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RECLAIMING THE LAST RITES (RIGHTS)

WOMEN AND AFTER-DEATH POLICY, PRACTICES AND BELIEFS IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the women who have respectfully, and with love, laid out the dead at home and in their communities for no or modest payment. Especially I want to pay a loving tribute to my own great grandmother Annie Lizzie Glover (nee Bevan) who laid out her son, my grandfather, at home when he died in London in 1946.

ABSTRACT

This thesis develops an ecofeminist analysis of women's roles in after-death work and ritual in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The thesis describes and analyses the male takeover, and accompanying professionalization of death which has removed death out of the hands of the lay women in the family and community who previously held this role, and which has removed dying, death and after-death practices and ritual out of the home and into the institution.

A bicultural emphasis has been adopted for this research into death which involves Maori, the first nation tribal peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Pakeha, people of European (particularly British) descent who have colonized Aotearoa. The thesis examines both the differing and related experiences of Maori and Pakeha in relation to changing and evolving after-death policy, practices and beliefs in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It also considers the value of after-death experiences in the home and in the community and the choices and restrictions of today that relate to this. A triangulation of research methods is used: public records research to produce an historical social policy analysis of death, the action research of the Palmerston North Women's Homedead Support Group which is an initiative to demystify and reclaim after-death knowledge and choices, and eighteen in-depth interviews which provide women's stories of their after-death experiences. The research aims to contribute to a process which seeks to demystify death and assist women and the wider community to reclaim control over the last rites (rights).

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Arohanui, Jean

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