehā can find common ground that is negotiated for the benefit of all' (2010a:260, 265).¹⁹³ With only one exception, the Māori healers I have worked with have resided within this third space, willing to work with anyone who wishes to attend their clinics, workshops, or wānanga.

Neo-Shamans in New Zealand are individuals practising their own idiosyncratic forms of shamanism; collectively they share similarities in many respects with other Western neo-Shamans trained in core shamanism, and they display some similar abilities to indigenous shamans as recorded in the literature. However, this land and its indigenous tangata whenua unavoidably shape them, just as they in turn enrich and shape Māori traditions, including their healing practices. My research suggests that some neo-Shamans and contemporary Māori healers are forming new relationships based on a respectful sharing of similar spiritual understandings.

for Māori from the implementation of the degree course, such as potential dilution and sanitisation of traditional practices but it is beyond the scope of my study to engage with those issues here. O'Connor (2008) addresses some of these political considerations in his study of the Te Oomai Reia Māori healers (see also Chapter 8 in this thesis).

¹⁹³ The term 'third space' was coined by Arnold Wilson prior to Homi Bhabha's use of the term as 'an evolving and dynamic space' (Greenwood & Wilson, 2006:11, cited in George, 2010a:265).

This thesis has traced the nebulous and fluid shamanic landscape in New Zealand as a form of local knowledge, while simultaneously drawing attention to the multiple global exchanges of spiritual and healing practices between neo-Shamans in New Zealand, and other Western and indigenous shamans. In addition, some Māori healers are exporting their practices as they travel overseas to work with, and teach others in Europe and the Americas. The boundaries blur between esoteric and ancient teachings and those of seemingly 'New Age'-derived philosophies. At the same time, esoteric and shamanic teachings, philosophies and practices filter into the mainstream, and other groups of healers consciously or unconsciously blend them into their work creating fusion models of healing that may or may not be a form of shamanism. All of these practitioners are bringing renewed sensibilities of other realities and other kinds of knowledge, particularly in relation to healing, ecological and environmental concerns, to challenge and modify conventional wisdom and understandings.

I conclude by offering a few reflexive observations on two aspects of my study: firstly, as a New Zealander conducting fieldwork in my own land and, secondly, the (at times erratic) progression of my internal process of engaging with the spirits. Both aspects have required me to develop flexibility and fluidity within my multiple roles as writer and anthropologist, naturopathic practitioner and researcher of altered state shamanic 'realities'. My role/s merged and diverged depending on the external situation and my own inner state; sometimes I was unequivocally an 'insider', at other times, a researcher with an ambivalent status, and in different circumstances again, an 'outsider'.

In 2006 I embarked on my fieldwork, experientially immersing myself in the shamanic worlds of New Zealand; at the same time, I was reading and absorbing the vast mass of anthropological literature about shamanism. This dual process could be viewed as an attempt to marry my heart and my head. The complexities of my multiple roles are perhaps mirrored in variable writing styles as I moved between theoretical and experiential perspectives. My seemingly more 'objective' writing in the earlier stages of the thesis reflects my outsider position as I began my fieldwork, when I was more 'in my head'. As I was progressively drawn into the experiential ethnographer-participant's role, my writing reflects this change in positionality. My

immersion in the field was challenging as I endeavoured to capture the mystical and indefinable altered realities of my own experiences, and those reported to me by my neo-Shamanic participants. I have sought to balance the at-times seemingly irresolvable tensions both within myself, and within the context of an academic project. Contributing to the discourse of taking the spirits seriously has required me to problematise my roles as researcher, naturopathic practitioner and experiential student of shamanism. However, it is not necessary that I solve these tensions; I present them as they are, an on-going conversation and multi-dimensional challenge for myself and for other future researchers working in this area.

APPENDIX I INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project: Contemporary Shamanic Healing and Neo-Shamans in New Zealand

I am undertaking a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Social Anthropology at Massey University, Albany. My research topic is an exploration of modern-day shamans (sometimes called neo-shamans) and shamanic healing in New Zealand. My interest in this topic stems from over twenty years personal and professional involvement in the complementary and alternative health field.

My research will involve talking to a wide range of New Zealand healers, both those who call themselves 'shamans' and others who do not specifically use this term but are involved in healing modalities which might be considered to be shamanic in origin. In addition I will attend workshops offering shamanic trainings of various types. Because of my extensive involvement with healing and healers, I already have many connections in the field and you are either personally known by me, or your name has been given to me by someone mutually known to us both.

In addition to informal conversations I would like to conduct in-depth, open-ended interviews lasting from one-and-a-half to two hours with approximately twenty healers, in particular with those who use the term 'shaman' for themselves. I believe that by interviewing twenty shamans I will obtain a representative sample of shamanic healers in New Zealand. The tapes will be transcribed by me and the transcription returned for comments or corrections. If at all possible, I would like a follow-up interview about three weeks after the original interview to discuss the material and to provide time for reflection and a deepening of our mutual understandings. I expect the second interview to be from half-an-hour to one hour in duration.

The material and information gathered as a result of my informal conversations, workshop participation and formal recorded interviews will be analysed, and the resulting thesis will be a comparative study between contemporary shamans in New Zealand and those overseas, as portrayed in the academic literature.

Information, in the form of my field notebooks and audiotapes will be stored in a lockable filing cabinet. The information will not be accessible to anyone else. After five years the data will be disposed of by my supervisor.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in my research. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;

- withdraw from the study at any time up till the conclusion of the data collection period (August 2009);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to me;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded. I will contact you to arrange this and in addition, a copy of my final report will be available for you to read if you wish.

During a recorded interview you have the right to ask for the audiotape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I do not anticipate that you will experience any discomfort (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual or social) as a result of your participation in my research. However, if you are discomforted in any way you have the right to inform me and to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

Should you agree to take part in my study, I will discuss with you further issues of confidentiality, e.g. whether you wish to choose a pseudonym for use in my report. In some circumstances, I cannot guarantee complete anonymity (the healing community in New Zealand is a small community and even with the use of a pseudonym other participants may recognise you).

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 06 / 027 . If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Kerry Chamberlain, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 ext.9078, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz .

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

**APPENDIX II
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Research Project: Contemporary Shamanic Healing and
Neo-Shamans in New Zealand**

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

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.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audiotaped.

I wish/do not wish to have my tapes returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full Name (please print):

APPENDIX III

GLOSSARY OF COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE MODALITIES

The following list of alternative therapies gives a very brief indication of each one. It is far from comprehensive, and covers only the modalities I have mentioned in the text.

Acupuncture: Involves the balancing of energy in the body through the insertion of needles into points along energy pathways in the body called meridian lines. Acupuncture is one aspect of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). TCM also incorporates other components such as the use of Chinese herbal medicines and energy (chi) balancing.

Ayurvedic Medicine: Ancient healing system of India that comprises the use of herbs, diet, applications to the skin, yogic breathing and spiritual practices to balance the constitution of the patient.

Bodywork: A generic term to cover numerous therapies that seek to relax the body and reduce pain. Many bodywork therapies aim to work holistically, balancing the person on all levels (body, mind, spirit). They range from very subtle energy-balancing techniques such as Reiki through to relaxing massage, and deep-tissue work or structural re-alignment. 'Bodywork' includes such therapies as relaxing or therapeutic massage, Bowen technique, Kinesiology, Rolfing, Hellerwork, craniosacral therapy (see below), Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais and others.

Chiropractic: A manipulative therapy that focuses on the structure of the body, and the interrelationship of the spine, nervous system and function of internal organs.

Craniosacral Therapy: A gentle bodywork therapy that works to balance the body's subtle physiology. The craniosacral motion originates from the cerebrospinal fluid and has a dynamic expansion and contraction motion that can be detected throughout the body. After trauma or if general health and well-being is compromised, the rhythm becomes distorted and the practitioner uses gentle touch to help re-balance and restore the cranial movement (Upledger & Vredevoogd, 1983).

Energy Healing: Modalities that work to balance subtle body energies.

Foot Reflexology: Foot massage that works on specific reflex points on the feet, based on the principle that the points relate to areas of the body and its internal organs. Hand or ear reflexology work on similar principles.

Herbal Medicine: The use of plants for healing. Many different healing traditions employ the use of plants, for example, Māori and other indigenous people, Ayurvedic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine. Most medical herbalists in New Zealand are trained in the European tradition, although they may use native New Zealand plants as well as those from other traditions or countries.

Homeopathy: A system of healing developed by a German doctor, Dr Samuel Hahnemann in the mid -1800s that works on the principle of 'like cures like'. The remedies are specially prepared in very dilute ('potentised') form, and administered according to the individual's symptoms.

Kinesiology: (also known as Touch for Health) Developed as a combination of muscle balancing based on chiropractic work and Chinese meridian energy flows. Imbalances are corrected through the use of pressure on specific points.

Lightworkers: Healers who consciously choose to be of 'service to the planet and to spirit at this time in the earth's evolution'. They employ a range of healing modalities such as channelling, energy healing, reiki or massage, sound healing, often connecting with spirit guides and other beings.

Massage Therapy: Use of the hands to work and release tension in the muscles.

Medical Herbalist: Practitioner of Western herbal medicine (see Herbal Medicine).

Medical Intuitive: A practitioner who employs extra-sensory perceptions to diagnose illnesses or energy imbalances in the body or energy field.

Naturopathy: Naturopaths work to balance and stimulate the body's vital force to heal, based on the principles of *Vis Medicatrix Naturae* (the healing power of nature), *Primum Non Nocere* (first do no harm), *Tolle Causum* (find the cause), and treating the whole person using preventive medicine to promote wellness (Doctor as teacher) (Pizzorno,

1996:172-173). They use a variety of modalities such as diet and nutrition, herbal medicine, flower essences or homeopathy to assist in these processes.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP): A system that maps and changes, or re-frames language patterns, perceptions and communication processes.

Osteopathy: A bodywork system that aims to integrate the neuro-musculoskeletal, visceral and connective tissues in the body, to balance and alleviate pain.

Psychic Healing: A term that covers a range of therapies in which the practitioner uses extra-sensory perceptions such as clairvoyance to ascertain energy blocks or other issues within the patient's energy field.

Reiki: Spiritual energy healing involving light hands-on touch.

Rolfing: A structural integration bodywork therapy that seeks to release stress patterns in the body (see Maitland, 1995).

Shiatsu: A bodywork system in which the practitioner applies firm pressure along the same energy meridians in the body as acupuncture.

Sound Therapy: The use of sound vibrations to balance energy and heal.

Touch for Health: See Kinesiology.

Vibrational Medicine: A general term that includes all therapies working with subtle energies. Gerber (1988) gives an overview of energy medicine, covering a vast range of modalities such as flower essences, the use of crystals, homeopathy, and some subtle bodywork systems.

Visionary Craniosacral Therapy: A form of craniosacral therapy that endeavours to develop the practitioner's awareness of subtle energy and to extend extra-sensory awareness.

APPENDIX IV

GLOSSARY OF MĀORI WORDS

This Glossary provides a simple definition of Māori words used in the thesis. As with all languages and cultures, subtle meanings are dependent on their context, and I expand on some words and concepts in the text as appropriate. In compiling this Glossary, I consulted two Māori dictionaries, Ryan (1994) and Williams (1997), and other Māori scholars are cited within the body of the thesis.

Aotearoa – New Zealand

Atua – Gods

Atua wahine – Goddesses

Hapū – sub-tribe

Hara – wrong-doing

Hinengaro – the mind

Hongi – smell, greeting by pressing noses together

Hui – meeting

Ihi – vitality, life force

Io – the Supreme God, Ultimate Deity

Io-matua-kore – the parentless one

Iwi – tribe

Kahu – fabric, a garment

Kaitiaki – guardian spirits

Karakia – payer, chant, incantation (see Shirres, 1997:75-97 for a detailed discussion of karakia as a tool to contact the ancestors)

Karanga – call, shout (often when ritually being called onto a marae)

Kaumātua – male elder

Kaupapa – strategy or theme; hence, **Kaupapa Māori** – privileging and following Māori-centred protocols and procedures.

Kawa – protocols

Kete – basket or kit woven from flax

Kōrero – to speak, talk, address

Kōrerorero – to talk much, frequently discuss.

Kuia – female elder

Makutu – black magic or sorcery

Mana – power, authority, prestige. Shirres (1997:53-61) provides a detailed explanation

Mana ake – uniqueness of individual and family

Mana wahine – power or authority of women

Māoritanga – Māori culture

Marae – focal point or meeting area for an iwi or hapū

Matakite – seer into the future, clairvoyant

Mātauranga – information, knowledge, education

Māte Māori – literally ‘Māori sickness’; sickness or death as the result of a breach of
tapu or makutu

Mauri – life-force in all creation, vitality

Mirimiri – soft massage or touch

Moko – mark, tattoo

Mokopuna – grandchildren

Ngahere – bush.

Pākehā – New Zealander of European descent

Papatūānuku – Earth Mother

Ranginui – Sky Father

Romiromi – deep tissue massage

Rongoā Māori – traditional Māori medicine

Rongoā – Māori plant or herbal medicine

Rongomatāne – God of Peace

Ruahine – old woman, woman who plays a role in lifting tapu

Taha wairua – the spiritual side or dimension

Tāne – God of the trees and birds

Tangaroa – God of the sea and fish

Tāwhiri – God of winds

Tangata whenua – indigenous people of the land, specifically Māori

Tapu – sacred, set apart. See Shirres (1997:33-49) for a full explanation

Te Ao Mārama – the sphere of broad daylight

Te Kore or Te Korekore – the void, emptiness

Te Pō – the night realms

Te reo Māori – the Māori language

Te whare tapa wha – Māori health model based on the four walls of a house, representing the wairua/spirit, hinengaro/mind, tinana/physical body and whānau/family.

Te wheke – octopus. Māori health model with the eight tentacles representing eight dimensions of life. These include the four aspects from the whare tapa wha model plus mana ake (uniqueness), mauri (life-force), awareness of ancestors, and whatumanawa (feelings).

Tikanga – customs

Tinana – physical body

Tipuna/ Tupuna – ancestors

Tohuna – Tuhoe iwi dialectical for ‘tohunga’

Tohunga – priest, skilled spiritual leader or expert

Tohunga makutu – tohunga who carries out black magic or sorcery

Tohunga tā moko – tattoo expert

Tohunga whakairo – expert carver

Tūmatauenga – God of war

Wahine – woman

Wai – water

Waiata – song, chant

Waiora – health

Wairākau – natural medicine, such as the use of medicinal plants in baths

Wairua – spirit

Wānanga – Māori education institution; see whare wānanga

Whakanoa – lifting of tapu

Whakapapa – genealogy

Whānau – family

Whare wānanga – house of learning, a place where esoteric knowledge is transmitted orally

Whatumanawa – feelings, emotions

Whenua – land

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