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So Mote it be!

**An Anthropological Investigation
of Contemporary Feminist
Witchcraft**

Helen M. Macdonald

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis was to produce an ethnography of contemporary feminist witches and the practice of their 'craft' in New Zealand, particularly the Otago and Canterbury regions. Data was collected over a sixteen month period using the traditional anthropological method of participant observation and formal interviews with practising witches. I became a member of a coven and participated in its formation with other interested women who attended a course on ritual making. Upon meeting witchcraft practitioners, I attempted to place them in a sociological pigeonhole of 'witch', which defies definition. It became evident that contemporary witches encompass a set of chaotic images, each with important implications for ritual practice and the self labelling process. By naming herself a witch, a woman empowers herself with a history, and a set of ideological beliefs, that challenge the prevailing rationalistic and scientific world view. The practice of witchcraft expands beyond important religious implications to provide the resources and tools for a political agenda compatible with feminist, environmental, alternative health, art and peace movement ideologies and protest strategies. Their world view is best explained through eco-feminist theorising that acknowledges the connections between women, ecology and spirituality, and explains why 'witch' is used as an all encompassing self-label by these women, instead of other equally valid but limited labels such as 'femmie', or 'greenie'.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction: The Wiccan Way

Religions are like ancient meandering rivers and tangled rainforests. They fit uneasily, it seems, into a modern, rational landscape, obstructing progress, impeding development. Yet just as the world's waterways and jungles, now seen to be endangered, are beginning to be taken seriously, so there is a need for a greater appreciation of resources within the world's religions. Their contributions to our social and cultural ecology deserve to be better understood.

(Donovan, 1990:9)

A little known spiritual movement; a part of the oft-noted resurgence of the 'occult' groups and the New Religious Movements, appears to be growing spontaneously and quietly. As a segment of the pre-Christian Pagan or Neo-pagan revival it has generally gone unnoticed and when acknowledged is largely misunderstood. It goes by a variety of names; Witchcraft, Wicca, feminist spirituality, feminist Neo-paganism, women's ritual groups and moon circles. Having no common body of doctrine, often individualistic and autonomous, these groups do not adhere to patterns that society associates with religious cults. Anthropological, historical and theological scholarship is filled with learned and semi-learned articles on the phenomenon (see summary of literature cited in Adler, 1986:351-371). Apparently however, few modern writers have actually encountered witches, a fact that has not prevented most of them from making ethnocentrically biased observations. Members of this movement commonly refer to themselves as Pagans or Neo-pagans; an umbrella term for the bewildering variety of groups in a movement that shares the goal of living in harmony with nature and claims their rituals from the ancient pre-Christian nature religions of Old Europe. The fundamental principle of these groups lies with the metaphor that any religious pathway is a journey to a spiritual reality, therefore the differing traditions, scope, structure, symbols, organisation, ritual and names for the deity that each chooses is legitimate. The movement flourishes in Britain and the United States of America and the increasing

number of practising witches and subsequent media coverage suggests a similar growth in New Zealand.

To return to Donovan's quote, several points should be noted. Witchcraft and Neo-paganism have developed or reclaimed 'ancient' traditions, dating back to the pre-Christian period of Old Europe. Thus, these 'new' religions are in fact derivatives of old religions, new only in the social context in which they appear. Common perceptions of witchcraft are varied; generally negative feelings are widely shared, even by well-educated people. Concern was often expressed for my well-being, upon a person becoming aware of my research interests. I was frequently greeted by responses, 'Hadn't you better be careful?' or 'Isn't it dangerous?' Witchcraft, or any perceived 'fringe' religion fits uncomfortably with the recognised rational and secularised society of today. Even as the introduction for this thesis is being written, the common stereotype of witches has materialised before me in the latest episodes of New Zealand's home-grown '*Shortland Street*', a television drama set in a private emergency clinic. The latest character introduced to the television series is a modern day witch, ironically named Morgana. She is a psychiatric patient, who lapses into spontaneous uncontrollable trances and chants, shatters mirrors upon gazing into them, moves objects, swings doors, opens and closes elevator doors, and finally speaks the voices of those who have recently died. Viewers are told by another coven member that she 'transgressed the boundaries'. Despite a recent report detailing the research the actress Marise Wipani engaged in (Rule, 1993:11), the producers of what in the past has been an excellent conveyor of popular culture, appeared to be more concerned with Stephen Spielberg style Hollywood witchcraft, than they were with producing a fair and accurate representation of contemporary witchcraft.

Since World War II social scientists have felt that religions 'deserve to be better understood' (Beckford, 1987:392). In the past theologians have only concerned themselves with religious dogma, or changes within formalised religions, and even currently, little comment emerges from the theologians regarding the current resurgence of new religions. There appears to be a new found willingness among social scientists to take the new religions seriously, and as such my thesis research has proved to be a popular discussion topic amongst my colleagues. Literature on Witchcraft is lacking, which is understandable when one considers the centuries of persecution and misunderstanding suffered by those accused of being witches. Literature on ritual making is readily available

and the curious only need to explore the titles in book stores to find it. Academic research in New Zealand appears to be well advanced with writings from Wisewitch (1987), Alice (1989, 1992) and Rountree (1992). Some British and American studies have been excellent and two in particular deserve mention; Margot Adler's (1986), *Drawing Down the Moon*, and Tanya Luhrmann's (1989), *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*.

During a 1991 Post-Graduate Diploma course, I became aware of a group of practising witches and was attracted to the possibility of writing an ethnography of contemporary feminist witchcraft based on a study of the group and its members. I approached my research with no central hypothesis to be tested and had little idea of the direction it would take, hoping instead that ideas would materialise as profound revelations which would contribute to social scientific study, specifically in the area of the sociology of religion. Particular ideas have emerged, which will be detailed in the discussion to follow. The data for this thesis is based on two methodologies; an ethnography gained by participant observation and informal interviews that have produced a chronology of female experience. Data was collected during a sixteen month period of participant observation as a member of a Dunedin coven. This methodology provided the study with the actuality of events and relationships, and of content.

The second source of information was collected by informal interviews with women and men from the Otago and Canterbury regions. Sixteen formal interviews were conducted with women from a number of different covens and with two male witches. In addition, informal discussions and interviews were ongoing, including participation in a seminar in Christchurch, an open ritual in Dunedin, and an invitation to share in a ritual with a group from Waikouaiti. I had further in depth discussion with two male witches and a Christchurch artist who uses Goddess imagery in her work, and much of the descriptive material in this thesis took place in the context of the group in which I participated, but of which I interviewed no members. A letter of introduction and an invitation to participate in the study was sent to all participants of the Workers' Education Association courses on women's spirituality. Several agreed to be interviewed. Finding subjects was conducted on an ad hoc basis, often by way of word of mouth. Two subjects came forward after an announcement to my own lecture class of my research interests.

The interviews, one to two hours in length, included both open and closed questions about lifestyle, social and political attitudes, and religious belief and practices. All contact with people and groups was conducted openly, with the knowledge of those involved. Interviews were held in the strictest confidence, and personal information (including names) that might identify individuals has been removed from the written text. All formal interviews were taped and later transcribed. It is from these transcripts that the women and men may speak in their own words. Interview techniques were similar to those detailed by Anderson and Jack (1991) and Borland (1991).

It should be emphasised that the coven of which I was a member was one of many. Decentralism and individualism are the basis of Witchcraft, and they overshadow any 'tradition' or 'ritual'. Crowley states, "Rituals are constantly reinterpreted as people evolve, but on the basis of a shared core of information which preserves a common thread which is recognisably Wicca," (Crowley, 1989:15). Because Witchcraft is so decentralised, and each coven is autonomous, each develops its own identity. It is easy to talk of a coven's particular tradition, or the rituals they practice, but difficult to analyse the differences between groups, because of their diverse characters. The period of investigation was during the early stages of the coven growth, and in fact I was one of the instigators of its formation. The coven, later naming itself 'The Lunar Spiral Sisters', was formed by interested women who completed a course in ritual making.¹ During this period the coven underwent many changes, and at times the possibility of disintegration. The future is sure to result in further changes in the composition of membership and the structure of the group. For these reasons it is timely to reflect on my role as a researcher, and as a catalyst for the group formation.

My main research concern has been whether it is compatible with feminist principles, that objectivity is an impossible reality, and that the subject should name or define their own reality, which begs the question; Can there be a feminist Ethnography? Feminists have decried the hit and run nature of past research that has returned little or nothing to the subject, and has sought to establish an egalitarian research process, "...characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her 'subject'," (Stacey, 1991:112). Ethnographic methodology based on participant observation and interviews with subjects is ideally suited to feminist research principles, and

¹ Janet Melbourne ran a four week course at the Dunedin Workers' Education Association entitled 'Women's Rituals' in early 1992.

I eagerly embarked on this type of method. My reasons are similar to Ann Oakley's, who has rejected the hierarchical, objectifying, and falsely objective stance of the neutral, impersonal interviewer as neither possible nor desirable (cited in Stacey, 1991:112).

Stacey finds two major contradictions inherent in this approach. Firstly, for the precise reason that ethnographic research is based on feminist principles, it contains the possibility of exposing the subject to, "...grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer," (Stacey, 1991:113), as my fieldwork can illustrate. Several of my informants were involved in a group split-up that was both incredibly recent and painful for the women involved. They felt this particular group break up should not be the subject of research and would only talk off-the-record with me. I was placed in an awkward position when another woman felt the issue of group dissolution should be addressed and used the example of the particular coven concerned. I too, felt the issue needed to be addressed, therefore potential betrayal in relation to those who spoke confidentially to me, existed. More times than I would have liked, this study placed me in a conflicting relationship with the women observed and interviewed, and I could list numerous other examples of conflict.

The second area of contradiction that Stacey (1991) points out lies with the ethnographic product. Despite all feminist claims to remove bias, and present a fair and accurate record of people's lives, the final authority always lies with the author. In spite of all my intentions to allow the women to speak 'in their own voices', I can only conclude that the final presentation of their respective narratives has been my decision, that is, my voice will always be the loudest. I retained a privileged position, which is often mistaken for mutual reciprocity. In addition difficulties lie with the requirement of the University to use legitimate research methodology, hence a double agenda exists. Feminist principles require that research should be a process of empowerment for subjects, and yet the legitimacy of the final product buys into intellectual elitism through both the accessibility of product and the use of unnecessary and difficult language. Language construction and publishing productivity placed me in a professional bind and can only be rectified by publishing papers through a more widely distributed medium.

I have been forced to address these issues and can only conclude the most correct action for me, is to openly acknowledge the limitations of ethnographic

process and product. I do not pretend to be neutral nor take an objective stance. This thesis does not do full justice to the women's stories, nor does it fully capture the diversity of lifestyles and experiences they represent. Uniting these women without homogenising them is an important criteria. It is in fact nothing short of a snapshot of a dynamic phenomenon. Thus, for the purposes of this research, the generic form of woman and related pronouns (she/her) are used to refer to witches unless otherwise stated. The practitioners of New Zealand witchcraft are predominantly women and the majority of my interviewees were women, although it must be noted that male witches exist and the majority of male practitioners label themselves as witches.

Upon becoming acquainted with the witches, I made attempts to place them in some sort of sociological pigeonhole. This was impossible to find. No single factor seemed to typify them, and the more I explored the concept of a 'witch' the more a definition defied and confused me. As the basis of the first chapter, which incidentally took the longest to write because of the aforementioned problems, it was with sudden clarity I realised that the aim should not lie with attempting to define what a witch was, an impossibility I now acknowledge, but instead to examine why women choose to label themselves as such, (or choose not to, as the case might be). These women are searching for an alternative world view that expresses their personal ideas of the world, embodied in the image of a witch. Committed to the evolution of post-patriarchal spirituality, many witches seek their inspiration and rituals from past models of female power. Chapter one explores the images of the witch, delving into its chaotic and at times horrific history, from the early images of female sacrality evidenced in the Old European nature religion to the persecution and burning of women accused of the crimes of witchcraft. Controversy surrounds the usage of these images for contemporary means, such as the original matriarchal stage that witches commonly refer to, and the tradition of witchcraft as an survival of the pre-Christian era, although scathed by the burnings. For New Zealand witches, proof of an unbroken tradition, or the authenticity of an early matriarchy commands little importance, as they attempt to create their own rituals and practices.

The Wiccan novice need only search the titles in book stores to find detailed descriptions of ritual performance. Chapter two provides a brief descriptive analysis of the formalised components of witchcraft; ritual, the Goddess and magical practices, although most 'Craft' texts delve out greater detail

for the ritualist than this chapter chooses to. The majority of this chapter is descriptive, with anecdotal evidence from a journal I kept, but like most written descriptive material the emotional impact and content of ritual is difficult to achieve. When offering an explanation for the presence of feminist rituals, functionalist theories reduce them to an effect of the feminist, peace and ecological movement, which is plausible for the reasons for which ritual is used; healing, worship of nature, spell making and other magics, creativity, celebration and self empowerment of women. Although theorising in this manner has some validity, it is not an entirely adequate explanation for the re-emergence of witchcraft, for it fails to explain both the emotional and psychological content of ritual, and the various levels of intentionality that exist in ritual.

Feminist witchcraft worships the Goddess. Feminist theologians have criticised patriarchal religions for ignoring women's religious and social expression. Witches assign to the Goddess the attributes the patriarchal God does not possess, providing both psychological and political consequences for all women, and reflecting the diversity of Wiccan practitioners. While furnishing a psychological and social model for women, the usage of Goddess imaging as a symbol for women places gender as the most crucial factor of religious expression. As long as religious expression is based upon gender, witches will always have a need for the Goddess, which reduces Her to a political sign as well as a religious symbol. Following the logic of feminist witches, men are thus denied access to Wicca because of the political nature of the Goddess. Chapter two analyses the important role of magical practices in feminist ritual, and seeks to examine the compelling and persuasive nature of magic. Most witches see magic as a form of social action based upon will, providing witches with a formal tool for gaining their own desires. Defined as, "...the art of changing consciousness at will," magic involves a transformation of some kind. Its pragmatic nature prevails witches to modify their evidence and interpretation, leading them to assume their magic is correct.

In the first chapter, I have detailed the issues concerned with defining what a witch is and means, and have concluded that not only is it a self label, it is part of a process. I have suggested that instead of trying to grasp a concrete definition of witches and Witchcraft, it would be prudent to examine under what circumstances witches choose to label themselves as such. In chapter three I have suggested that women label themselves as witches when their spirituality reaches a point where they make the claim, 'my spirituality is my life'. Chapter three

examines the background of witches and despite the fact that women of different race, class, age and religion are welcomed to join and practice witchcraft, there are characteristics of those women who are attracted to witchcraft. Many are older, pakeha, middle-class (in ideology as opposed to socio-economic grouping), and independent women, who are often lesbian or without a male partner. Of course, this is a generalisation and many witches fail to fit these characteristics. Their search for a religion, their feminism, their love of nature, or friends and beliefs may lead them to witchcraft. Chapter three details the process women experience in two sections; the initial changes, that are often startling and very intense, and the process of conversion, that suggests witches are already involved in Wiccan ideology in terms of feminism and ecology long before they ever happen upon Witchcraft practices. Witchcraft is linked to other social areas beyond feminism and environmentalism, therefore I have chosen to examine what I feel are two important connections; creativity and the alternative health movement.

For many witches the spiritual and political are intimately linked, and are implicitly expressed within an ecological feminist framework. Feminist critique of the patriarchal bias that exists in the ecology movement has brought feminism to ecological theorising. In terms of articulating a feminist position, witches find themselves in two camps; radical eco-feminism which views women as closer to nature because of their biology, and socialist eco-feminism that suggests women are ideologically constructed as closer to nature. Eco-feminism, the subject of chapter four, must move beyond the boundaries of both the radical and socialist perspectives and a new 'dialectical feminism' needs to be articulated, which will position feminism and environmentalism with other forms of oppression. Eco-feminism also refers to the grass root organisation of women's efforts to mobilise against ecological destruction. Feminist witchcraft secures a strong base for articulating an eco-feminist perspective, for mobilising political action and for providing protection from political burn-out. Leading activist witches, such as Starhawk, are building a women-centred activism centred on pacifist and ritualised content. However, political feminists continue to dismiss witchcraft, or any movement that involves the metaphysical, as apolitical and a means of mystification. Sadly, a true 'dialectical feminism' remains unachievable, as long as those political feminists who can articulate it most clearly, continue to ignore the potential in the feminist spirituality movement.

Finally, chapter five explores some future considerations that witchcraft as a movement will have to confront and deal with. My intention in this chapter has been to point out difficulties witchcraft may face in the future, not to negate its role in that future. The growth of new religions, that appeared from the 1960s onwards, is a source of curiosity. Academic response has been varied. Some suggest we are approaching a Secular Age, others associate religious growth with periods of rapid, intense and wide-ranging social changes. The media, mainstream churches and the public view the new religious movement growth with trepidation and alarm. In order to endure in what appears to be an increasingly changing environment, witchcraft will need to remain adaptable, flexible and able to engage in critical discourse. The decentralised and non-hierarchical nature of Wicca and the loosely constructed network will allow witchcraft to survive, but could inhibit its growth. In addition, the Wiccan future may look quite different with the equally ambiguous impact of the next generation of witches and the growth of male spirituality and male involvement, where attempts may be made to formalise the Wiccan tradition. There lies with Witchcraft the potential to bridge the ideological differences between the women regardless of background and extends not only to those women who become witches, but also in their interaction with and their understanding of other non-Wiccan women. The intricacies of group dynamics and power imbalances need to be recognised and addressed, or they lie dormant until causing conflicts and in some cases group break ups.

CHAPTER ONE

What is a Witch? A Portrait

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary witchcraft or Wicca is but one quasi-religious group, who describe themselves as a part of a pre-Christian pagan revival. The Neo-pagan movement, a religious phenomenon currently sweeping regions of the United States of America, shares the goal of living in harmony with nature and claims its rituals from the old pre-Christian nature religion of Europe (defined in section 1.2.1). Witchcraft, a branch of Neo-paganism, is a relatively recent development in New Zealand, and has been heavily influenced by feminists and lesbians. What differentiates it from other Neo-pagan groups is the centrality of women's experience, that is, it is gynocentric. Chapter one discusses witchcraft and the contentious debates arising from its practise. Within contemporary witchcraft, the word '*witch*' or '*witchcraft*' has created a furore, which must be clarified so that a working definition can be applied to this text. I conclude that '*witch*' is a self identification; a label that recognises a complexity of images, not only those contemporarily perceived, but also those originating from pre-Christian beliefs. Committed to the evolution of post-patriarchal spirituality, many practitioners seek their inspiration by looking to the past for models of female power. For these reasons and to grasp an understanding of their spirituality and practice, it is important to examine the archaeological evidence and the subsequent debates surrounding it. Archaeology has yielded many Palaeolithic female figurines and it has been widely suggested they represent the existence of female sacrality and a fertility cult. Academic interpretation indicates the contentious nature of this debate, which is further intensified by many feminist authors who have used these finds of ancient artefacts as affirmation of a pre-Christian matriarchy.

Much intellectual debate arising from J. J. Bachofen's original thesis has focused on the matriarchy argument, and whether it offers a theory of the origins of witchcraft. Further, some feminist witches and the occasional scholar intimate that contemporary witchcraft is an archaic pagan revival. Those that champion

this supposition posit that witchcraft, in addition to emanating from the early fertility goddess cult, survived the burnings of the Middle Ages, was kept alive underground, and reappeared during this century. While this debate has raged overseas and appears to be resolved (Adler 1986:86), it has been of little consequence to the witches of New Zealand. It would be incredulous that any New Zealand witch could ever hope to claim an unbroken traditional line. The developing phenomenon is unique to New Zealand's conditions and diverges from other traditions elsewhere in the world, despite its largely feminist, ecological and spiritual nature.

1.1 PERCEPTIONS OF WITCHES

One seemingly insurmountable problem facing the study of women's spirituality is the use and meaning of terms such as *witch*, *witchcraft*, *magic*, *pagan* and *ritual*. Rountree states,

The historical and anthropological study of witchcraft could arguably be seen as a study of the process of labelling, whereby witches were or are defined and consequently feared or ridiculed, shunned and persecuted by the societies to which they belonged or belong, often as marginalised members.
(Rountree, 1992:96)

The historian Elliot Rose observed that the word 'witch' is, "...free to wander, and does wander, among a bewildering variety of mental associations," (cited in Adler, 1986:42). Many of these mental images, whether they be perceived or real, are conveyed by the media. In one example, the reviewer of Germaine Greer's book *The Change: Women, Aging and the Menopause*, states that in Greer's scheme, menopause is a spiritual crisis. It is, she argues, "...a time to put aside worldly things (coffee and tea as well as sex) and take up witchcraft or, depending on one's taste, religion," (Ehrenreich, 1992:56). Examples utilising the terms 'witch' or 'witchcraft' can be found close at hand. The Otago Daily Times published a headline, "*Power crisis review not a 'witch hunt'*", (*Otago Daily Times*, October 15, 1992), and a recent Dominion Sunday Times printed, "*The royal witch hunt continues*", (*The Dominion Sunday Times*, November, 1992). Conclusive definitions are as variable as the practitioners of witchcraft. Adler warns that,

The very power of the word lies in its imprecision. It is not merely a word, but an archetype, a cluster of powerful images. The price we pay for clarity of definition must not be a reduction in the force of this cluster of images.
(Adler, 1986:42)

Groups of fundamentalist Christians continue to be perturbed by 'witches' and 'witchcraft', claiming that witches possess supernatural powers and practise the 'black arts'.² However, modern witches do not associate with the supernatural, and magic is usually considered secondary to their religion or spirituality. Modern perception equates witches to makers of evil, an appropriation of the witch burnings from the Middle Ages era. Television evangelist Pat Robertson, speaking against the Equal Rights Amendment in the USA, was quoted as saying,

It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice [sic] witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.

(*Time*, September 7, 1992)

Contemporary witches claim that they promote good. Our perceptions of witches are passed from generation to generation; a stereotypical image that is still pervasive in children's fairytales, in movies and cartoons. A witch is the haggard old woman, with a hooked nose and warts, a broomstick and black pointed hat. When asked to provide a description of witches, the makers of the television documentary *The Burning Times*, found children gave with a variety of responses,

Child A: I think that witches make potions and then at night they give it to you and take you to where-ever they live and they put you in a cage and make you their slaves.

Child B: I think there are good witches and bad witches. I think a bad witch would look maybe a bit old and wrinkling, and a good witch would be young and all beautiful.

Child C: A witch is something that comes out of the ground at Halloween and gives us all magical powers.

(*The Burning Times*, 1990)

Much of the confusion lies with the bewildering images associated with and commonly practised by witches. Numerous academics have divided 'witches' into an assorted array of classifications with the intention of providing definitional clarity: including Classical, Gothic, Feminist, Neo-pagan, Family Traditionalists. This study has focused on feminist Neo-pagan witches. Neo-

² The Dunedin Christadelphians recently hosted (30 May 1993) a free public bible lecture entitled, *The EVIL of Witchcraft and Sorcery*.

pagan witches are usually polytheists or animists or pantheists, or two or three of these things at once (Adler, 1986). This religion, with a heritage located in the pre-Christian nature religions, has a specific history of its own (discussed in section 1.2). Of the 80,000 self identified American pagans (Adler, 1986), Russell (1980) argues that approximately fifteen percent are Neo-pagan feminists. As witchcraft in New Zealand is a largely feminist and lesbian phenomenon (Ansley, 1985) fifteen percent is possibly a relatively low estimate of the proportion of Neo-pagan feminists practising in New Zealand. It is important to note the difficulty in assessing the extent to which other Neo-pagan groups are operating in New Zealand, due to their hidden nature and low numerical participation.

To make matters more confusing and despite the frequency of feminist pagan witches, not all witches agree with the use of the term '*witch*'. The majority feel it is a word to be reclaimed. Derived from an Old English word *Wicca* or *Wicce*, witch means 'wise' or 'to shape or bend', thus many witches claim they are the seekers of wisdom or change.³ Intent on salvaging a lost women's history, the modern witch often brandishes the title about. By calling herself a witch, each woman is recognising and identifying with the millions of victims of the burnings and as feminist witch Starhawk states, "...to be a witch is ...to take responsibility for shaping a world in which prejudice claims no more victims," (Starhawk, 1979a:22). Section 1.2.3 discusses the historical construction of the witch.

Women who call themselves witches are subverting the negative connotations linked with the word witch. They are retrieving the word to use it in a positive and powerful new light. Paula recognises the power in naming something:

I think any word that has or is used, or has a negative connotation is very powerful in itself. It is very interesting to look at words like 'witch', which have been used in a derogatory way.

For Cathy, the word witch is

...one of the words used to denigrate women, along with a whole list of others, because alternately it is a word of power as well, which is why people are so afraid of it.

³ The derivative root is *Wic* or *Weik* (Adler, 1986:11).

Although to a large degree women wear the word witch as a badge of pride, with a comparability to lesbians reclaiming the word *dyke*, a lesser number of women do not use the word witch to describe themselves. For Renee, the word 'witch' has developed more problems through its usage than when it was previously unused. She places the blame on perceived ritual abuse that is sensationalised by the press:

I think it is a word that is difficult to use publicly at the moment and more so now than even two or three years ago. I think there is a lot of ritual abuse that has come into the public eye and things like that. I think that perhaps 'ritual' more than 'witch' has got some bad press.

As Ellen states,

The word witch is a big problem really, and I think it would be better if we didn't use it, or use something like Wiccan instead. It has got bad connotations

What these women practise is even more contentious, with many terms used synonymously: Goddess worship, witchcraft, Wiccan, feminist Wiccan, women's spirituality, and ritual making. For clarity of definition 'women's spirituality' is too expansive for application, especially when feminists within mainstream Christian churches are attempting to reform the church and in some situations have developed their own ritual groups.⁴ Alice (1989, 1992) has attempted to define feminist women's spirituality in New Zealand. She found numerous names and descriptions assigned to the variety of women's spirituality groups. Equally she found no label represents the movement as a whole. The commonality between these groups is the centrality of women's religious and social experiences, that is, they are gynocentric. Feminist theologians have for a long time criticised codified religions for continuing to ignore women's needs, and for attempting to control peoples' (particularly women's) religious as well as social expression. Wisewitch's (1987) research showed that traditional churches have alienated women because of their ideology of male domination, their rigidity and dualistic theology and their rejection of female sexuality. She concluded,

...there is not, and never can be, a place for women in the main patriarchal religions. Therefore there will always be alternatives such as Women's Spirituality. (Wisewitch, 1987:1)

⁴ A small number of witches are still currently practising members of mainstream religions, in particular, Catholicism. One interviewee, Ellen, stated that she would return to the Catholic church if it extended equal rights to women.

Core religious symbols must bear relationship to peoples' experience. Christianity, which has traditionally been constructed by males in ways that represent male experience and interests, is not in a position to interpret female experience. Feminist spirituality, witches argue, is a living metaphor, where women celebrate themselves as autonomous, powerful and free.

Alice (1989) discusses three strands of feminist spirituality that appear to be defined according to experience: church based spirituality, where feminists are challenging the church from within it; goddess spirituality, where goddess symbology it utilised; and ritual group spirituality, where women meet as covens to perform rituals. These categories appear to be arbitrary. Alice provides little explanation for separating Goddess spirituality from women's rituals, while simultaneously suggesting that they may overlap, viz;

For many women who become involved in feminist spirituality the goddess figures less often than the fun of creating rituals with other women.
(Alice, 1989:226)

Goddess symbolism can play a major or minor role in ritual, but this is not to suggest that women who practise ritual separate the Goddess from their ritual making, or their lives. Rather than posit definitive categories, I suggest that these women use both Goddess symbology and ritual as and when it is necessary. Women's initial involvement in feminist spirituality may entail the separation of the Goddess from other aspects of ritual making. The concept of a Goddess is unusual in Western society, and can sit uncomfortably with women who have been raised in the tradition of the Christian God.

It is through this process of legitimate self actualisation that witchcraft becomes a way of life for many women. For this reason many call it a spirituality in contrast to a religion. As Jenny describes,

I see it [witchcraft] as an integral part of the whole thing I do. Rather than me bringing ritual into my life, ritual is a part of my life. So it is not a pick-up the things and put them into my life. It is an expression of all the things that are already there.

Cathy states,

It's an identity thing. It is social, political, ideological and it is religious. It is a whole, a total package, a lifestyle or a world view, a way of looking at the world.

These statements reveal the self identification of a witch. In her summary Rountree states, "For most contemporary historians... there was no such thing as a self defining witch. A witch was a person, usually a woman, who was labelled as such by her persecutors," (Rountree, 1992:98). For contemporary practitioners of witchcraft self identification and labelling are an essential part of defining themselves. Choosing the label 'witch' is not simply a matter of like or dislike of the word. Labelling moves beyond this realm of definition. Penny argues, "We do NOT accept the pejorative meaning of witch or coven. These are OUR terms and we use them in OUR way," (Penny, 1990:178). Alice (1989, 1992) points out that there are various groups of women using ritual and Goddess imagery in a number of ways, who do not call themselves witches. At some point during a witch's discovery of her own religious expression she will come to label herself as a witch. By doing so she recognises the history specific to witches and the chaotic images associated with being a witch. It becomes crucial to move the analysis of witches and witchcraft in a direction away from the words themselves, and instead examine the social, ideological and political contexts in which a woman will label herself as a witch.

1.2 THE ARCHETYPAL WITCH: ORIGINS

1.2.1 The Ancient Religion

Most scholars conclude that the world's earliest religious conceptions were manifested through feminine dimensions of the sacred. Archaeological sites have yielded numerous female figurines (often sculptured images and cave paintings) frequently with exaggerated sexual characteristics, commonly known as the 'Venuses', after the Roman Goddess of love and beauty (Preston, 1987:36). Excavated in hundreds of Upper Palaeolithic sites from India to Western Europe from the Gravettian-Aurignacian cultures, they date as far back as 30,000 years. Early Neolithic cultures and the subsequent emergence of agriculture furnish corresponding goddess figurines representing a strong continuity of a Goddess culture for over 10,000 years (Preston, 1987:37) and widely interpreted as a fertility cult. Most scholars believe the early cult was concerned with fertility, birth, growth and life in general, including rebirth and renewal after death. The most famous carving is the Venus of Laussel (20,000 B.C.), where she is pictured holding a horn with thirteen lines, symbolising the thirteen lunar months of the year (Holford, 1984:4). Other examples of the Goddess include the Venus of Willendorf, the Venus of Menton, and the Venus of Lespugue. The complex

imagery of the Neolithic era, centred around females and animals, is best illustrated by evidence from the Anatolian settlement of Catal Huyuck, excavated by James Mellaart in 1961-1963 (Preston, 1987:37). One of the earliest known cities (6500 B.C. onwards) contains forty shrines distributed in a labyrinth of decorated rooms displaying the presence of a nature goddess, her associated images of serpents, trees, butterflies and leopards, and accompanying male deities. The Goddess is also found in the three aspects of youth, giving birth and old age.

Northern semi-nomadic invaders, known as Indo-Europeans, brought their own religion with them, the worship of a supreme sky-father, storm or warrior gods, often with control of fire or lightning. Archaeologically attested by 2400 B.C., their arrival was executed by a series of aggressive invasions. The resultant synthesised religion often juxtaposed the male deity as dominant over the female, or the female deity changed form, in many cases becoming a spouse Goddess (Stone, 1982:14). The Indo-Europeans brought concepts of light as good and dark as bad, and came to see the symbol of the snake as evil (Holford, 1984:9). Although the early Israelites engaged in the worship of female deities, the phenomenon of Goddess worship was eventually eliminated. Scholars struggle with the exact sequence of events, and argue over whether Goddess worship was purged early in Judaism or whether it was retained for centuries before being finally removed (Gross, 1982:255). The historical and social processes that resulted in more male-centred images and concepts of the sacred are not clearly understood, although some feminist scholars have argued that this purge of the feminine represents the origins of women's repression (Binford, 1982).

1.2.2 The Matriarchy Controversy?

Some scholars (and many feminist authors) have extrapolated archaeological evidence to suggest the existence of a pre-Christian period of matriarchy. Two prominent theorists of this view were Jacob Bachofen and Frederick Engels. One of the most influential theories in the study of goddess worship was advanced by nineteenth century Swiss historian, J.J. Bachofen (1815-1887), who linked goddess worship with a more general theory of social development. His book, *Mother Right*, asserted that the first human societies were matriarchal and characterised by an initial stage of widespread promiscuity, which was reflected in the worship of female deities. Using ancient myths as evidence, he argued that women brought about a matriarchy through defeat of lustful males. His work, defining matriarchy as a social order based on the

primacy of mother rule and inheritance through the female line, sparked widespread debate. Although influential at the time, Bachofen was criticised for the lack of empirical data and for substituting mythology for history.

Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, posits that early societies were 'essentially collective,' and characterised by group marriage. Descent was traced through women, and men lived with their wives' families. The household was communal and within it both sexes worked as a unit of production; the division of labour between the sexes was reciprocal. Change occurred in property relations whereby inheritance became individually based. By separating the family from the clan and institutionalising monogamy, inheritance traced through the male line could be insured. Thus the central premise of Engels' work lies with the emergence of the male-dominated family unit and subsequent development of classes (Engels, 1972).

The issue of a primitive matriarchy which once plagued the study of goddess worship has not disappeared. Feminist authors find their evidence for pre-Christian matriarchy in three areas (Stone, 1982, Binford, 1982). First, they argue that early civilisation was female-dominated because humans would not have possessed a conscious understanding of the relationship between sex and conception, therefore paternity and fatherhood remained unknown concepts. It is argued that in this situation descent was traced through female lineage. Their second piece of evidence comes from the early excavated sites that exhibited clear signs of ancestor worship. They extrapolate the first assumption, that women may have been regarded as the sole parent of the family, and combine it with ancestor worship to explain the founding of the cosmos. Their conclusion suggests that the creation of the universe was a birth from the vagina of a Goddess or by similar creative forces. Their third piece of evidence is the figurines excavated from both Palaeolithic and Neolithic sites (as discussed above). Feminist witches further argue that mothers used to rule the world, not by fear and intimidation as men later did, but by natural right as givers of life and bearers of the culture (Starhawk, 1979a, 1979b, 1982b, Walker, 1987, Stein, 1990, Stone, 1982).

Debating the matriarchy theory, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (1979:343), notes three errors committed by scholars and feminists who perpetuate this myth. They mistakenly assume that the presence of female deities substantiates a matriarchy. Although they represent a prominent element in the religious life of

the pre-Christian period, it is erroneous to assume these female figurines constitute proof of an early stage of matriarchy, and in fact the symbolism of these images tells us nothing clear about male or female roles in the social organisation of the Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic cultures. Feminists accept a second error by conjecturing that matrilineal societies are survivors of an era of matriarchy, and finally the premise that matrilineality and matriarchy share some sort of contiguity. Anthropological studies examining traditional matrilineages conclude that a woman's brother exercises the power and authority usually reserved for fathers and husbands in patriarchal societies (Webster, 1975:145, Binford, 1982:545). Binford summarises these arguments:

...the New Feminist Fundamentalism is based on assumptions that cannot be supported; these include the notion of matriarchy as a stage in cultural evolution, the equating of matrilineality with matriarchy, the romanticising of "natural" birth control, and the assigning of unitary significance to art forms that appear in widely differing contexts.
(Binford, 1982:547)

The problem of matriarchy is both definitional and conceptual. Current texts commonly contrast matriarchy with patriarchy, which is defined in terms of political power. Matriarchy presumes that women, rather than men, have political dominance and presumably control men. To assume relations of sexual asymmetry and political differentiation is to base assumptions upon western experience of industrial capitalism, sexual stratification and class divisions (Tiffany, 1982:145). Most contemporary historians of religion accept the anthropological view that a stage of matriarchy never existed. Although most feminist scholars today agree with the anthropological position, there remain a few articulate feminist authors who continue to perpetuate the idea of an original matriarchal era. An example of this genre is Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*. She writes about an age of the "...rituals and knowledge of the ancient matricentric (mother centred) times," (Starhawk, 1979b: 261). Again this presents a definitional problem, as writers such as Starhawk are attempting to change the meaning of matriarchy.

Concerns with female power are of consequence not only to feminist scholars and anthropologists, but also to groups of women such as witches wishing to restore a more balanced practice of female/male roles. For this reason, most contemporary witches do not accept the matriarchy in the sense that matriarchy displaces patriarchy. They want equality. As Jane states,

I believe that the matriarchy meant that the central deity was a Goddess, that the most important force in the earth that the people recognised was that of fertility and the bringing again of life. The Goddess as the deity did not, and does not, and I emphasise this strongly, the Goddess does not say that women are better than men, which is what the Christian God is saying.

Cathy also feels the same way,

I think a lot of feminist writers romanticise it beyond all belief. I don't find it hard to believe in a matriarchy, but a matriarchy where it is not defined as the reverse of patriarchy, but where women have participating power, or equal power.

Although most contemporary witches qualify what a matriarchy is for them, most accept a situation where women were revered, obtained positions of esteem, and held equal power. However, a great deal of feminist romanticising is associated with this alternative definition (Binford 1982). Cathy recognises these thoughts:

But in terms of the romantic idea of the matriarchy, where we have societies where women ruled and everything was lovey, dovey, and there was no strife and no war. I think that is poppycock and ridiculous.

The power of matriarchal ideas lies in its refutation of male dominance. Matriarchy evokes the biological and social powers of women, as opposed to their subordination and denigration. Redefined, the concept of matriarchy conveys the potential for developing new relationships and institutions that value women as people, who may also choose to be mothers. The matriarchy is important to witches because it offers an alternative, especially to women who are beginning the process to self-actualisation and autonomy. It conveys a source of power, but as one witch (Cathy) states, "It is a frilly feminine power. There is no Amazonian-type strength in it." Thus, although recognising the power of women's mind and bodies is an initial and crucial step, feminists must be careful to not fall into the trap of essentialising women into a type of matriarchal ideal. Although the matriarchy was not a mirror image of patriarchy, it is wrong to assume that it was also harmonious and spiritual, essentially implying an innate moral superiority of women. Jenny states her objections,

I find it offensive when people say, 'Women are like this' or, 'Women are nurturing and da da da.' I think it is important that I don't see myself as part of womanness. It is just another thing they lay on you.

I think women are different enough from each other to not be the perfect society either.

Matriarchy however defined is, in many cases, the only vision witches have of an alternative society in which women have power, or at least men do not (Webster, 1975:155). For many women (witches) this imagining holds political consequences.

1.2.3 The Burning Times

One theory suggests that over the centuries, women continued to practise the ancient religion of Old Europe. They practised it as counsellors, healers, midwives, known as the wise women. Branded devil worshippers by the Christian church, their history is now being reclaimed by a new generation of women. Hard line fundamentalist Christians are particularly disapproving of witchcraft. For them the word *witch* is synonymous with black magic, the occult or Satanism. This preconception dates back to the Renaissance and Reformation, and is continually perpetuated in contemporary society. Despite the misconception this stereotype holds, contemporary witches feel drawn to the history behind it, of the nameless women who burned at the stake for the 'crime' of witchcraft. It is important to examine the historical construction of the witch and its relevance for contemporary witches.

From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, thousands of people in Europe were burned. In most cases they were women. During this 300 year period, between 200,000 (the most conservative estimate) and nine million (the highest number quoted mainly in feminist texts) were executed (burned, drowned, beheaded, strangled or hanged), on accusations of witchcraft. Eighty five percent or more were women (Nachman, 1986:6). This was truly the 'Women's Holocaust'.⁵ They took their stories with them and a way of life was subsequently destroyed.

Christianity eventually became the dominant religion of Britain and Europe from 600 A.D. As the authority of the Christian church spread through Europe it absorbed the pagan rites. While intolerant of pagan beliefs, the church's strategic advance was through the harnessing of powerful emotions

⁵ In 1585, two villages in the Bishopric of Trier, in Germany, were each left with only one female inhabitant (Merchant, 1980:138).

generated by pagan worship. The pagan Goddesses were turned into saints. Cathedrals were built over pagan shrines. They offered no Goddess in return, and in many cases the people demanded Mary be recognised.⁶ Many heathen festivals were added to the Christian calendar. For example, the Christian festival of sacrifice and resurrection, Easter, takes its name from the Norse goddess Eostre. She in turn was a northern derivative of the Phoenician Goddess of fertility, Astarte, in whose honour rites were held every spring. Easter eggs continue an age-old tradition in which the egg is a symbol of birth, and cakes which were eaten to mark the Pagan festivals were the immediate precursors of our hot-cross buns. Accordingly, Paganism and Christianity lived relatively harmoniously until the fourteenth century.

The first thousand years of Christianity's existence were relatively peaceful, and only the crime of heresy was punishable. The definition of witchcraft shifted so that a new theological and legal conception of witchcraft emerged. Recognising the seriousness of the crime of witchcraft, Pope Innocent VIII, in 1484, issued the famous 'Witch Bull', affirming witchcraft's reality and authorising the use of the Holy Inquisition to prosecute it with full force (Matalene, 1978). Two years later the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Witch's Hammer), possibly the best known of the Catholic ideologies on witchcraft, was published. The importance of the *Malleus Maleficarum* cannot be over-emphasised. Its enormous influence was practically guaranteed, owing not only to its authoritative influence, but also to the mass distribution made possible by the printing press (Anderson & Gordon, 1978:173). This violently anti-female book contributed to a horrible, endless march of suffering, torture and human disgrace inflicted on thousands of women.⁷

The Devil at this stage had been elevated to God's worthy opponent, a position not previously held. The supposed natural sexual lust of women provided one of the bases on which women were accused of witchcraft and they were deemed to be insatiable, constantly engaging in sexual intercourse with the Devil as confirmation of a pact. If sexuality was sinful, then women were the greatest sinners of all. But no one did more damage to the church than

⁶ Within a hundred year period, over 500 Cathedrals were erected, all dedicated to Mary (*The Burning Times*, 1990).

⁷ The *Malleus Maleficarum* was reprinted fourteen times before 1521, and another fifteen times after 1576. In addition, the book used the feminine form *Maleficarum* rather than the masculine *Maleficorum* in its title (Merchant, 1980:138).

midwives, for they eased the burden of labour, God's punishment to women for Eve's sins. They interfered with God's will by helping women with contraception, birth and abortion (Nachman, 1986:22). Anyone who had not studied medicine was barred from practising, and as a prohibition for women attending the University prevailed, a male-dominated medical profession emerged. In its endeavours to establish exclusive rights to the treatment of illness, the medical profession denounced many midwives and folkhealers as witches (Anderson & Gordon, 1978:175).

More commonly, accusations of witchcraft stemmed from the need to explain the economic, political and religious upheavals which occurred with increasing intensity from the fifteenth century onwards. Many of those who demanded reform were branded as witches, and the regions where the witch burnings dominated were aroused by clashes between Catholics and Protestants. The witch hunts were well organised campaigns and one accusation was all that was required to set the formal proceedings in motion.⁸ The jailed accused was tortured until she confessed, if it did not kill her. The majority confessed to the inquisitors' questions and were forced to name other witches (Matalene, 1978:576). She was stripped of her clothing, and her hair shaved from both her head and pubic regions.⁹ She was brought out into the town square and had to approach the inquisitor backwards so as not to give him the evil eye. The witch hunts were also a source of revenue. Meticulous book-keeping required every step to be costed, from torture to the cost of confiscating a woman's property (Currie, 1974:200).

The burnings occurred many centuries ago, but the memories still linger for witches and certain groups of society. As witches and their practices continue to remain unacceptable to fundamentalist Christian groups in Western society, they are forced to meet in small groups, in secluded places. Many do not publicly acknowledge themselves as witches, for fear of reprisal. When asked by a stranger if she was a witch, one woman (Miriam) replied, "The last time I said 'Yes', they burned me!" This simple statement typifies the feelings witches experience. While not allowing their spirituality to be publicly acknowledged, neither will they deny it.

⁸ Other forms of witch testing occurred. One such method was to dunk the accused witch in water. If the body did not float, that is the accused drowned, he or she was judged to be innocent.

⁹ She was stripped so she could not hide spells in her clothing and her hair was shaved as it was thought to contain the powers for braiding men's destiny.

1.3 CONTEMPORARY WITCHCRAFT: AN ARCHAIC PAGAN TRADITION?

1.3.1 The Mythical Survival

While modern Wicca/witchcraft has very little to do with the witchcraft of the Middle Ages, many scholars have suggested that witchcraft is a religion that dates back to Palaeolithic times, survived the burning times by retreating underground, and was kept alive by families, only to resurface when the witchcraft laws in England were repealed in 1951. This idea was popularised by the strongly influential writings of Margaret Murray. In 1921 Murray published *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, asserting that witchcraft had survived the Inquisition and could "...be traced back to pre-Christian times and appears to be the ancient religion of Western Europe," and, "...it was a definite religion with beliefs, ritual and organisation as highly developed as that of any other cult in the world," (Murray, 1921:12). This ancient religion, she argued, centred on a deity which was incarnate in a man, a woman, or an animal. The feminine form of the word is Diana, and "...is found throughout Western Europe as the name of the female deity or leader of the so-called witches," hence Murray called the religion the Dianic Cult (Murray, 1921:12).

Although Murray's theories held sway for a period of time, most scholars today view her work as filled with errors. Since Murray there have been numerous other sources of the revival myth. Many mention Gerald Gardner as the father of witchcraft. An amateur anthropologist and folklorist, Gardner spent much of his life in the Eastern Asia. Gardner argues that he was initiated into an authentic surviving coven from ancient times (cited in Adler, 1986:62). Concerned for its survival, Gardner published many books on witchcraft and its rituals. Scholars and witches alike have written Gardner off as a fraud. Despite this and other criticisms, elements of the myth of Wicca can be found in most introductory texts of the modern craft. For example, Starhawk states, "Some covens follow practices that have been handed down in an unbroken line since before the Burning Times," (Starhawk, 1979a:25). Until a decade ago, the Wiccan community took almost all foundations of the myth literally. Few do so today, which in itself is a lesson in the flexibility of the revival. By attempting to reconcile this controversy with the idea of Wicca as a serious spiritual movement many scholars, writers and the media have dismissed the Craft as 'silly' or 'fraudulent', subsequently forcing Neo-Pagans and Wiccans to reassess who they

really are and the fundamental principles of Paganism. Today most revivalist witches in North America accept the universal Old Religion more as a metaphor than a literal reality, a spiritual truth more than a historical one (Adler, 1986:86).

1.3.2 Contemporary Witchcraft in New Zealand

As more and more of the Wicca saw that there was no such thing as a totally unbroken or uncontaminated tradition, they reassessed the meaning of their movement. Few witches connect with the witchcraft practised in the Middle Ages, and prefer to look further back to the ancient Greeks, the Celts and even the Egyptians. In New Zealand, witchcraft is largely a feminist phenomenon, with a very strong lesbian tradition (Ansley, 1985). The reasons for this growth are unclear, and I can only speculate that Pagan practices which admit both men and women have proved less desirable to develop for both women and men alike. These ideas are discussed further when male involvement is examined in section 5.3. Wisewitch's (1987) thesis on Women's Spirituality estimated there were less than fifty such groups in New Zealand, and no more than a few thousand practitioners. At least sixteen women's ritual groups are known to operate in Auckland and Christchurch (Cropp, 1990). My own research indicates that there are currently three covens in Dunedin and one in Waikouaiti, and many more women preferring to practise solo rituals.

Wiccan is a relatively recent development in New Zealand, probably no more than fifteen years old, but is fast gaining ground. Dann's (1985) historical account of the women's movement in New Zealand first notes a spirituality group as early as 1979 in Christchurch. Among Christchurch covens listed in Wisewitch's thesis, the Slothwomen are the oldest, formed on Hallowmas 1981 (the witches' Halloween celebrated on April 30) and still currently active. The remaining four began stirring in the mid-1980s (Wisewitch, 1987:108). Groups in Auckland have likely been active for just as long. No official network exists, apart from such occasions as open rituals at summer and winter solstices, or organised courses and seminars.¹⁰ Ritual groups often form from various courses and open rituals and their main connection appears to be through various newsletters or magazines. The *Women's Spirituality Newsletter*, begun by Lea Holford in 1987, is produced on the basis of shared responsibility.

¹⁰ Noreen Penny, a politically active witch held a day seminar on August 30, 1992, entitled *The Goddess Remembered*, in an attempt to bring Christchurch groups into closer contact.

Womanscript, a Christchurch based magazine, reserves a page, 'Ritualspace', for a ritual group network. Unfortunately, issue seven (1992) was the last to be produced.

I speculate that it would be improbable for a New Zealand witch to identify with the traditionalist craft or even the craft of the Middle Ages. Instead, many turn to literature on the Ancient Goddess Religion and adapt it to their rituals. Much of the folklore, symbols and herbs from American texts bear no direct relevance to New Zealand rituals. Only one handbook on New Zealand ritual making exists, Juliet Batten's *Power From Within: A Feminist Guide to Ritual Making*, which was designed for witches who prefer to use native fauna and flora and celebrate the seasons and symbols of the southern year. She is presently writing a new book which focuses on seasonal rituals.

New Zealand witchcraft is based largely upon the already established and sanctioned religion of the United States of America. Two such officially sanctioned churches exist; Starhawk's Covenant of the Goddess is common to all spheres of modern feminist witchcraft. Starhawk's coven admits both men and women, under the assumption that a patriarchal God is oppressing to both men and women. Zsuzsanna Budapest founded a legal church and designating it the Dianic Sisterhood of the Wicca, after Diana, the Roman moon Goddess. Within this following, there is no room for men or a male God. Here in New Zealand groups apply this latter tradition, but a separate women's religion may be transitional (Ansley, 1985). Thus although New Zealand witchcraft has been strongly influenced by American traditions and was probably imported from both the United States or England, it is not solely an import, nor is it part of an indigenous culture. Rather, it has emerged out of these elements and the unique conditions of New Zealand.

1.4 SUMMARY

Defining the characteristics of a witch and witchcraft is extremely contentious and complex, and leads me to question the desirability of such a definition. The practice of witchcraft must originate with self-labelling. The problem remains as to when and under what conditions women identify themselves as witches. The process of self-identification is discussed further in chapter three. New Zealand witchcraft is evolving into an established practice that varies from the Wiccan customs observed in America and England, where

both feminist and lesbian influences, and the conditions restricted to the environment of New Zealand have impressed upon the development of a unique tradition. Despite creating their own conventions, New Zealand witches share a strong heritage with witches from other Western societies through the images of history, the use of Pagan rituals and the indiscriminate borrowing of myths and Goddesses from other cultures.

To conclude, a witch considers herself to be a cluster of images. Acceptance of the ancient religion of pre-Christian Europe furnishes witches with a vision of a matriarchy however they wish to perceive or define it and provides them with a grounding in female sacrality and mythology. Whether or not modern witchcraft is a survivor of both the ancient religion and the burnings remains a myth and its authenticity holds little relevance for New Zealand witches. Instead they understand the archetypal witch of the Middle-Ages as an image of the present and past, just as the burnings offer a metaphor of women's own oppression. A new generation of women are appropriating the chaotic imagery, which has a heritage of over 30,000 years, so that they might be empowered. Adler's conclusions indicate the extent to which witches have appropriated their chaotic images for modern ends as follows:

All that follows - the distinctions, the definitions, the history and the theory of the modern Craft - means nothing unless the powerful and emotional *content* that hides as a source behind the various contemporary forms is respected. This content lies in the mind. There is something connected with the word *witch* that is atemporal, primordial, prehistoric (in *feeling*, whether or not in *fact*), something perhaps "older than the human race itself." The story of the revival of Wicca is - whatever else it may be - the story of people who are searching among powerful archaic images of nature, of life and death, of creation and destruction. Modern Wiccans are using these images to change their relationship to the world. The search for these images, and the use of them, must be seen as valid, no matter how limited and impoverished the outer forms of the Wiccan revival sometimes appear, and no matter how misreported this revival is in the press.

(Adler, 1986:44-45)

CHAPTER TWO

Components of Witchcraft: Ritual, the Goddess and Magic

2.0 INTRODUCTION:

1 MAY 1992, WAITATI

The night is enchanted, still and clear, the only sound coming from the crackling fire in the cauldron. We meet under a large tree to celebrate Hallows, the Witches' New Year. The candles flicker on the altar, the moon peers through the treetops and shines on the circle. We huddle closer for warmth. At one point, we all take hands, consecrating the circle with salt. In honour of Hecate the Crone, this group of women call on the guardians to watch over them. The coven members have remembered their ancestors. A black candle is lit, symbolising their abolition of fears and worries from the past cycle, while lighting a white candle symbolising their dreams and hopes. Someone begins a low humming, a deep vibration barely heard. We weave our way around the fire and altar grasping each others' hands. We are chanting, interweaving voices and melodies, and the energy grows with each cycle. The energy spirals, pulsates, faster and faster as it narrows towards the top. "Now", a voice cries out. All fall silent and collapse, limp dolls sprawled on the ground. The energy they have created is channelled into a hope or aspiration. Slowly, we pick ourselves up from the ground. Thanking the Goddess for being with us, we hug each other. We make our way inside to eat and drink what each of us has brought.

Ritual performance is meticulously detailed in any of the 'Craft' texts that line book seller shelves, that include easy to follow steps for the Wiccan novice. Despite grappling my way through these ritual guides, it was not until I attended my first ritual that an understanding dawned on me, as to why women are

attracted to witchcraft and feminist ritual. The text could not and did give any description of the emotional content of a ritual. As Adler explains,

Sadly, it is only poets and artists who can make religious experiences come alive in telling about them. Most description of mystical experiences are monotonous and banal - unlike the experiences themselves.
(Adler, 1986:43)

This chapter details the three major components of feminist ritual making: the rituals themselves; the Goddess as a central symbol and deity; and magical practices. A brief description of the ritual structure is given, although most 'Craft' texts delve out greater detail for the ritualist than this chapter does. Much of the description comes from journal notes, and is presented in an anecdotal way. The main reason I had problems visualising the process of ritual was because of the lack of illustration beyond written descriptive documentation. I felt it was important to give visual information, and a number of the photographs presented in this thesis are of actual rituals performed by the coven in which I participated.

It becomes evident after analysing the ritual structure that feminist rituals are flexible to the extent that no two rituals will ever be identical. Symbolism provides the flexibility from doctrine or dogma by relying on the beliefs of the individual woman. When offering an explanation for the presence of feminist rituals functionalist theories reduce them to an effect of the feminist, peace and ecological movement. Although theorising in this manner has some validity, it is not an entirely adequate explanation for the re-emergence of witchcraft. It fails to explain both the emotional and psychological content of ritual, and the various levels of intentionality that exist in ritual.

The Goddess is another constituent of witchcraft. Definitions of the Goddess reflect the diversity of practising women. Christ (1979) provides an analytical framework by separating the meaning of the Goddess into four categories. While the Goddess provides a psychological and social model for women, there are theoretical problems with using her as a symbol for women simply because she is female. Finally, magical practices play an important role in feminist ritual, by providing witches with a formal tool for gaining their own desires. Magic means different things for different women, and can be analysed at a definitional level. While not seeking to prove or disprove the reality of magic, this thesis examines the compelling nature of magic, and investigates the reasons why witches find it so persuasive.

2.1 THE RITUAL PRACTICE OF WITCHES

2.1.1 Description

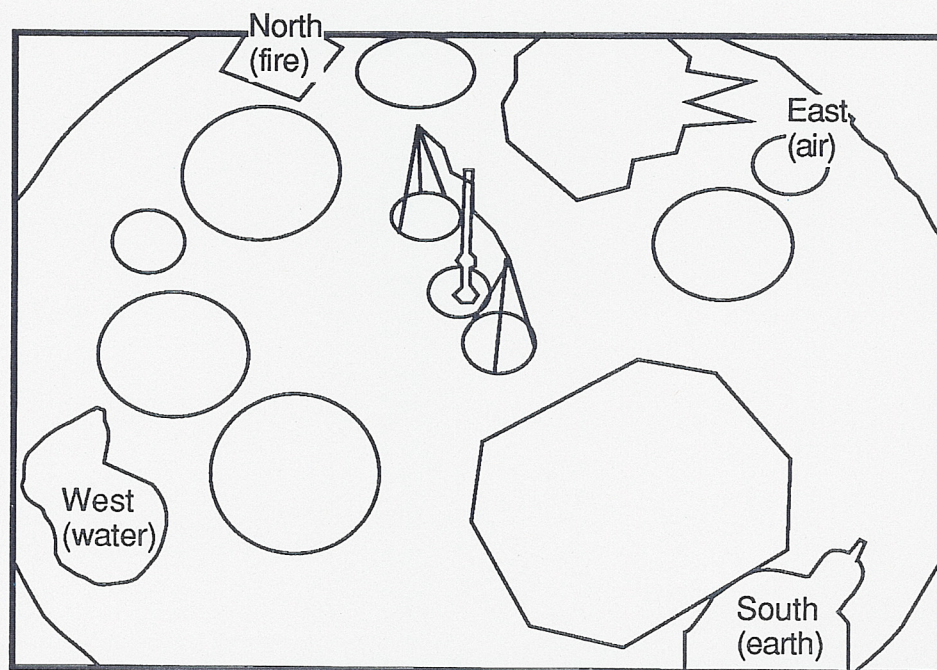
Any 'Craft' text the curious beginner reads will likely follow a common format (Starhawk, 1979a, Batten, 1988, Stein, 1990). Providing the reader with a brief history of Witchcraft, similar to the description given in section 1.2, the more feminist authors introduce the reader to the Goddess after berating patriarchal Christian religions for negating women's spiritual experience. All these authors stress the flexibility of ritual that must centre on an individual's experience. Like a lot of beginners, I read these texts, but found it difficult to understand where the next step lay. Fortunately for me and the majority of inquisitive women in general, courses on women's rituals are organised in most of the large cities.

Since 1984, Lea Holford has been organising and offering courses on Goddess imagery at the Auckland University for Continuing Education (McLaren, 1988:40). Pakeha women, heterosexual and lesbian alike, crowd classes in women's spirituality, which are advancing from city to suburb in the main centres, and becoming visibly noticeable in other areas. The Dunedin Workers' Education Association 1992 programme included a course entitled, *Women's Rituals: Creating the Space, Invoking the Energy, Channelling the Power*. The popularity of the course in Dunedin compelled Janet Melbourne, the initiator and leader of the workshop, to incorporate an extra course into her already busy schedule. The Otago Polytechnic is offering its first course on Women's Spirituality in September of this year. The latest *Women's Spirituality Newsletter* (Winter Solstice 1993, issue no 33) contains many notices announcing future courses in the Auckland area. These courses, without question, introduce women to the craft of witches.

My first experience of a ritual was to enter a half lit room with twelve other strangers. Apologising for my lateness, I quickly took off my shoes and joined the circle of unknown women. The circle, we were told, is an important women's symbol, and by using it, no woman is placed in front of or behind another. In the centre, I instantly recognised from my research, was an altar, but without the perceived imagery I had carried uncomfortably in my head. The word 'altar' is invariably and unfortunately associated with another: 'sacrifice'. Most women start doing ritual by creating an altar which is firstly designed as a

thing of beauty, embodying objects of personal meaning to the woman who designs it.

Despite the emphasis on creativity, a ritual altar contains articles laid there for definite and deliberate symbolism. Basic symbolism in ritual commence with the four elements, air, earth, water and fire, and the spirit. In directions, the fire corresponds to the north, air to the east, earth to the south, water to the west, and spirit in the centre. Symbolism can take any form. For example, fire may be represented by a candle, a Bic lighter, or a bonfire. On the other hand, the symbolism extends to include the colours red, crimson, orange, gold and yellow, various fire goddesses, crystals, and emotions such as passion, will, anger, and destruction. The season associated with fire is summer, and all its products. Other associations include energy, blood, healing, purification, the sun, deserts and volcanoes. There is no rigidity in Wiccan symbolism, and each woman is encouraged to find one which she understands and feels comfortable using. Many women maintain a personal altar in their homes, and the common practice for group rituals is for each woman to bring symbols and objects to contribute to the ritual altar. Figure 2.1 is an illustration of the altar, as it corresponds to the four directions. The celebration is the Autumn Equinox, a time of balance. Hence the scales are placed on the altar as a centrepiece, and various autumn plants, seeds and nuts decorate the altar cloth.



**Figure 2.1 Autumn Equinox, March 20-23
(courtesy of Juliet Batten)**

Light and dark are balanced, and about to tip towards the dark. Time to give thanks for the harvest and prepare for the dark times.

The altar and its accompanying symbolism can be very elaborate, or created spontaneously. An example of this spontaneity developed at a Christchurch seminar, organised by an outspoken witch, Noreen Penny. The women involved were given approximately twenty minutes to reflect on and contribute to the ritual. My personal recollections centre on the ease and simplicity with which the ritual unfolded. A Goddess figure built out of snow became the ritual centrepiece. A branch of early flowering blossom was used to purify the circle. Three stones were gathered from outdoors, and during the ritual were placed into the hands of each woman to represent three wishes for the coming month. Finally to symbolise change, some grape juice was poured over the snow Goddess and she turned a brilliant shade of crimson.

Witches interpret symbols as personal signs of their unconscious thoughts and individual beliefs and experiences. By acknowledging these symbols in ritual and other everyday aspects of their lives, each woman is bringing them into her consciousness. In Lea Holford's handout for a University of Auckland's Continuing Education programme on Goddess imagery, she states,

Symbols help to amplify aspects of life too complex to be limited to verbal expression and also serve to take us to deeper levels of experience and meaning. (Holford, 1984:2)

These thoughts are similarly expressed by women interviewed for this thesis. Jane suggests that a symbol is "...a key to another realm and each person has different symbols." Renee has similar ideas: "Symbols are similar to ritual. It is a kind of way in. It is a focus and a material object that leads you to something else." Felicity states,

They [symbols] are just a face of something and behind it there are many other things. People can interpret them any way they wish. It has opened up a channel. You see the same things, but you see them in a different way.

See figures 2.2 and 2.3 for the use of different symbols for various rituals. Note the greenery and red candles used in the Winter Solstice celebration, which equates to the Northern hemisphere Christian Christmas celebrations.



Figure 2.2 Group Bonding Ritual, April 15 (1992).
The first ritual for the group formed after the Workers' Education Association course.



Figure 2.3 Yule (Winter Solstice), June 20-23 (1992).
The longest night, the darkest time and the turning point for the birth of the returning light.

There are some essentials that are practised during rituals.¹¹ Most important, ritual has to feel right for the individual or group, and thus is extremely flexible. As a general rule, 'anything goes, as long as it harms no other'. Despite its unrestricting environment, many women follow a ritual structure. A circle is always cast to create a sacred and safe space. By creating a sacred space, participants intentionally, albeit temporarily, move from profane to sacred inner space. The acts of purification, casting the circle and invoking the elements and Goddesses, are designed to give the witch control, by subjecting objects to her will, for example by banishing negativities as a prelude to the ritual, and calling on Goddesses and elements for protection, guidance and support. The following passage is an example of an invitation extended to the Goddesses and element of fire at a Candlemas ritual (3 August, 1992). Candlemas is the fire festival of increasing light, signifying the potential heat of the new growing season.

*Hail, Guardians of the Watchtowers of the North,
Powers of Fire,
We invoke you and call you,
Red Lion of the noon heat,
Flaming One!
Summer's warmth,
Spark of Life,
Come!
Mahuika of Aotearoa, discoverer of fire,
Pele of Hawaii, women's power and passion,
By the fire that is Her spirit,
Send forth your flame
Be here now!*

Drury views this type of ritual as much more 'active and aggressive,' as the "...magician believes that he [sic] has within his scope and potential, the ability to alter his [sic] consciousness magically at will," (Drury, 1979:13). Effectively, these acts serve as a centering effect for concentration.

On full moons witches may choose to 'draw down the moon,' which essentially taps the moon of its energy and puts it to some earthly use. 'The Charge of the Goddess', witchcraft's only formalised passage or 'prayer' is read, if agreed upon by the ritual group, on full moons and each of the eight sabbats. The version commonly spoken, is that of Starhawk's (1979a:90-91). The penultimate

¹¹ Refer to Juliet Batten's (1988) book for a guide to New Zealand feminist ritual making.

lines of 'The Charge of the Goddess' are the most profound and are taken seriously by women focusing on their respective self empowerment:

*If that which you seek, you find not within yourself,
you will never find it without,*

The purpose of the ritual is often cited and can lead to ritual meditation. Meditation is aimed at changing the state of consciousness, so that each woman might have access to her internal power, which in turn is appropriately focused on some real or imagined goal. The body of the ritual is variable in its aim, and will depend upon the purpose of the ritual. This aspect is examined more fully in section 2.1.3. Energy is then raised and focused on a goal, initiated through chanting, dancing or humming. A self blessing acknowledges each woman individually within the ritual. Finally the circle is opened, the elements and goddesses thanked, and the group will either share their thoughts or food that each has brought to the ritual.

It was through these steps that I, with twelve other women, was led. Sitting uncomfortably cross-legged on the floor of a Workers' Education Association room, with traffic noise and city lights intruding, I repeatedly found myself simultaneously distracted and fascinated. But something happened that night that had not happened before in these women's lives. For many, something natural and intensely emotional had manifested, a 'something' many knew not how to explain, but knew they had found what they were searching for. Chapter three analyses the processes these women experience in their search for a spirituality and the subsequent changes that materialise after finding witchcraft.

2.1.2 The Practice of Ritual

Witchcraft is based centrally around magic and ritual. Both can be performed alone, as a group, or as a large gathering. The majority of groups organise as covens, traditionally thirteen in number.¹² Aiming to maintain their smallness, ritual groups create a safe, trusting and family-like atmosphere. Although ritual groups appear to spring up quietly and spontaneously, many are gently assisted by women who have either attended a course on ritual making or an open ritual. Of the women interviewed, the greater number were in a ritual

¹² The number thirteen is associated with the thirteen lunar months of the calendar year.

group, or wishing to form one, but felt they lacked numbers or knowledge. The majority of women prefer to practise in a group. As Jane explains, "It nurtures me. It is a source of unconditional acceptance of who I am, of my good, my bad, my strong, my weak and my power." When asked if she would like to be in a group, Miriam, who lives in Ashburton and cannot find enough interested women answered, "Yes. I think it is very powerful work when you are linked as a group, all in one focus. You make massive changes in your spiritual and physical level." In addition to attending group ritual, most women with knowledge of ritual making will practise solo rituals. Frances explains when she is most likely to practise alone,

When I do my spell making it is really personal. I mean stuff in the group is personal as well. Often if I do things on my own I might be at a crisis point or really depressed.

Other women find it fulfilling to host an open ritual. Given enough warning and good weather, dozens of women around New Zealand have descended on ritual locations: community halls, beaches, hilltops, city parks and caves. The winter solstice in Auckland (1990) was held in the central city hall, because the cave they normally use was flooded. Over 150 women attended (Cropp, 1990). Similarly, fifty Christchurch women celebrating the return of the sun goddess (1990) gathered on New Brighton Beach. Participants brought along something representing their darkest negativity or fear. Each woman walked up to the fire and sacrificed her fear to the flames (Cropp, 1990). In Dunedin (1992), approximately forty women attended an open celebration for International Women's Day at Chingford Park. Open rituals typically mark an important event, either one of the seasonal festivals or a recognised celebration of womanhood. See figure 2.4 for an illustration of an open ritual.

Covens may vary widely in their style and custom, but there is a common core of practice. They meet on (or near) days dictated by the sky, the solstices, equinoxes and the 'quarter days' between them. These rituals celebrate the seasons and tap the energy flows of them. Covens often chose to meet in moontime, new, full or dark. Each cycle of the moon holds significance for particular rituals. The new moon (waxing) is a time for wishing, the full moon for power, and the dark moon (waning) for banishing. Weather permitting, the majority of witches indicate a preference for conducting rituals outdoors. The feeling exists that outdoor rituals allow the individual to connect directly with nature. See figure 2.5 for an illustration of an outdoor ritual.



Figure 2.4 Yule (Winter Solstice), June 20-23 (1988).
(Courtesy of Juliet Batten)

An open ritual in a cave, held by an Auckland ritual group.



Figure 2.5 Summer Solstice, December 20-23 (1992).

The longest day, the brightest time, but also the turning point for beginning of decreasing light. The ritual was performed on Smails Beach, Dunedin.

Many rituals serve as '*rites de passage*', which assist people in times of major transition. Pregnancy, motherhood, menstruation and menopause are all occasions for celebration in the group. Changes in careers, house blessings, group bondings, funerals and lesbian trystings¹³ are all alternative rituals or ceremonies given a contemporary spiritual nature. Some ritual themes are specific, such as those on the seasonal calendar that aim to physically connect with the Goddess and Nature. The more specific rituals may involve healing. Jane expands on this:

For women I work with, ritual is a source of healing for them. They channel their own healing through ritual. They become more consciously aware of their healing process through ritual.

A member of the Cosmic Crones, a former ritual group in Dunedin, describes another ritual where a 'sweatlodge' was used. A hut was built out of branches, stones heated and placed in the centre of the hut. Water was then poured onto the stones and a ritual evolved (Tylor, 1992:20). Miriam who practices alone, uses symbols and ritual when changing belief patterns,

If there is a belief pattern I wish to change, I bring forth a symbol that represents it, and I deliver it over the mountains and watch it dissolve into the distance. I come back to my Goddess self and ask for a symbol that represents the new belief pattern that I wish to have.

2.1.3 Ritual as a Social Determinant

Despite occurrences of ritual in the everyday lives of people (religious and non-religious alike), its purpose has yet to be understood. Maurice Bloch (1986), summarises the influential theories to date on ritual, and is heavily critical of the reductionism prevalent in functionalist theories. Ritual, he argues, cannot be seen just as a regulatory force for solidarity as Robertson-Smith (1889) and the orthodox Durkheimian perspective suggest, or to balance the ecological environment as Rappaport (1967) speculates, or to legitimise the authority and social power of the dominant individuals or groups as Marxist writers insist (cited in Bloch, 1986:3-6). While I do not question the validity of the above perspectives, they are not approaches effective for my purposes. Bloch argues that

¹³ The Otago Daily Times (3 March 1992) reported a lesbian wedding conducted at University of Victoria, Wellington, in an article, "*Wedding not legally recognised. Lesbian Couple 'tie the knot'.*"

...a connection between ritual and social organisation does not itself constitute a demonstration of causation.... The problem is that any theory that explains ritual in terms of their socially regulatory functions pays attention to only a few aspects of a very rich and complex phenomena. (Bloch, 1986:7)

People act in terms of perceptions, their world view and their belief system, which are a product of their historically constructed culture. Therefore analysis of ritual must bring together the symbolic side, and the emotional and sociological aspects. Not only must the process of social manipulation through symbols be examined, but also the way the social environment determines the symbolic (Bloch, 1986:9). Bloch labels this the 'principles of transformation.' In many rituals the intentionality or purpose may exist at two or more levels, requiring a more complex explanation.

If ritual performed by feminist witches has the intention of changing or transforming current conditions it can be analysed at a functional level. Flexibility, the non-hierarchical and unrestricting environment characteristic of ritual, allows women to directly employ ritual for any need or desire. The body of the Wiccan ritual has three requirements: it must involve all the women of the circle; it must contain elements of healing, change or transformation; and it must be a validation of each participant as Goddess. In witchcraft, symbol and ritual are used to precipitate altered states of awareness/consciousness which direct participants to various insights and transformation. Ritual is not considered productive if a transfer of 'power' has not been effected. Turner points out that this power is not 'an object of possession' and 'emanates from within' a person (Turner, 1982:226).

If functionalist theory is to be applied to feminist witchcraft, then a link for causation must be explored. Feminist rituals, it could be suggested, are a product of a rapidly spawning technological era that has alienated humans from nature and humanity in general. With the rise of the peace, ecological and feminist movements, ritual reflects the needs of individuals to reaffirm their positions in the world. Witchcraft's alignment with these movements will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four, but needless to say there is a connection. But is this a case of the chicken before the egg, or the egg before the chicken? Has social organisation influenced ritual participation, or does ritual seek to influence social organisation? One can flip the coin, and suggest that ritual with its connected emotions and context, creates the social units with which they synthesise. Ritual provides witches with an alternative vision and reality. Whether the vision in

fact becomes a reality or just remains a vision depends on the context of that vision. It is important to understand that both influence each other. Witchcraft is not only a symbolic system, but also a symbolic system being created in history, (Bloch, 1986:10).

Demonstration of causation does not and cannot explain the phenomenon of ritual. To do so ignores the dynamic quality of ritual, and the various levels of intentionality that may exist within each ritual. The layers of intentionality may be present in a Croning ceremony. Croning, the celebration of an older woman's wisdom and knowledge is particularly important for many witches and is marked astrologically at 56, (the second return of Saturn). On one level croning serves as a '*rite de passage*', which acts to transform a woman into a wise and revered elder. On a deep level the Crone may experience the symbolic transfer of power. If placed in a political context, its aim being to bring about a change in the traditional social mores of society. As one witch states,

There's no positive affirmation for women going through menopause in our society. They're just told to spend their money on cosmetics to make themselves young again. (Ansley, 1985:16)

Ritual is much more than a social determinant. If ritual is only a product of the present social turmoil of a technological and rational age, then why do witches need to practise ritual at all? Surely a consciousness movement, that is a consciousness that challenges the prevailing scientific world view as a belief system, would suffice without the need to perform ritual. After all, political movements such as the peace, women's and environmental movements exist to address the inadequacies of the current world view. As Jenny states,

It [ritual] is not about wanting to be a disciple, and it's about not wanting to connect for other reasons except for my own. I'm not just doing this because it is a good social thing, or because I believe in it politically, or anything. It has to be this inside to the outside thing, rather than going the other way.

Chapter three examines why the label of witch and the practice of witchcraft as a holistic ideology for these women, that combines their beliefs about women, nature, peace and politics into a uniform framework. Thus ritual must indicate more than mere functionalism, and be addressed as a dynamic transformation. How otherwise, can we view quotes such as Felicity and Miriam's respectively,

It [ritual] is a sort of cleansing thing. It is time as well, because it is a space when nothing else from your world and the outside world can come in. It is just like a complete time out. Your mind needs space.

It [ritual]- is time just to be totally honest with yourself and with other women, with life, and connect with the whole cosmos, the moon, the earth, the waters, the fires, the air, the wind, just being with the elements and worship.

2.2 LAMENTING THE LOST GODDESS!

2.2.1 How do Women see the Goddess?

The concept of Mother Goddess and/or Great Goddess has contributed a sense of religious power and meaning in the cosmos by being a spiritual focus for women and girls, and means of recognition for males too, of the validity of female as well as male aspects of God. Witchcraft or Wicca worships the Goddess, the majority feel that the Goddess has a profound effect on their lives. Not all modern practitioners view the Goddess as essential to ritual making - many prefer to remain ecologically focused. Isolating the meaning of the Goddess in the lives of contemporary witches, Christ (1979) discusses four aspects of Goddess symbolism: the Goddess as affirmation of female power, the female body, the female will, and women's bonds and heritage. Despite the many other interpretations of the Goddess, Christ covers the more important meanings.

The simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of Goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power.
(Christ, 1979:277)

Liberating through recognising women, the Goddess gives women feelings of independence and power as persons in their own right. Inclusive of all women, the Goddess becomes a source of self development for women, of strength, power and can provide the affirmation of self image. As Jasmine states, "The Goddess is validation of myself as a woman to start with... and it is empowering from that point of view." Witches are using the Goddess as a psychological tool to build individual power and community strength. Affirmation of female power has psychological and political consequences. When asked to give meaning to the Goddess most witches assert that their definitions are personal ones. As Frances states,

You see I don't know what she is. She is part of this life force, so she is sort of like a power that is greater than me, but she is also here with

me, in me and she is part of the trees and the earth. That's what I love about it, because it is so tangible.

Frances' statement sums up the most common interpretations of the Goddess. Firstly, she is seen as an entity, a power or energy of greater presence than humanity, and despite this explanation, witches insist that the Goddess is definitely 'not out there'. Patriarchal religions, witches insist, locate their deity *outside* the world. "Divinity is imminent: IN the world not outside it," (Penny, 1990:16). By locating a female deity within each woman, witches are rejecting what they consider inherent in patriarchal religions; authoritarianism, hierarchy and dogma. In addition, the Goddess is very much tied to nature, for she is the Mother earth. As Paula explains, "I think that the Goddess is the earth for a start. Nature is sacred, ...and in the modern technological age, we have lost a lot of respect for nature." Most witches adhere to the Gaian philosophy, that the earth is a living organism and on the most simplistic level, this means an interconnection of everything, thus our every action has an effect on the planet. The Gaia consciousness will be discussed more fully when analysing eco-feminism in section 4.1.1.

The second implication of the Goddess symbol for women is the affirmation of the female body and female sexuality. Femaleness cannot be threatening, negatively ensnaring or simply bad if it is part of the ultimate deity. In the past, women have been assigned two roles, both implicitly linked to their sexuality; that of the eternal temptress, symbolised in the myth of Eve and that of the Virgin Mary, who transcends the carnal lust associated with women. A female godhead allows full affirmation of the body and female sexuality, and witchcraft ideology has no concept of original sin, nor is it restrictive about sex. Like all other aspects of witchcraft, sex is self regulatory; conceived in an ethical context, but not bound in a set of rules. Cathy reiterates these thoughts,

Wiccan offers one of the first areas that women can reclaim independence through sexuality. It allows women to discover their sexuality for themselves in relation to their community, and whoever they want, whether they want to be lesbian, or straight, or whatever.

Bound by nature, women menstruate and give birth and have traditionally cared for the young and the dying. The female body with its natural functions has been marginalised, controlled and often denigrated by Western cultural, social and health practices. Despite the accomplishments of the Women's Liberation Movement women's bodies are controlled more than ever through the false

ideals of beauty. It is through the symbol of Goddess, that women and witches alike are reclaiming the female body and its cycles and processes. A symbolic connection is often made between the cycles of menstruation and the moon. These three aspects of the moon; waxing, waning and the full moon reflect the stages in women's lives. As the new moon, she is a Maiden, a mature fertile woman with the full moon, and the old wise woman or crone with the waning moon. By celebrating life, one comes to accept ageing and dying, to overcome menstrual taboos, return birthing to the control of women and challenge society's attitudes towards beauty, old age and death.

Christ's (1979) third implication of the Goddess symbol is the positive valuation of will, especially the practice of ritual magic and spell casting as a source of power. Christ states, "A woman is encouraged to know her will, to believe that her will is valid, and to believe that her will can be achieved in the world," (Christ, 1979:284). Magic and spell casting is discussed further in section 2.3. Christ's (1979) final interpretation of the Goddess symbol lies in revaluing 'women's bonds and heritage'. The sense of sisterhood declared through rituals is undeniable, and constantly the differences between women are willingly tolerated and respected, as these women look to a future that recognises feminine principles. The potential for witchcraft to bridge the differences between women is discussed further in section 5.2.2. The witches world view of a more egalitarian future has culminated in exploring forms of 'woman-identified culture,' where numerous women are expressing their spirituality through art, poetry, literature, music, health, political analysis, sexuality and lifestyle, (Culpepper, 1978:224). Creativity and the links with the alternative health movement are discussed further in section 3.3.

2.2.2 Sign or Symbol?

Functionally, symbols are more than mere signifiers of known realities, therefore, the emergence of the feminist goddess symbolism has significant political and psychological importance for women and the feminist movement in general. The critical point lies with the importance of religious symbols and rituals in human life must be understood. Carl Jung was primarily interested in symbols as revealers of the unconscious or hidden realities. The unconscious goes beyond the individual's 'personal unconscious' to the 'collective unconscious' that Jung viewed as a commonly shared collective psyche, (Jung, 1946:602). Signs, Jung distinguished from symbols, were a secular representation

of the thing already known, for example, a hand wave for a greeting. The collective psyche is accessed through dreams and represented in mythical archetypes, recurring constantly in the myths and religions of all peoples, such as the Great Mother, the Sky Father and the Child. In summary, "A symbol represented a previously unrecognised psychological force seeking conscious expression," (Shinn, 1984:176).

Although some writers of Wicca (Crowley, 1989) use Jungian theorising, most feminist theologians apply the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz's, interpretation. According to Geertz, symbols have a 'double aspect' in relation to the cultural ethos; they "...give meaning, i.e. objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves," (Geertz, 1966:8). It is unrealistic, he argues to equate natural signs, (dark clouds as signifiers of rain) and conventional signs, (the white flag as a symbol of surrender) to those of religious symbols (Geertz, 1966:5). Religion can be defined as a, "...complex and self-legitimizing symbol system," (Shinn, 1984:177). Borrowing from Geertz's understanding of symbols, contemporary feminist 'theologians'¹⁴ embrace the Goddess as a supreme symbol for women (Christ, 1979).

Shinn criticises the feminist Goddess solution to the 'patriarchal god' problem.

...most feminist goddess theologies appear to proceed with the assumption that the gender of the religious symbols necessarily has a homologous or one-to-one relationship to the psychological, social and religious self-understandings of men and women.

(Shinn, 1984:179-80).

This is made explicit by feminist linking of male religious symbols with the social and religious status of men and the negative impact on women, and the expectations of the liberating symbol of the Goddess for women. Christ assumes there is a gender correspondence between divine symbol and human role-models.

As women struggle to create a new culture in which women's power, bodies, will, and bonds are celebrated, it seems natural that the

¹⁴ *Thea* is the Greek word for Goddess, whereas *theos* is the word for a masculine god. Naomi Goldenberg feels it is more appropriate to adopt the word thealogy and for feminist scholars to name themselves theologians (Goldenberg, 1982:215).

Goddess would reemerge as symbol of the new found beauty, strength,
and power of women. (Christ, 1979:286)

For Christ, the Goddess provides validation and legitimation for women because she is female; thus feminist theologians and feminists in general are ascribing negative or positive values to religious symbols based on their gender. It is this interpretation of religious symbols that feminists have denounced in the past. Feminist have long decried the patriarchal images of the Christian God, and the way the Christian church has manipulated symbols to oppress and subordinate women and to legitimise its political male institutional power; the burning of witches as the most extreme example. It is not only the gender of the Christian God that feminist find oppressive, but also his characteristics and attitudes.

Rather than debate the value of the Goddess for women as a psychological and social model for women, as there is no doubt that the Goddess serves this purpose, I question whether gender needs to be a critical factor in religious expression and experience. By making gender the critical factor of religious expression, many writers reduce the Goddess to a social, economic and psychological and hence a political symbol, instead of a religious or spiritual one, and ignore situations where both men and women have been provided with religious meaning and expression through the same deified symbols. The Goddess re-imagining of extolling the Goddess as "...the explicit embodiment of feminine roles and/or attributes," (Shinn, 1984:192), may actually lead to similar narrow and manipulated uses of symbols to those of the past. Alice states that this is reflected, "...in a rather uncritical, indiscriminate borrowing of goddess figures from many different cultures," (Alice, 1989:222). She further states,

Fascination with goddess figures is undoubtedly a mixture of defiance at our society's pervasive masculinist imaging of almost every aspect of life and more importantly an expression of desired existential connection between symbolised strength, transformative endurance and the complexly alienated lives of feminist women today.

(Alice, 1989:223)

Shinn (1984) argues that the Goddess is a 'theological signifier' or 'vehicle for conception' that is not a fully religious one. By essentialising feminine attributes encompassed in the Goddess, the end result theoretically denies men religious expression through the Goddess. Reliance on the gendered image of the Goddess vetoes the dynamic and relational function of religious symbols for men and women alike. Following this assumption, then witchcraft will have no religious place for men because of the Goddess imaging. For a fuller discussion on how

male witches view the Goddess, refer to section 5.4.3. Differing views of the 'meaning' of the symbol of Goddess can surely only lead to dogmatic theological controversy. As Christ suggests, "...theologians may need to give more than lip service to a theory of symbol in which the symbol is viewed as the primary fact and the meanings are viewed as secondary, "(Christ, 1979:279). What other way can statements such as those expressed by Jenny and Renee, respectively, be evaluated?

I guess it depends on how I am feeling at the time as to what I need from the Goddess and what face I see her as having. I mean a benevolent face, or a face of sorrow, or a face of strength or whatever. I don't actually perceive her as a lady with a beard, on a cloud.

I have got an interest in the Jungian archetypal types of Goddesses, so like I might say to myself, 'I'm off to work now, so I will pop Athena out, because she is the one I want today.'

2.3 THE MAGICAL PRACTICES OF WITCHCRAFT

2.3.1 What is Magic?

'Magic' is a word that causes discomfort, curiosity or dismissal from those who do not understand or practise it; it reeks of superstition and illusion. At the same time, magical practice/results are hard to confirm empirically and magic in Western society is scientifically, and in many cases socially unsupported. What, then, is it? O'Keefe (1982) suggests that it appears to be related to religion and seeks to assist the individual. He argues that although the classic theorists, Marx, Weber and Durkheim have much to say on the theory of religion, with the exception of one, their theories contain little in the development theory of magic and, "magic is treated as a footnote to the sociology of religion," (O'Keefe, 1982:10). Magic, he argues, is social action, where following an occurrence the social situation is altered in some way. The Wiccan definition of magic is similar, but more definitive than merely a social action. Despite the idiosyncrasies, Aleister Crowley's definition of magic prevails on the majority of witches. Magic is, "...the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will," (cited in Crowley, 1989:111). Feminist witch Starhawk refines Crowley to its common usage, "...the art of changing consciousness at will," (Starhawk, 1982a:173).

My first contact with Wiccan magic filled me with anticipation, scepticism and confusion. Allowing us time to think and prepare ourselves, Janet Melbourne informed the group of women enrolled in her course that our next ritual would involve magic and instructed us, 'to be careful what we asked for, because we would receive it.' With another general Wiccan law in mind, I spent the week mulling over what it was I might want, whilst simultaneously attempting to analyse the thought processes occurring. I was aware that I did not ask to win Lotto or any other jackpot winnings, nor was I asking for something I would not achieve anyway. Instead the magic was performed for something I could have, but felt needed a helping hand. The following week, we entered the circle with our wishes. Asked to write everything that would stop us achieving our wish on paper, we burned it. That was magic. We then filled a small pouch with symbols and objects representing our desires, securing it with a magical chant. That was magic. In my particular case, I performed some magic to help me forgive a special friend who had hurt me emotionally and by marking the occasion in a formal ritual I was helped through the process. The other women's wishes ranged from, 'the motivation to find a job', to the 'passion one woman felt she deserved'. The wishes appeared to fall into two categories, first, those women who wanted positive affirmation of who they were, and second, those who wanted to be given strength to do what they wanted, 'to put the past behind them', 'to be rid of the chains', and 'to have a new voice'.

Magicians experience unusual emotional, spiritual and physiological feelings in rituals and they identify these feelings as an indication of the ritual's power (Luhmann, 1989). 'Power' is neither uniquely nor consistently defined and lies within the individual who interprets it. This is a powerful and positive way to take women internally where they reclaim their consequences. Jasmine explains the concept of will,

When I internalise something, or have this vision of something that I want to happen, then it happens. I don't practice magic, but I can see that if I was to use this way of directing my own will, I could bring about quite a lot of things. So I can see that it works, and there are different ways of going about it. I mean, I use my mind, somebody else might put something into a velvet bag.

The concept of will is important. To have will, means that each individual has self autonomy and the right to choose actively, and as such each person has the right to refuse magical help. There also exists the ethical code, that which one sends out, returns three times. Witches therefore think and act positively,

performing good magic. The only exception known to me is a binding spell on rapists and child molesters, as opposed to hexing which seeks to deliberately harm someone and will result in some misfortune or negativity returning to the witch performing the magic. Noreen Penny in *WomanScript*, describes a part of the Samhain ritual, "We stabbed a pumpkin to get rid of our anger towards rape, child molestation, murder." This again is at the discretion of the group, many preferring to perform magic to help the survivors of these crimes than to 'bind' the offender.

Given its weak definition magic can be applied to other types of social action. O'Keefe and Starhawk reiterate these thoughts, "Human action is 'magical' in some weak sense," (O'Keefe, 1982:28). "Political action is itself a form of magic," (Starhawk, 1982a:180). It is this loose definition of social action and/or a change in consciousness that witches adhere to. As Paula explains,

It (magic) can be seen on different levels. I mean positive affirmation can be seen as a kind of magic. Casting a spell is a ritualised expression of positive affirmation.

Frances has a similar explanation,

The actual definition of magic is like 'growth', the mental process you go through when you actually change your thinking about something, or your thinking evolves, or you learn something or grow something.

2.3.2 Why is it so Persuasive?

It used to really blow me away, when I first started doing spells. Things happen really fast for me after I have done a spell. It repeatedly happens.

Frances' quote presupposes a rigid relationship of cause and effect. Faced with explaining an event as caused either by ritual or coincidence, witches tend to become comfortable with attributing the event to the power of magic. Why do witches/magicians find magic so persuasive? Employing a pragmatic approach to magic, few witches attempt to explain how magic works. Rarely will witches stringently test their magic empirically, by a method similar to Popperian methodology, that states any false science can be abandoned once subjected to rigorous hypothesis testing (Luhrmann, 1989:123-4). However, even in its strictest formulation, the experimenter's dependence is upon an attitude. Magic is said to depend on some sort of transformation, and witches will inform you

that they experience spiritual, emotional and physical changes during ritual. These changes influence the magician as new ways of knowing and understanding. As Luhrmann explains,

... becoming a specialist in magic, results in systematic changes in the structure of interpretation itself. A new definition of evidence, new assumptions, new common knowledge - these changes systematically alter the way yet-to-be interpreted events are noticed, organized and analysed.
(Luhrmann, 1989:176)

Sometimes magicians interpret a ritual as failing and conclude that one particular element of a ritual is incorrect, and they revise it. Therefore, magic is never disproved. As one ritualist describes,

In one ritual I forgot to lead grounding for.¹⁵ I found myself bursting into tears about half an hour after it was over, for no apparent reason. Other women said they had trouble sleeping that night.

(Stein, 1990:64)

On the basis of personal practice, witches eventually conclude that magical ideas are probably correct, assigning causality to what they once would have called coincidence. They internalise performance targets and become motivated to achieve these targets. Jane adheres to this pragmatic approach, "Yes, it (magic) works, and it works for the person who is creating it. It works for them and it works because they wish it." Evans-Pritchard, in his work on the Azande, lists twenty two reasons to explain, "...why the Azande do not perceive the futility of their magic," (Evans-Pritchard, 1937:475). In summary, he argues that belief in magic is backed by tradition and religious sanction, thus testing is strongly discouraged. It would require methodical testing to discredit it, and often magical beliefs are vague, therefore difficult to disprove. Usually the results would happen anyway or are justified on a different level of success. When the results are ambiguous, one should question the assumptions, but elaborations and excuses are made. Finally, the salience of success blocks out failure. Cathy, through describing a ritual, illustrates some of these points,

One friend was determined she wanted to change her relationship with her lover, and she wanted to get rid of all the stuff that separated them. So we found a spell in a book somewhere, and decided we would do this.... A couple of days later, she said to me, "I don't know

¹⁵ Grounding is an action that relinquishes the energy created in a ritual and is customarily directed toward a goal. On a simple level this can involve placing your hands on the ground allowing the energy to leave your body and be absorbed by the earth.

what that spell was supposed to do, but I have totally lost all interest in that guy." I mean she got rid of all that separated her and her lover.

My own experience with this was through a member of the coven I participated in. Angela was seeking employment. This was magically expressed by blowing bubbles. When her bubbles went in the opposite direction to everybody else, (behind her and south), she expressed her disappointment and claimed that maybe she was not supposed to have a job. Another member's interpretation was that her job might be in the South, where the bubbles had blown. Several weeks later, Angela obtained the exact job she wanted, located in Mosgiel, a township to the southwest of Dunedin. It was claimed the magic had worked. Everything can be interpreted in a positive manner with hindsight. One or the other interpretation had to be wrong, because both interpretations were mutually exclusive.

2.4 SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter is to provide a description and brief analysis of the formalised components of witchcraft: ritual, the Goddess and magical practices. A brief description of ritual and ritual practices, similar to those found in 'craft' texts was given. The flexible nature of witchcraft is evident when examined, and is expressed in the general and much practised rule, 'anything goes as long as it harms no other'. Categorically, ritual appears to be used for a number of reasons: healing, worship of nature, spell making and other magics, creativity, celebration, self empowerment of women etc. The common element transpires through the importance of womanhood, and the process of transformation. Through positing a cause and effect relationship, witchcraft fits comfortably with functionalist reasoning. The re-emergence of witchcraft can be seen as a mixed response to the feminist, peace and ecological movements that form the current Western consciousness movement, but can be flip-sided to contend that witchcraft influences social conditions, such as the new social movements. Although functionalism may provide some answers for the phenomena of Wiccan ritual, it fails to examine the emotional impact and the various levels of intentionality employed in ritual.

Feminist witchcraft worships the Goddess. As long as societal distinctions based upon gender exist, witches will always have a need for the Goddess. Feminist witches assign the Goddess the attributes the patriarchal God does not possess, providing both psychological and political consequences for all women.

Problems arise over the assumption that benefits accrue through a female deity simply because she is female. Qualifying the Goddess in this nature places gender as the most crucial factor of religious expression, reducing the Goddess to a political sign as well as a religious symbol, and by doing so may deny men a role in witchcraft or other Goddess worshipping practices. One final source of contentious debate over Goddess imaging and symbolism extends to essentialising the Goddess as the embodiment of all that is desirably feminine, which may run the risk of both manipulation as a symbol and the homogenisation of women. As gender relations possibly become more balanced in society, both men and a male deity will likely be introduced to rituals (discussed in chapter five).

Magic is another element of ritual in witchcraft. While magical practice appears to be linked to religion and seeks to assist the individual, there is very little understanding of it in theoretical writing. Most witches see magic as a form of social action based upon will. Defined as, "...the art of changing consciousness at will," magic involves a transformation of some kind. By altering their world view and by its very pragmatic nature witches find magic persuasive. Personal practise modifies the way witches view their evidence and interpretation, leading them to assume their magic is correct.

CHAPTER THREE

Witchcraft: A Way of Life

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Witches do not fit a sociological type. However, their search for a religion, their feminism, their love of nature or friends and beliefs may lead them to witchcraft. I concluded from the first chapter that the self labelling process is the crucial definitional factor and suggested it would be more beneficial to examine under what circumstances witches choose to label themselves as such. Witches find that the label 'witch' encompasses a world view that cannot be attained from other labels such as 'femmie' or 'greenie'. The point in time when a witch claims her 'spirituality is her life', is the context in which she accepts the label, in spite of the entrenched negative stereotypical images associated with the word 'witch'. This chapter examines the type of women, (if such persons exist) who are attracted to Wiccan practices, their religious backgrounds and other related sociological factors. Despite the fact that witchcraft is open to women of all backgrounds, some are more attracted than others to its practice. The majority of witches I interviewed and came into contact with were typically older, single and pakeha women. However, generalisations to this effect are difficult and dangerous to articulate because they homogenise women and witches alike.

This chapter explores the processes in which witches find themselves engaged, to a point where the label 'witch' becomes appropriate to explain their world view and practices. The initial changes they experience are startling, often very intense and affect a large impact on the lives of the curious beginner. The impact is typically momentous because the majority of women live the way of life of Wicca long before they come to hear or know of its ideology and practices. For many, witchcraft is a startling revelation, that is, they have finally found a name and practice for what they already know, accept and understand. The process, although impacting, does not always mean the conversion process is sudden; for the majority it is slow moving and commonly described as a journey along a spiritual pathway that will continue to grow and may never reach an end.

Witches assert that their spirituality is unable to be separated from the rest of their lives. The remainder of the chapter discusses these ideas. Two areas with historical and contemporary connections to witchcraft are explored in depth: that of creativity and the alternative health movement. Women's symbols/images and women's bodies have been a source of contention for feminists and witches alike.

3.1 WHO ARE THESE WOMEN? - THEIR BACKGROUNDS

Who are the women attracted to witchcraft? The impression persists that witches fit a sociological profile and have certain personality traits. Luhrmann describes them as '...imaginative, self absorbed, reasonably intellectual, spiritually inclined, and emotionally intense,' (Luhrmann, 1989:100). One American study suggests that feminist witches were raised with a home life that valued traditional women's roles, but who now have non-traditional, achievement oriented careers (cited in Luhrmann, 1989:100). This finding is not descriptive for New Zealand witches. Their respective careers are varied and wide reaching. Among the witches in this study were a librarian, an administration manager, a medical herbalist, a shop assistant, a student, a home maker, an artist, a journalist, a professional kitemaker, and a medical radiation technologist. Wisewitch's (1987) thesis indicates a similar conclusion.¹⁶ Feminist witches, although 'middle-class',¹⁷ do not fit a sociological type, as there exists an incredible diversity of values among white middle-class women. Witches rebel from categorising themselves, arguing that witchcraft is available to and welcomes women of all backgrounds, race and class. When asked if witches fit a particular portrait, Felicity explains,

It is definitely open for anyone, because if it wasn't then it wouldn't be witchcraft as such. I wouldn't really want to say, because it then excludes other people.

¹⁶ The occupations of the women interviewed included an artist, a composer, a health worker, a bookseller, a sickness beneficiary, a student, a community worker, a teacher, a tutor, a courier driver, a homemaker, a high school student, and a builder, (Wisewitch, 1987:103)

¹⁷ The term 'middle-class' has been and is used loosely and requires further clarification. Luhrmann suggests that, "Magicians are middle class people of a particular and not uncommon temperamental cast - not people with similar socio-economic profiles," (Luhrmann, 1989:100). Other analysts of the New Social Movements have suggested the creation of a new class, which is drawn from the middle-class, but the members of this class differ in income considerably more than in their educational and occupational backgrounds. They have been called 'humanistic intellectuals', whose interests are primarily critical and emancipatory, and hence often political (Offe, 1985). A similar analysis could be applied to contemporary witches.

Frances has similar thoughts,

The thing I've really liked about it [witchcraft] is that we are just ordinary women. I think the only criteria to being a witch is being a woman as well. A lot of women that I know are witches have been fucked around badly by patriarchy.

Frances' comments exemplify what I have observed to be characteristic of witches. While witchcraft is indeed open to all women, some are more attracted to it than others. Hesitating to generalise, witchcraft appears to attract older women. The average age of my sample group was 37 years of age. Only a minority of witches are under the age of 25 years. My observations indicate that witches are made up of a larger group of older (35-45 year old), a proportion of whom live independently. Many have split from their husbands or partners. Of the women I interviewed, excluding those who are lesbian, over half have separated from long term relationships.¹⁸ Whether this trend reflects the national profile of the family unit in New Zealand remains to be explored. Unfortunately, my sample was too small for such conclusions.

The characteristic I would apply to witches is 'strong', as they appear to have achieved a great deal of self knowledge and self autonomy. They have reached a particular stage in their lives and many of them commented that they were 'finally understanding who they are as women', and by embracing witchcraft they are openly acknowledging it. The word witch reflects the stage they are at in their lives, and equally reflects their beliefs about women, ecology, politics and spirituality. As Renee explains,

They are certainly people who are open, they are people who are interested in the environment, peace and feminism. That is true, because some women who are free, but are perhaps not so committed in a feminist way have not joined the feminist ritual side of it. There is definitely some connection.

When asked if she felt women who are attracted to witchcraft have any predispositions, Paula replied,

¹⁸ Of the fourteen women interviewed, three are lesbian, two are bisexual, two do not wish to be labelled, seven are heterosexual, with two indicating they may be bisexual or have had a lesbian relationship. Observations indicate the proportion of lesbianism is higher than my sample would suggest. This is borne out by Wisewitch's thesis, where five indicated they were lesbian, five bisexual, and five were not sure or did not want to define themselves to any one particular label, (Wisewitch, 1987:103).

Yes, I do! I think women, especially women who have a feminist view, you know, who see the inequalities, and so on. I think women like that will possibly reject the church, although not necessarily.

The second common background of witches is their religious upbringing and would appear to be of some significance. Luhrmann briefly examined the religious background of 'magicians.' She suggested that, "...perhaps two or three out of every ten magicians had a catholic upbringing, or Pentecostalist parents, or a father with books on spiritualism and magic on the shelf," (Luhrmann, 1989:107). Scott argues that witches are more likely than not to be Catholic due to the 'ritual pageantry and group orientation of Catholicism' (Scott, 1980:127). Adler corrected what she feels is a common assumption made by herself and others, that the "...Pagan and Craft movement was filled with a majority of ex-Catholic and ex-Episcopalians," (Adler, 1986:444). This misrepresentation, she argued, lies with the idea that people who enter Wicca have a love of ritual and a hatred of dogma, thus rebelling against the church teachings. Her survey of American pagans showed their religious backgrounds closely mirror the national religious profile. Adler (1986) concluded that for a variety of reasons people have become disenchanted with the religion of their past and become involved with magic. Wisewitch observed in her research that,

All of the women surveyed have some significant involvement in other religions before their participation in Women's Spirituality... with the exception of one, Christianity was a common religion.

(Wisewitch, 1987:24)

My observations indicate that all of the sample were raised with some Christian background. This ranged from having non-religious parents who sent their children to Sunday school 'as the right thing to do', to those who were very deeply involved. Although this trend may reflect in New Zealand's national religious profile the sample is too small to produce results of real significance. Surprisingly, a number of witches were heavily involved in their respective Christian background during their teenage years,¹⁹ most becoming disillusioned during their late teens. Their reasons for their disenchantment with the Christian church were remarkably similar. They disliked the patriarchal nature, the hierarchy, the way women are positioned in the church, the lack of female involvement, and the contradictions they felt were inherent in church doctrines. A small minority of witches continue with their Christian practice, and feel that

¹⁹ A large number of witches taught Sunday school, or were deeply entrenched in their respective church teachings.

when their respective churches make more social and fundamental changes to the roles for women they will move back into the church. This view is not shared by the majority of witches.

To conclude on the background of witches, it could be suggested that one strong characteristic is some sort of Christian upbringing. Rejecting the church in their late teens, many of these women do not immediately attempt searching for a viable alternative. This may account for the group of older women joining and practising witchcraft. However, I would argue that women join ritual groups as part of a self exploration process. Many come out of long term relationships determined to find their self autonomy. Although many do not articulate their feminism, they are without doubt oriented in that direction. A combination of characteristics brings women to witchcraft; they have similar friends, and ideas, a love of nature and woman-centred things. This is why the label witch is so important, and why the point at which they accept this label is important. Janet Melbourne commented on women who undertake her course on ritual making,

They are women who dare, and that is all I can really say. I don't know what else they are daring... They are women who are questioning and looking.

3.2 THE WITCH'S WORLD VIEW: "MY SPIRITUALITY IS MY LIFE!"

Spirituality is an important part of all the women's lives. In fact, for many it cannot be separated from other parts of their lives, and it's [sic] effect is so strong that it not only influences the way they view the world, but what they do in it. (Wisewitch, 1987:90)

In the first chapter, I detailed the issues concerned with defining what a witch is and means, and concluded that not only is it a self label, it is part of a process. I suggested that instead of trying to grasp a concrete definition of witches and witchcraft, it would be more prudent to examine under what circumstances witches choose to label themselves as such. I want to suggest that women label themselves as witches when their spirituality reaches a point where it, 'cannot be separated from other parts of their lives.' In the preceding section, the background of these women was examined. Despite the fact that women of different race, class, age and religion are welcomed to join and practice witchcraft, there are characteristics of those women who are attracted to witchcraft. Many are older, pakeha, middle-class (in ideology as opposed to socio-economic

grouping. See discussion in footnote 15), and independent women, who are often lesbian or without a male partner. Of course, this is a generalisation and many witches will not fit this description. Some witches may well have some of these characteristics, but there will always be some whom have none of these features. Their search for a religion, their feminism, their love of nature or friends and beliefs may lead them to witchcraft. The initial changes they experience are startling and often very intense.

3.2.1 The Initial Changes

The women drawn to witchcraft often become practitioners through browsing in book stores, and then seeking out ritual groups. The majority of women, however, are first introduced to ritual through a course or an open ritual invitation from someone they know, and due to Wicca's flexible nature and lack of doctrine there are few converts. For whatever reason women first choose to seek out and experience feminist ritual; it is both a unique and private experience. Having the benefit of observing twelve women's initial reactions to ritual as part of a course on ritual making, I was surprised at the intense emotions and receptiveness they experienced. Janet Melbourne, who coordinates the course, states,

...they dare to show their feelings to other women unknown to them, and some of them show a lot of feelings, some of them only just get in touch with their feelings, but the fact that they dare...

Adler (1986) generalises the reactions of women to their initial contact with ritual with a common phrase that she heard during her research, "I've come home"; Or as one woman (Felicity) enthusiastically confessed to me,

...my flatmate was into witchcraft, and that is what got me interested. Then I did some readings... and I thought, 'wow, yeah'. I sort of always felt it was something that I wanted to express myself spiritually, but I didn't know what channels to do it through.

During the first months of participation in witchcraft a diary was kept to record my own reactions to the rituals and the women participants. Scribbled notes from an entry dated after the first ritual I attended include the following observations. Obviously, my initial response to ritual was little different from that experienced by other women.

5 March 1992:

*Everything was so positive
Women of many shapes and sizes
The psychological benefits are immense;
- a self awareness programme
- could easily become a way of life
I had various intense emotions;
- a lot of personal pain
- an incredible feeling of love and happiness*

The intimate and personal experiences of ritual are not isolated in the adult. Many fantasies occur during childhood, and hold a significant relevance for them as Wiccan practitioners. Many loved the ritual of their own churches, others held nature as sacred, others fantasised about ancient God and Goddess myths, and these archetypal images are often disguised in contemporary forms such as 'Star Trek' and other science fiction programmes and books. Childish fantasies are forgotten or discarded, only to be remembered and awakened when a woman embraces witchcraft. Frequently, witches use their early childhood memories as evidence of a continuation of their spirituality, and give a similar response as that of Jane's, "It is who I have always been, it is not who I have always recognised myself as being."

3.2.2 The Process of Change

People are frequently motivated to search for a meaning system to explain their individual situations within a new social reality. Not only is a meaningful system sought, but many also look for a framework of practice in which to express the new meaning. When the individual integrates belief and practice, a new lifestyle emerges. Most texts refer to this as a 'process of conversion', which unfortunately carries negative connotations often associated with mind-control and brainwashing. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'conversion' refers to the process of creating or looking for, and changing to a new religion. In the case of Witchcraft, there is no intent to convert the individual, and all experiences are considered personal and unique. Despite the initial experiences for most women involving intense feeling, by no means are all conversions sudden. Some take place slowly over months or even years, so that the person involved finds it difficult to pinpoint the specific time when she first started to see the world in a different way. As Carol states, "I have discovered that you are making a journey...you finally start to work out who you really are." Jane has similar thoughts,

...that's the process that continues to unfold. I recognise the energy of it fully, the extent to which it permeates my life continues, the way in which I channel that energy, it grows and so it is still a process. It is unfolding.

For a lot of converts, it is the commitment to the way of life that follows the conversion to the beliefs. The appearance of everything alters, the convert or witch undergoes a change that results in her seeing the world in a new light. This description is aptly described to portray Christian conversion as 'born-again', where converts claim the Bible and their life make sense because both take on new meaning, (Hexham & Poewe, 1986:12). If conversion is sudden, it can often be a source of worry for unconverted parents, spouses and friends, because the convert's world view has changed often for an unknown, obscure and socially misunderstood one: "It is shaped by a new outlook, dominated by new goals," (Hexham & Poewe, 1986:13).

My observations indicate that the above conversion mode is not the common process feminist witches encounter. The majority follow a second pattern of conversion, whereby many women admit to having become committed to the way of life of witchcraft before becoming converted to its ideology. Due to the background of many of these women, they have essentially 'prepared' themselves for some of the beliefs and practices that characterise witchcraft, before they have ever met it or even heard of its existence. Lofland & Stark (1973:31), in their model of conversion, investigate what they call 'predisposing conditions', which "...comprises attributes of persons prior to their contact with the cult." Witches' predispositions lie with their feminism, environmentalism and religious backgrounds and subsequently lend themselves to Wiccan ideology, hence the echo, "I've come home," or as a woman told Adler (1986:210) "I always knew I had a religion, I just never knew it had a name." Renee acknowledges similar thoughts,

I think it has been more of a discovery, like all the years when I thought I didn't have any spirituality, basically, I realise now, that I did have it and it was in things like being in the garden, and contact with nature, and animals and things like that.

Cathy echoes these ideas,

...my culture and upbringing I guess. It didn't fit with my conceptions of who I am, and so Wicca offered a way of being that was compatible to where I was coming to...and since then it has been a process of

developing my own theology within that...deciding what to discard and what to hang on to.

Witches appear to engage in the second process of conversion. Once engaged in witchcraft practices of ritual and magic, witches typically continue to explore their spirituality in a process similar to the first described. They find their eyes opened to objects, symbols and ideas that they had not previously recognised. Felicity express these ideas,

With witchcraft I think I tend to use my intuition more, so I read more into symbols. So it has opened up a channel thing. It is not as if I am fatalistic or anything, but I think that things are there to be read, and you just have to open your eyes and see things. You see the same things, but you see them in a different way.

It is the feeling of finally discovering an ideology that expresses with conviction the way they feel about themselves as women, their relationship to others and to the environment, that lead the majority of women practising Wiccan to label themselves as witches. Until this point many have toyed with other labels, that although relevant, are not entirely encompassing, including 'Greenie', 'New Ager', 'Alternative Lifestyler', 'Femmie' and 'Hippie'. Others find that even these identifying classifications are inappropriate. The term witch, rather than holding negative connotations, expresses an ideology that encompasses the women using it. They are women who are strong and independent, who are using their spirituality to change their relationship with other people and with nature. Witchcraft provides a holistic framework from which these women can express their world view, that until this point in time has not been offered through other channels. It brings together feminism, spirituality, environmentalism, creativity, the alternative health movement, gender relations and politics under the same umbrella from which to operate.

3.3 APPLICATION OF WITCHCRAFT TO OTHER AREAS OF WOMEN'S LIVES

Three main components of witchcraft are discussed at length in this thesis, that of feminism, environmentalism and spirituality, and to a lesser degree how these components are utilised in the political arena. However, witchcraft extends to more areas than those listed, and most witches comment that their spirituality cannot be separated from any other part of their lives. Wisewitch suggests,

I suspect that it is because of the woman orientation of this spirituality that everyday events and things are not separated out from spirituality. Women are traditionally associated with being responsible for and involved in ordinary everyday occurrences.

(Wisewitch, 1987:78)

Witches argue that any element that is able to be separated from spirituality is likely to cause conflict. Starhawk calls it 'a split in consciousness' and views it as a problem, one that can, 'quite comfortably cause pain and suffering,' (Starhawk, 1982b:416). She argues that if something is sacred, but what we see and experience does not reflect this sacrality, then it can only cause pain and turmoil. Carol explained this to me,

Let's say that you were a keen Buddhist, and the only job you could get was in the freezing works. I know it is a horrible scenario, but you are gutting carcasses, or actually herding the animals to be stunned, during the week, and suddenly you become a Buddhist when you get home. You can do it, but it is not a very comfortable way to live. You are coming into conflict.

It became clear as I met with more and more witches, that very few experience a split in their consciousness with regard to their personal lives, and if one did exist, it was something they were aware of and attempting to remove or modify. Witchcraft is a way of life for most witches, but this does not mean all of them live it. However, it is something that the majority strive toward. In terms of employment, the majority of witches are engaged in areas that are compatible with their beliefs. In many cases this is extended to other community activities, including volunteer work, such as the Women's Refuge. A large number hold interests that are an extension of their witchery, such as story-telling, drama, writing, gardening and various gardening techniques, including medicinal and culinary herbs.

One area exists that often causes witches problems is the reconciliation of their beliefs with technology and science. Jane states, "I'm a hypocrite here, because I don't like it [technology] much, but I love hot showers and I like being warm." Contrary to my own expectations and the assumptions of scholars, the majority of witches are optimistic about the uses of scientific research and the resulting technology. My own views were coloured by the writings of Theodore Roszak (1969), that challenge the current capitalistic, bureaucratic, and technological world view, and I naturally assumed that witches and Neo-pagans would be of similar attitudes. Adler also found a similar response,

Many, in fact, do not view the past positively at all. They were adamant on this point. Perhaps they reacted strongly because I expressed forcefully my own ambivalences and my surprise at their seeming complacency.
(Adler, 1986:392)

The majority of those I questioned informed me that the problem with technology lay with its misuse, which was fed by the market forces of profit making, and for ecological and human destruction. On the other hand, they argue that there is a potential in technology to provide a useful ecological tool, that minimises the use of resources. Renee emphasises these points, "Appropriate technology that doesn't use up resources, I have no problem with. If it dehumanises society, then I don't like it." Many witches feel that technology would be appropriate and even beneficent if applied with a 'life-saving' consciousness that removed the profit making motive, and Jane is no exception,

We need to use technology with art, we need to create and creatively use technology. We need to use our creative energy when we get involved with technology.

Despite these intentions, technology is a source of conflict for many witches. The remaining section deals with two areas of women's lives that the majority bring to their spirituality. Creativity is strongly emphasised, and the links with the alternative health movement cannot be denied.

3.3.1 Creativity

Many artists bring their creative processes to ritual. "This process adds to its contents, stimulates ritual's evolution, and helps to avoid repetitious stagnation," (Edelson, 1982:323). Although not all witches are artists, creativity is strongly emphasised within feminist spirituality. Many feminists artists consider the ritual setting and experience to literally serve as a visionary mode, and reflects feminist insights about the spiritual dimensions, expressed through art, poetry, music and fiction. Their chosen medium of expression imparts information of feminine images, primarily the communication of images of goddesses, the restoration of women's symbols, and art imagery of goddesses and the mythic or legendary women are often explicitly present. Magazines show visible signs of creativity and the potential for women to redefine their own reality. Magazines such as *Woman of Power*, *WomanScript* and the *Women's Spirituality Newsletter* reflect the current feminist interest in areas such as astrology, tarot, herbal and dietary healing, dream interpretation, story telling,

feminist ritual, meditation feminist analysis, communal living and of course creativity.

Women's music is an area that many witches are exploring, and frequently women's poetry and acoustics evenings portray a spiritual/feminist dynamic. Wisewitch's (1987) thesis is accompanied by a tape containing two recordings by Christchurch feminist witch, Phoebe Gray. Phoebe is a singer and composer who uses ritual in her musical performances, (Cropp, 1990:11). Phoebe explains her feelings towards spirituality and her talent,

When I write music, I write spiritual music. So in what I read, how I write my music, how I conduct my day - everything - is all completely involved with my spirituality. (Wisewitch, 1987:81)

Responses to her music are varied. When Phoebe performed for the University of Canterbury Department of Music in 1987, her recital/ritual culminated in an imposition of a formal lifelong ban, prohibiting her from further performances at that particular venue. The chamber was draped in charcoal muslin and black candles, black roses were distributed and a poem to the Star Goddess was read aloud. She was accused of handing out 'death wishes', people walked out and complaints were laid (Cropp, 1990:11). Phoebe Gray is not the only ritualist to use ritual for a performance piece. Not only is their spirituality manifested through their work aurally and visually through representation and symbolism, but also their creativity is influenced by their spirituality. In the case of Juliet Batten, she is both an artist and ritualist, who often combines both facets in her work. The following sequence is an example of Juliet Batten's work that combines spirituality, ritual and creativity.

JULIET BATTEN: 100 WOMEN PROJECT

Photographer: Gill Matthewson

The project entitled '100 Women Project' was coordinated by Juliet Batten as part of ANZART 1985, and drew a hundred women participants to Te Henga beach, on Auckland's west coast, on May 12, 1985. The photographer was Gill Matthewson, and the photographs have been reproduced with the permission of Juliet Batten.



FIGURE 3.1 ARRIVAL

The women followed a trail of coloured flags through sand dunes to a place where introductory circles were formed, 25 women at a time. Sealed instructions were given, names shared, and questions answered. Then each group was led in single file to a deep hollow behind the foreshore sand dunes.



FIGURE 3.2 TUNING IN

In the deep hollow each group of 25 was taken through a warm-up and tuning-in ritual. The women then spread out to make way for the next group of 25, and the ritual was repeated each time until all 100 women sat quietly in the hollow, tuning in to the sounds and rhythms of the environment. They then filed over the top of the dune to the beach, and at the sound of the gong, began work.



FIGURE 3.3 CONSTRUCTION

Each woman built a mound out of sand, quietly and meditatively. Then she joined with a partner to make a second mound. Within 30 minutes the beach was covered with 150 gently rounded sand forms. The women withdrew from the area to contemplate the whole as they finished, one by one.



FIGURE 3.4 SHARING

At the gong signal, the women returned to the mounds and sat amongst them in groups of 4. One woman in each group recorded their words as they shared how they each emerged as women over the last five years.



FIGURE 3.5 CIRCLE

All 100 women joined in a huge circle, which began to move clockwise as they chanted: "We are merging women/We are emerging through the earth/We are emerging, merging, merging? Through the tides and through the air."



FIGURE 3.6
MOUNDS AT TE HENGA



FIGURE 3.7 FINALE
The sea became the performer, washing over the mounds, embracing them, softening, reshaping, and finally carrying them away as the women watched and cheered.

Focus on the spiritual is only one feature for Pakeha artists in New Zealand, but commands a central place in the women's art movement. Marian Maguire, a Christchurch based artist, has expressed women's spirituality through her art and like a majority of feminist communicators, Marian is interested in images of women,²⁰

It was the positive images I was after, not the way women had been exploited, distorted and abused through organised religious ideas and practices. I was after some ray of hope, models, 'ancestors', on which I could soundly base my faith in women's ability to control their own lives and achieve success. History has presented us with occasional 'extraordinary women', who stood above their sex and made a mark, but I wanted something more innate than that. A symbol inside every woman.

Two of her stronger images to emerge are the fertility figurine and the creative/destructive goddess. She is wary of female fecundity, and states, "It almost seems like a trap, my own fertility being the trap, a distraction away from the complete person." However, she contrasts this with the creative/destructive goddess whom she views as having power and control over her own life, as well as others. Some feminist witches focus on exploring goddess myths through their art. Frances uses this sort of imagery and women's symbols, and often achieves them through meditation,

I use a lot of symbols in my art work. Some people write. I have always painted, so that is my thing. Usually I see the Goddess as half bird and half woman, and in lots of my paintings I have half bird/half woman things in them.

Although their art is often part of an academic study or intellectual exercise, all witches find their work extremely personal; their images may reflect women's power, but they do not seek to speak for women in general. The images help the artist resolve issues in their own lives, and when asked if their work is political, most witches do not believe it to be so. Marian acknowledges, "I am aware that the effect of the work can be political, as some of the things I am looking at are paralleled in other women's lives."

¹⁶ Marion Maguire has given numerous exhibitions, one of which was entitled 'Women and Spirituality', held 5-16 July 1992 in a Dunedin gallery.

3.3.2 Spiritual Dimensions of Feminist Healing

For the feminist movement, women's bodies have always resonated with political meaning, and struggles for power and control over them exist at this basic level. Feminists argue that traditional healthcare was concentrated in the hands of women who assisted the individual as the 'original healers, the midwives, herbalists, myth-makers, spiritual guides, psychic and death guides,' (Glendinning, 1982:281). Over centuries, the emphasis moved from holistic techniques to allopathic medicine. Glendinning (1982) claimed the change for women was disastrous, as the new medicine shaped by religious and societal attitudes came to view the female body and bodily functions as sick, dirty and in need of alteration. Legitimated from the pulpit, women were barred from universities and an exclusive male medical profession evolved that evicted women from the health care that they had contributed to for so long. "If a woman dare to cure without having studied, she is a Witch and must die," (Ehrenreich and English, 1973:17). Despite the lifting of prohibition laws and winning the right for women to train as doctors, the Western medical profession remains predominantly male and white. Ironically, the majority of users of health care and health care workers are women.

Many women are satisfied with the medical care they receive, but many are not. Women and witches do not deny the invaluable tools of some drugs, surgery and medical technology, and that without them many people would not be alive today, but it is not without concern that feminists criticise some practices and attitudes of the medical profession. Contraceptive technology is an interesting case to note, where the women's sexual freedom has been reasonably guaranteed without the fear of pregnancy. However, there has been much risk and mismanagement associated with it. Feminist criticise the amount of investment that is spent on researching invasive methods of birth control, that is, chemicals or intrauterine devices, with what is spent on barrier methods. Women in many cases have become subjects to prolonged experiments such as in the case of the Pill and the IUD, and have even been prescribed drugs banned elsewhere such as Depo-Provera's use in New Zealand. The costs to women have been high,²¹ and blame is often foisted on the victim. Women are blamed for promiscuity, and therefore the problems become behavioural.

²¹ Infertility, pelvic infections, unwanted pregnancies, ectopic pregnancies, hysterectomies and in some cases, death are among some of the costs to women.

Discontented with the medical profession as a whole, and refusing to see allopathic medicine as the only alternative, many women and witches are reclaiming old techniques or turning to other cultural practices to explore their medicinal properties. Tired of having their reproductive functions controlled, and female health problems trivialised, or told that 'it is all in the mind', feminists are attacking this problem in a number of ways. Bunkle (1992), firstly suggests feminists are fighting on a liberal front, by advocating feminist empiricism. The existing bias would be corrected by moving women into science, and the increased proportion of women in science will change the current emphasis of medicine and medical practices. Secondly, Bunkle (1992) describes feminist standpoint theories, where "...knowledge is determined by the position of the knower," (Bunkle, 1992:63). This would effectively move medicine in the direction of a more patient-centred practice. Finally, Bunkle turns to a post-modern feminist approach that acknowledges 'all meaning is constructed.' New Age medicine uses these approaches, whereby the patient is an active subject in the process of healing, rather "...than a passive recipient of expertise," (Bunkle, 1992:67). Many feminists are interested in redefining patriarchal assumptions about the female body, taking control of its care, and inventing or rediscovering ancient healing practices. As such, "...an unofficial guild of feminist healers has been emerging," (Glendinning, 1982:285). Examples include alternatives; midwifery, death guides, dream interpreters to those involved in Chinese acupuncture and herbalism, homoeopathy, Bach flower remedies, and Lomi Lomi body work from Hawaii.

The implications of the alternative health movement are enormous for witchcraft and witches. Alternative medicines offer a holistic understanding of health that integrates the well-being of the individual on a physical, intellectual, spiritual and social level. As Glendinning states

What all holistic approaches share is that each in its own way, encourages or catalyzes the life energy imbalances in the body, mind and spirit... What they all require is participation in the healing process.
(Glendinning, 1982:291)

It is interesting to note that a number of Wiccan practitioners are involved in alternative medicine as healers and also those seeking to be healed. Jenny feels there is a connection between women taking control over their own bodies and witchcraft. Women, she argues, become involved with caring for themselves and disillusioned with their General Practitioner, and one provides the catalyst for the other. Jenny intuitively points out some obvious connections, for

example crystals, "You can see them in terms of health, or in terms of spirituality."

I think there is a whole area of women's health and spirituality being put together. The increase in homoeopathy and natural therapies are part of people feeling they want more control over what's going on. It is empowering rather than trying to take power away.

There are a significant number of connections between spirituality, witchcraft and alternative health. In particular, this thesis will discuss two areas that witchcraft has links with, natural child birthing and the use of ritual in death. One sphere of significant concern to women and witches alike lies with the reproductive capacity of women and the manufacture of medicalised motherhood by the medical profession. Child bearing, they argue, does not exist in a social and political vacuum, but is socially and politically constructed. Pregnancy, labour and childbirth are normal bodily and in the majority of situations are uncomplicated processes. We have medicines and technologies available for crises. Instead women giving birth become reliant on the judgement of a medical expert and thus dependent on the technology this expert chooses to use. By intervening, motherhood is seen as an experience of illness and powerlessness, instead of relying on women's natural strengths.

Token gestures have been made: nurse-midwives in some hospitals; allowing fathers into the delivery room and new birthing rooms and pools. However, intervention has reached an all time high,²² and as a result many witches and feminists have allied themselves to the alternative health or natural childbirth movements, arguing reproduction should be a source of women's power. Making home births and midwifery available has been a difficult task, but the movement for natural childbirth with midwifery attendance, whereby obstetricians are available for problems requiring emergency medical attention or surgery, has grown. Dunedin Polytechnic began its first course in midwifery in 1992. Within the coven I observed and participated in, one woman was a trained midwife and another, a student in the polytechnic course. With the freedom contraceptive technology has given women to control their fertility and greatly improved nutrition, the alternative child birthing movement and the

²² In Great Britain, inductions are performed in 39 percent of cases. In the United States of America, forty percent of first births are by caesarian section and over ninety percent of babies are born between the day hours of nine to five o'clock (Bunkle, 1988:xiii).

established medical profession should be allied in their aim to provide women with skilled assistance and backup to their child birthing needs.

At the other end of the life cycle, death: another area that the health movement is involved in. Modern medical science uses every medical means to prolong life and controversy often surrounds this process. Death, funerals and mourning are a source of ambivalence, consternation and anxiety in most cultural contexts and in our society *hospices* have been created to provide a humane alternative to public hospitals and nursing homes. Witchcraft has sought to place death in the cycle of life and nature. The focus in witchcraft is on the 'here and now' not on an afterlife and of all Wiccan ideology 'life after death' is the most ambiguous and intensely personal. The majority of witches have no concrete description of an after-life, although some believe in regeneration and/or reincarnation of some sort. Instead emphasis is placed on planning an alternative funeral celebration and the effects of death on the living. Celebrants of alternative rituals of a contemporary spiritual nature recognise that, "The funeral ceremony can provide the time and space to acknowledge, honour and farewell... and affirming the loving bonds and connections with those who carry on living," (Hancock, 1991:31). In addition to alternative funeral celebrations, death guides have been a more acceptable practice through the work of Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

In her work with dying patients, she discovered that if people are encouraged to express, rather than repress, the denial, anger, disappointment and sorrow they feel, they will arrive at a state of peaceful acceptance of their own death. (Glendinning, 1982:287)

In *WomanScript*, independent nurse practitioner, Lorraine Anderson describes her experience of nursing her father through his last two months of life. Her statement suggests a combination of healing and ritual.

On the night before he died, I lit the candles in his room, placed flowers and crystals to create a sacred space. I began my ritual of releasing, asking on his behalf that all those things and people who could be holding him to the Earth - to release him.

(*WomanScript*, 1992:34)

Witches' involvement with the alternative health movement does not lie just with the life cycles. Many will visit homoeopaths or naturopaths to seek remedies for common ailments. By taking care of the body, health care extends to other areas of a person's life. Many witches will meditate, perform yoga and/or

other relaxation techniques. Most witches that I have had contact with continue this extension to their diet - many are vegetarians or vegans. Wisewitch comments, "Many are vegetarian, just over half.... Almost all the women did make a connection between respecting animals and vegetarianism," (Wisewitch,1987:39). For witches to heal themselves is both a spiritual and political act, they are breaking away from the medical establishment to use natural approaches to heal themselves. They are reclaiming integrative ways of healing, many dating back to ancient medical knowledge. For many the connection between a healthy body and spirituality is undeniable. Whether women's spirituality leads women to alternative health, or that women through paying attention to their body and health are introduced to spirituality remains to be explored. It is my thought that the connection is mutually exclusive and both will continue to grow as women take greater control over not only their lives, but their bodies and its processes.

3.4 SUMMARY

Calling oneself a witch is a self-labelling process, a process that involves the power of naming a personal world view and an experience of subsequent conversion. The initial contact with feminist Wiccan is often very dramatic and affects a change in the lives of many women, and the process of naming this experience instils, affirms and empowers the witch. The conversion process reveals that a majority of women who later become witches engage in a development that results in their beliefs and attitudes being in harmony with feminist Wiccan ideology long before they meet with or embark on witchcraft practices. Thus for many witches, it is not a practice of conforming with Witchcraft ideology, but one of 'coming home'. The conversion has a dynamic quality that ensuring that changes in spirituality, ideology, and symbolism continue in an ongoing growth pattern.

Their respective backgrounds subscribe to feminist Wiccan ideology through a numbers of areas: their feminism, their environmental views, and politics (discussed in detail in chapter four). Despite the welcoming attitude of witchcraft to women of all backgrounds, witches are perceived to have a number of sociological similarities. The first presumption lies with their religious profile, where it is assumed their respective childhoods were full of ritualistic church activities. Adler (1986) analysed these perceptions and found that the religious backgrounds of Pagans reflect the national religious profile. Unfortunately, my

sample was too small to make any definitive observations, except to comment on the religious zeal of fourteen witches as teenagers and the subsequent church drop-out rate during their late teen years. Similarly, my observations indicate a number of witches are older and live independently, (whether they are single or have separated from their male partners), but again the sample was too small to suggest that it might reflect a particular trend and not the national profile of the family.

Spirituality, a quality unable to be separated from the everyday day lives of women, has ramifications in other realms. A split in consciousness causes a great deal of anxiety and conflict in the lives of witches and is minimised as much as possible. The application of spirituality to various social and political elements has wide reaching implications, and in particular I have explored the areas of creativity and the alternative health movement. Creativity is encouraged in feminist Wiccan, even at the most basic level of creating a beautiful altar, or ritual. For many, creativity extends beyond the ritual, which can serve as a vehicle not only for creative expression, but also creative inspiration and preparation, to a level of formal art using goddess/female symbolism and imagery. Some feminist artists use ritual as a performance piece in multi-medium art pieces, such as Juliet Batten's *'100 Women Project'*.

Witchcraft has strong historical connections with medicine and women's health and it was only natural that this area should be explored. Women's bodies are a source of contention, a site to be reclaimed from the control of the patriarchal health system. Comparable to their involvement in creativity, witches engage in health care at a variety of levels, from personally exploring herbal remedies, becoming alternative health practitioners or users to revising traditional medical methods and processes, such as child birth, and dying. "My spirituality is my life," is not an idle expression of the zealous Wiccan convert, but rather a code by which witches attempt to live by that pertains to every action and thought.

CHAPTER FOUR

Spirituality and Politics - Gendering the Environment

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Feminist witchcraft has diverged in a different direction from other Neo-pagan groups. These feminists have a history of political activism, that is not commonplace for Neo-pagans, and for many witches the spiritual and political are intimately linked; they regard the separation of the two as an instance of patriarchal dualism. To understand this connection it is important to examine the way in which the spiritual and political are implicitly expressed by witches within an ecological feminist framework. For many witches, their politics and spirituality are linked to nature and are thus involved heavily in the ecological movement. Eco-feminism, a theory that arose from feminist critiques of the 'Deep Ecology' movement, moves beyond the patriarchal confines, and highlights the important connections between women and nature. Despite disparities amongst ritual circles, the majority of witches practise the general eco-feminist philosophies, although few articulate it. In terms of a feminist discourse, witches find themselves articulating different eco-feminist ideas: radical eco-feminism and socialist eco-feminism. Eco-feminism, from a radical perspective, views women as closer to nature because of their biology. Socialist eco-feminists consider this position to be a philosophically dangerous exercise because it essentialises women. Instead, they suggest that women are ideologically constructed as closer to nature. Criticisms have been justly levelled at both perspectives and for eco-feminism to move beyond its limitations a new dialectical feminism needs to be articulated.

Implied within eco-feminist theorising is a connection between theory and action, that is a praxis. Eco-feminism is known by many as a grass roots movement, as opposed to a feminist theory. Political action is a central concern for political feminists. Suspicious of any movement that involves the metaphysical, they dismiss witchcraft and other women-focused spiritualities as a

means of pacification and as generally apolitical. Witches on the other hand, regard their spirituality as political, and have extended the old adage, 'the personal is political' to include the spiritual, that is, 'the personal is political is spiritual.' By using feminist witchcraft as a tool for women-centred political action, witches are not only drawing their strength from an eco-feminist perspective, but in addition they are avoiding political 'burn-out'. However, while political feminists continue to be sceptical, a true dialectical feminism remains unattainable.

4.1 ECOLOGY

4.1.1 The Gaia Philosophy

The Gaia hypothesis is not a new one. The idea that the earth is a self regulatory and living system of communication and control has existed since early times. The term 'Gaia'²³ comes from the ancient Greek Earth Goddess, who brought forth the world and the human race from a 'gaping void', called chaos (Spretnak, 1991:12). First coined by biologists Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock, Gaia is defined,

...as a complex entity involving the Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet. (Lovelock, 1989:11)

Theorists proposing the Gaian philosophy argue that our planet is an intricate and complex entity designed to maintain and nurture life, through biological, chemical and physical cybernetic processes. All the processes that we take for granted, Lovelock (1989) argues, are part of a life sustaining system, and these processes require no human intervention. Life on earth has been set up as one of partnership and cooperation. The air we breathe, is an example of a cybernetic process. The oxygen we as humans require is breathed out by plants; a waste product of photosynthesis. In return non-plant life expires carbon dioxide that is needed in the process of photosynthesis. Hence, plant life and non-plant life are mutually dependent on each other.

²³ Gaia is also known as Ge, from which root the science of geography and geology derive their names (Lovelock, 1989:10).

The Gaia hypothesis has influenced many people and the majority of New Age religions and witches interviewed for this thesis share Lovelock's conclusions, but they make a further connection by linking their beliefs about nature and the earth to their spirituality. The earth is regarded as alive, sacred, active and powerful and worthy of our love and respect. Jenny draws an analogy between her view of the Goddess and the earth,

I see Goddess as to do with being an entity of power, and a completeness and a connection, and all the things that I think Gaia means, about the earth being an organism of its own and we just happen to be there. So we are not the be-all-end-all and that we are a part of it; a connectedness.

Reverence for Mother Earth does not allow for her rape through mining, deforestation and the squandering of natural resources. The connectedness Jenny speaks of implies the need for humans to be sensitive to the rest of the natural world in order to maintain its harmony. Juliet Batten's *100 Women Project* (see section 3.3.1) illustrates the way witches are working in harmony with the environment, manipulating Her (the building of mounds) without the intention of controlling or changing Her (the sea reshaping and reclaiming the witches' work). Similarly, the alternative health movement regards the individual in a holistic sense, where the entirety of the body and its connectedness is used to heal by "...encourag[ing] or catalyz[ing] the life energy to correct imbalances in the body, mind and spirit," (Glendinning, 1982:291).

Eco-feminist Gray points out that humans are, "...unaware of the silent energy moving through these biospherical cycles and maintaining us in life," and that they fail to recognise the crucial fact that humanity is inching closer and closer to ecological destruction (Gray, 1991:20). Nature, it would appear, can live without humans, but we cannot live without it. As Gray states, "The Earth seems to have a cancer, and our species is it," (Gray, 1991:20). The reason lies with the assumption that nature is to be manipulated and controlled for the purpose of human needs and survival. These ideas were developed from attempts to set humans apart from everything else, as supposedly detached Newtonian observers.

Materialist beliefs centre around several fundamental assumptions of our society. Zimmerman (1987) examines these assumptions. *Androcentrism* is one of the largest problems facing ecological analysis, that is, traditionally male-identified beliefs, values, attitudes and experiences are taken as human

characteristics. This masculinist experience negates those attributes traditionally identified as 'female'. Secondly, society gives preferences to male experiences and orders thought through vertical spatial thinking; that is, a *value hierarchy* where that with the greater perceived value is given greater importance. This leads to oppositional *dualisms* that assign a higher value to one polarity, such as the traditional oppositions of nature/culture, nature/humans, feminine/masculine, black/white, evil/good, etc.

The idea that women are associated with nature in opposition to culture was first introduced into contemporary feminist/anthropological discourse by Sherry Ortner (1972). Her hypothesis suggested that in every culture woman is regarded in some degree as inferior to man. Female identification with or symbolism of something that every culture devalues, Ortner reasons is, "...simply that every culture implicitly recognises the distinction between the operation of nature as such and the operation of culture," (Ortner, 1972:11). She concluded that women's association with nature, begins with the body and its reproductive functions, and that these in turn naturally put her in a social role deemed to be lower, and provide her with a different psychic structure. Warren (1987) argues that oppositional dualities give rise to the *logic of domination*, which legitimises and maintains the subordination of an 'inferior' group. Further, Western thought is seen as *atomistic* rather than holistic, in keeping with modern science, and finally it is *abstract* because, "...conflicts about rights are resolved in rationalistic and impersonal terms that ignore both the feelings and the particular traits/needs of the individuals involved (Zimmerman, 1987:29). It is this type of Western scientific rationalist thought that both deep ecologists and feminists are attempting to rectify.

4.1.2 Deep Ecology and the Feminist Critique

A branch of the environmental movement called 'deep ecology' appears to answer a call for a non-hierarchical and anti-domineering approach towards nature. Deep ecology maintains that reform ecologists have not delved deep enough into the crisis facing our planet, and are in fact short-sighted. First coined in the writings of Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, 'deep ecology' favours a more spiritual and ethical approach based on the assumption that we, as humans, are part of an interconnected web of relationships. Eco-feminists maintain that deep ecologists are not radical enough in their approach because they ignore the role patriarchy and androcentrism play in human

development.²⁴ Only by overcoming androcentrism, dualism, hierarchical thinking and atomism can an attempt to live harmoniously with nature be achieved. A truly 'deep' ecology, eco-feminists argue, would go deeper and recognise the explicit connection between male domination of nature and male domination of women. Deep ecology in Ariel Salleh's mind is,

...simply another self-congratulatory reformist move: the transvaluation of values it claims for itself is quite peripheral... the deep ecology movement will not truly happen until men are brave enough to rediscover and love the woman inside themselves.

(Salleh, 1984:344-345)

Eco-feminists accuse deep ecologists of ignoring the link between women and the environment. These connections, they argue, have been universally recognised throughout historical traditions and contemporary cultures.

...we view ourselves as an integral part, almost a representation, of the Earth. The Earth is our mother - a woman. As women are exploited, so is our mother. And we must fight both battles simultaneously.

(Todd, 1982:438)

Eco-feminists argue that women have particular connections with the environment that are different from men. For example, women are the majority of consumers in the Western countries, and the food producers and caretakers in developing countries. The links between consumerism and the environmental desecration are undeniable, and many women are recognising their strength in their roles as a consumer. In developing countries the links have a more material basis: poor peasant and tribal women have typically been responsible for fetching fuel and water and are the main producers of food (Agarwal, 1992:127). Other forms of women's mobilisation focus on issues of miscarriage or foetal damage caused by environmental contamination, and children's health and safety. That women are linked to the environment is indisputable, but differences concerning the nature and cause of this link remain heavily debated. In response to this debate, feminists are attempting to wed feminism and ecology in what appears to be a difficult and controversial marriage.

²⁴ For recent discussions of feminist critiques of ecological writings, see Diamond & Orenstein (1990), Merchant (1980) and Plant (1989).

4.2 ECOLOGY AND FEMINISM: SOME CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Ecology for many women has become a feminist concern. Ecological feminism or eco-feminism provides a framework for this type of analysis. The *Women's Environmental Network* newsletter describes eco-feminism as, "...a convergence of environmental, feminist and women's spirituality movements," (1991:1). The term 'eco-feminism' was first coined in 1974 by French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne, to describe the diverse range of women's efforts to save the earth and the recent development of feminism resulting from the new view of the relationship between women and nature. An eco-feminist framework has been posited by Warren. It is based on the following propositions; (i) the oppression of women and nature are connected, (ii) understanding this connection is paramount to explain the oppression of both women and nature, (iii) feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective, (iv) solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective (Warren, 1987:5). But just as there is not one feminism, there is not one eco-feminism. As Warren states,

For some, eco-feminism is a movement involved in developing non-patriarchal, earth and women based spiritualities. For some, eco-feminism is a movement involved in understanding historical, social and philosophical connections between the dominations of women and nature. For some, ecofeminism is a grassroots political movement that weds the peace, environmental, and women's movements.
(Warren, 1991:64)

While feminists agree that there are important connections between the oppression of women and the subjugation of nature, they disagree as to the nature of those connections. To examine the plausibility of eco-feminism it is important to examine the extent to which the leading feminisms; liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist, position themselves in eco-feminism. Each analysis provides important insights into the oppression of women and nature, but each is not without problems. It is important to note two considerations in respect of eco-feminism. First, not all feminisms have articulated their positions on ecology, so discussions on some are purely hypothetical. Second, discussion is essential of Warren's 'transformative' eco-feminism, which may provide scope beyond theories of liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist feminism (Warren, 1987, 1991).

4.2.1 Liberal and Marxist Eco-feminism

Liberal and Marxist eco-feminism are two feminisms that are not being currently articulated. If they were, their position would be as follows. Liberal feminism roots itself in the early philosophy of liberalism that extends rights to all individuals as autonomous beings. Both the women's movement and the Civil Rights movements extended these ideas for their respective demands. Liberal feminists consider that structural inequalities in the public sphere, that limit women's access to power, prestige and money, should be removed. They further believe the rights of the individual are paramount, but all share the capability to reason. As rational agents each has access to compete on an equal footing to optimise their own interests. Ecological implications are based upon moral and legal grounds. Liberal feminists would thus argue for legal protection for non-human life on the basis of moral consideration (Warren, 1987:10). From a feminist perspective maintenance of the patriarchal framework is sustained through dynamics of androcentrism, hierarchal thinking, and the oppositional dualisms.

Traditional Marxist feminism bases the oppression of women on the rise of capitalism and the sequential class society. The law of 'dialectic materialism' distinguishes humanity from the rest of nature by its ability to transform nature to meet humanity's material needs (Warren, 1987:12). For traditional Marxist feminists, women can overcome their oppression only when they are included in the public realm of production, and their lives achieve economic independence. Nature is viewed to have no value unless subjected to human labour. Thus materialism, as opposed to spiritualism is the driving force of social change. One can only conclude that Marxism is unsuitable as a basis for ecological theorising, when its claims emphasise the use of the natural world for human consumption. Marxist feminism will be hard pressed to overcome the objections that dangerously align women with culture pitted against nature and deny a number of basic human values.

4.2.2 Radical Eco-feminism

Radical feminism roots women's oppression in biological difference. The solution to women's oppression will be attained when women are no longer bounded by the constraints of compulsory child bearing and rearing, and institutionalised heterosexuality. To date eco-feminism has tended to be

associated with radical feminism. Some eco-feminists accept the emphasis on biology uncritically. An extreme form of this position is argued by Ariel Salleh,

Women's monthly fertility cycle, the tiring symbiosis of pregnancy, the wrench of childbirth and the pleasure of suckling an infant, these things already ground women's consciousness in the knowledge of being coterminous with nature. However tacit or unconscious this identity may be for many women... it is nevertheless 'a fact of life'."

(Salleh, 1984:340)

The stance taken by radical eco-feminists over ecology breaks into two camps. One camp applauds the close connection between women and nature, and believe women should ally with nature against men (King, 1981:12). Other radical feminists have taken the opposite position and believe any connection of women to nature can only be a regression, which is bound to reinforce patriarchal sex-role stereotyping (Warren, 1987:14).

The essential difference between the two or more types of radical feminists is whether the woman/nature connection is potentially liberating or simply a rationale for the continued subordination of women.

(King, 1981:12)

Many witches locate themselves in this 'metaphysical-feminist naturalism' (King, 1981:13). They celebrate this connection with nature through their rituals that centre on the Goddess, the moon, nature and the female reproductive system. Radical feminism challenges the traditional 'political versus spiritual' dichotomy, and thus many witches adhere to the radical eco-feminist philosophies. It emphasises different sources of knowledge, such as intuition, feelings, spiritual or mystical experiences, thus bringing the 'politics of women's spirituality' to feminist political theory (Spretnak, 1982:XXX, no 20). Jane emphasises these points,

I don't think we can push women closer to nature. It is a quality women already have. Women give birth, women bleed, women are more into feeling than thinking, they are more into creation than destruction, they are emotive rather than logical, they are more passionate...to focus women on nature, if they are not already there is to just purely open their eyes in the direction they are already looking. We need to push men not only towards nature, but to themselves as nature, that they are not living with nature, they are nature too.

Miriam has similar thoughts,

I think the majority, no I just think it just is, that we are more in tune to our intuitive processes. It has something to do with the childbirth process. I mean, a mother is always awake moments before her baby cries in the night. It is just there, it is just intrinsic and we just do it.

Several criticisms have been made of radical eco-feminism. Firstly, it tends to ignore the historical and material conditions of women's oppression, and, as a result, lacks a theoretical analysis of other types of oppression, such as racism and classism (Warren, 1987:15). Dann (1992) argues, how can Pakeha women oppose themselves to 'war hungry men', when their own connection to violence can be historically found in the colonisation of the indigenous peoples of New Zealand. In addition, radical eco-feminists criticise deep ecologists for writing in a technical-rationalistic style. Salleh for example, accuses deep ecologists of being coloured by patriarchal culture, and that their experience is a masculinist distortion (Salleh, 1984:344). But if this is the case, then surely something analogous can be said about women. Feminists after all, are more than familiar with the difficulties of discovering their own 'voice'. Zimmerman criticises Salleh for her accusatory tone and feels she, "...may limit her audience as much as misogyny," (Zimmerman, 1987:39). Ellen also feels this way,

I think it is a dangerous thing to develop and spread as a philosophy, because it is telling men that, 'this is not worth your while, so don't bother to get involved in this, (witchcraft).' I am very wary of ideas that say women are better at this, women are intrinsically this and men are the opposite. I think men and women are capable of anything.

Secondly, radical eco-feminism situates that women are closer to nature than men, which raises doubts about its conceptual framework (Warren, 1987:15). To suggest that women are closer to nature suggests an essentialist or biological difference between men and women. Positioning women in this way only perpetuates the very oppositional, dualistic thinking that feminists criticise in patriarchy. As Warren (1987) accurately points out, even posing a theory based upon the question, "Are women closer to nature than men?" legitimises the assumption of the nature/culture dualism. Felicity reiterates this position,

I am really sick of that kind of dichotomy. I think everyone is connected to nature, and everyone is connected with culture, because we all participate in both. It is a weird kind of sexist old archaic labelling.

Cathy also levels similar criticisms when she states, "I think feminists or any women to categorise women as naturally this and that are using the same patriarchal arguments." It could be argued that until radical eco-feminists can overcome dualistic thinking their argument is conceptually flawed. Further, it remains to be seen whether radical eco-feminism is liberating or simply another excuse to subordinate women.

4.2.3 Socialist Eco-feminism

Socialist feminism combines the insights of radical and Marxist feminism, making production and reproduction the base for women's oppression. Their solution to women's oppression lies in the abolition of both capitalism and patriarchy. They further argue that humans are historically created through the relationship between biology, physical environment and culture. Women's oppression is neither solely historical nor solely biological; it is both. Socialist eco-feminists argue that the nature/culture dualism is a false one, "...a patriarchal ideological construct which is then used to maintain gender hierarchy," (Agarwal, 1992:121). Merchant (1980) provides an historical analysis of pre-modern Europe and the rise of capitalism. She argues, that with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the market, nature, always associated with the female, was reconceived as an object of human dominance. Thus socialist eco-feminists accept the view that women are closer to nature, but believe it is ideologically constructed because of their biology. A number of witches believe this to be true. Both Cathy and Rachel respectively espouse these views,

Women have always been acquainted as being closer to nature, which I don't believe. Humans are close to nature. It is unfortunate that it has become genderised, so that women and nature become such a negative combination. Nature has to be reclaimed and women have to be reclaimed with it.

I don't think women are more nurturing, more caring intrinsically than men. I think they are given lots of opportunities to develop that side of their nature, but I have met nurturing and caring men, just as I have met hard and unfeeling women.

Dann (1992) picks up these arguments, by stating that the problems lies with simplistic definitions of 'woman' and 'nature.' She suggests that definitions change over time, and feels some feminists "...fail to see that these concepts are merely human constructs, and thus are led to a simplistic analysis

and political practice," (Dann, 1992:342). Bodily processes, she argues, are subject to historical and physical conditions. She states,

How natural is it to menstruate? In previous centuries women began to menstruate much later than do today's well-fed Western women. They more frequently suppressed menstruation through pregnancy and lactation, and died before menopause. These are facts of history, not of Nature. (Dann, 1992:344)

The definition of nature has always served social consequences, and objects assigned the role of 'natural', have been subjected to exploitation. Past history has shown this type of analysis extended to human beings, where large populations of people were forced into slavery, converted to the 'true way' or colonised. The definition of nature, "...is derived primarily from personal experience, and the political and social goals of the definers," (Dann, 1992:344). One witch, Carol, has similar ideas,

Women don't have a choice in that, (birth, reproductive functions). I mean, if women had a choice there are quite a few of them that I know wouldn't want to give birth and wouldn't want to menstruate. So no, I don't think that can be used as an argument really. I think it is a social construction; social engineering.

Socialist eco-feminism presents the most comprehensive theoretical framework for linking the oppression of women and women's relationship to nature. However, many socialist feminists have yet to articulate their position. Conceptual problems derive from assumptions of economic determinism. Although combining radical with Marxist philosophies, socialist feminism is suspicious of the way radical feminist conceptualise nature in spiritual or sex-specific terms. Until production is reconceptualised, socialist eco-feminism is in danger of aligning, "...women with culture in culture's ongoing struggle with nature," (King, 1981:13).

4.2.4 Feminism and Beyond

Many eco-feminists have advanced an alternative feminist framework; Dann calls it 'holistic dialectics', Argawal 'feminist environmentalism', Warren 'transformative feminism', and King 'dialectic feminism' (Dann, 1992, Agarwal, 1992, Warren, 1987, 1991, King, 1981). All feel an integrative and transformative theory needs to be developed. Dann is quick to point out that concepts such as 'woman' and 'nature' are conceived by human definition and are accordingly

able to be manipulated. As she suggests, feminist theory has enough trouble discerning exactly what 'female', 'feminine', or 'feminist' values are. Therefore a unifying theory will have to take account of the diversity of goals within both the women's and ecological movements.

Warren (1987, 1992) lists six criteria for what she views as an integrative transformative feminism. First, she feels traditional feminism needs to move beyond just the concerns of women's oppression and to recognise the interconnections between all the forms of oppression: racism, sexism, classism, ecological destruction, and Third World oppression. Socialist feminism offers an opening by connecting sexism, racism and classism. By incorporating the advances made by socialist, Black and Third World feminists, a more expansive and complete concept of feminism can be articulated. For contemporary feminist criticism to bring about changes in our understandings of oppression, it must not fall into the trap of essentialising women as a greater source of superior values. As Zimmerman states,

Women want and need to validate the fact that there is another mode of experience. Such validation is important, even if the experience is distorted by patriarchy.... this validation makes possible the next stage of development: the search not simply for authentic female experience, but for authentic human experience.

(Zimmerman, 1987:41)

The second point in Warren's transformative feminism is that it must provide a place for the diversity of women's experiences. Postmodern feminism has contributed greatly to this area. The 'politics of difference' does not attempt to articulate one feminist theory, or a woman's voice. Rather, by using the terms holistic, transformative or dialectic the idea of 'process' is encapsulated. Thirdly, a transformative feminism would show how forms of oppression are all tied to the same patriarchal conceptual framework. Women need to form alliances, otherwise the yet to be articulated transformative feminism will degenerate like past forms of feminism, into a primarily white middle-class movement. Fourthly, it would involve a rethinking of what it means to be human, especially in connection with non-human nature. The fifth issue is one of revaluing and recasting traditional ethical concerns, and would include 'non-hierarchical models of morality and conflict resolution', (Warren, 1991:65). And finally, these ideas will lead to challenging the current bias in technology, research and analysis. Only those preserving life, she argues should be employed. While many women and witches grasp the need for a new feminism that will

incorporate these ideas, a 'dialectical feminism' has yet to be articulated. It will remain unachievable as long as political feminists (the most able to articulate such an analysis) deny the connection between the spiritual and the political.

4.3 PRAXIS - THEORY AND PRACTICE?

4.3.1 The Politics of Feminist Spirituality

Feminist spirituality or witchcraft is based on a vision of self autonomy and a struggle for social and political change. The editors of *Woman of Power*, an American magazine devoted to feminism, spirituality and politics make these links clear in their opening statement of philosophy:

We provide a forum for the studies of feminism, spirituality and politics. It is our view that these studies coalesce in their considerations of power. Through feminism we evolve perspectives on the power of the feminine, with spirituality we deepen understanding of our power, and with politics we use power in our lives.

When considering spirituality and political action, two opposing groups of feminist thought exist. The first genre are usually practitioners of feminist spirituality or witchcraft and feel it essential to expand the political agenda to include spirituality. Fundamental to this debate lies the definition of 'politics', or 'political'. Politics for a long time has been seen as a fight for economic and legal reform in the public arena. The women's movement began to understand that the 'personal is political' through the consciousness raising process. Through realisation of the similarities occurring in their respective lives, many women have grasped an understanding of the oppressive structures placed upon them.

By accepting that the personal is political, witches assume that personal growth will lead to reformation at a societal level. But while individual focus will bring about modifications on a personal level, a collective focus is needed to bring about societal changes. Alterations must be made at both a personal and collective level. Women involved in the spirituality movement assert that their spirituality and politics are inseparable, and that to focus exclusively on one is to reproduce the patriarchal dualistic split; spiritual versus political. Witches agree that focus restricted to the spiritual will ignore political analysis. In a similar vein, Spretnak sums up the feeling among witches, "We simply consider

inadequate any political vision that fails to incorporate the spiritual dimensions of life," (Spretnak, 1982:XXX, no20). As Cathy points out,

If you divorce spirituality from the physical then you are only perpetuating the orthodox Christian view.... the whole point of Wicca is to unify, to come back to the whole.

Renee also feels this way,

Yes, it [spirituality] is tied to politics, because it is part of a holistic outlook, isn't it? You can't divorce spirituality from politics, or it would be a better society if they weren't divorced, shall we say! Ideally politics should have a spiritual balance.

Alice argues that many witches experience a split between the personal and political. She uses the example of a woman who was involved in the Peace and Anti-Nuclear movement and described her experience like this,

I joined a coven... changed my job and became a witch. Since then I am seldom stressed and I don't rush. I don't make speeches in public. Apart from my two groups of wonderful women I do not belong to any political group.
(Alice, 1989:228)

It is for these reasons that other feminists feel uncomfortable with the concept of religion, even if it is women-centred or feminist in orientation and language. Historically, religions have typically acquired a political agenda to varying degrees. In contemporary society, an enormous amount of time, money and energy is focused on issues ranging from contraception, homosexuality, abortion to involvement in war. However, political feminists are concerned that feminist spirituality will leave women passive and regard the movement as apolitical. Their analysis, which is essentially Marxist, has shown how religion postpones the development of a rational set of political commitments. As one woman stated, "...people who are busy looking at crystals in their navels haven't time to be politically active," (McLeod, 1989:27). Many of the New Age religions emphasise individuality and hence share assumptions with advocates of the free market. The strongest critics of spirituality have three objections: first, all spiritualities and religion are oppressive, secondly, that spirituality is escapist, a withdrawal into mysticism, and finally, it is a wasteful use of woman-time and woman-energy (Inglehart, 1982:406).

The debate about participation in political activities is central to New Zealand witchcraft. Many feminists share the view of Pat Rosier that

"...exploring/changing one's spiritual dimensions through the recreation of goddess myths is seen as individual, apolitical, avoiding the realities of the material world," (Rosier, 1987:46). Her views reflect the *Broadsheet* (New Zealand's feminist magazine) collective, who make a point of refusing to publish articles on women's spirituality.²⁵ Rosier states,

I reject this, it doesn't make any difference whether it's a male or female god, it's all part of the same search for solutions outside of the world we live in. It may make individual women feel better, but it doesn't change anything. (Rosier, 1987:46)

Ruth, an ex-member of a coven, describes her initial connections with witchcraft and later what she regards as an apolitical movement. Rachel got involved with witchcraft for its possible political action:

I felt it was possible to weave the world back together, by celebrating women's rituals and that would be important and it could have some meaning and some use in the political world.

She continues by stating,

We have to loosen up a little and allow difference to come back. I think it is good to critique things. A little bit of academic rigour doesn't hurt. I find I am capable of rational and intuitive thought and I don't find it difficult to be able to do both. A lot of us think we should go draw spirals in the sand and not think about any of this, because it is boy's stuff.

Involvement in witchcraft is considered by some to be a political action. Jenny goes so far as to say, "I see acknowledgment of women's spirituality as valid and just existing is quite an important political thing." Some witches wish to publicly acknowledge their involvement and others, usually due to their standing in the community, do not wish to make their spirituality open. As Ellen explains, this type of conflict led to their group split up,

You always have a bit of conflict. For example, you get people who want to spread the word and have open rituals and put notices up everywhere, invite everyone along, and have articles in the paper. Then you have the others ones, who are at the other end of the pole, who like to have it as very private and support group ideal, where you just meet with a small few. In the end she [a disgruntled member]

²⁵ There are very few exceptions. Two articles on women's spirituality were published in the May 1990 issue of *Broadsheet*.

took it further and with several others left us behind and struck fearlessly into the world.

For many this is not an issue of politics, but rather one of fear of persecution. Until witchcraft becomes an acceptable religious alternative, many witches will not use it as the basis of their political action.

4.3.2 How do Witches' Lives Reflect Their Politics?

If we accept that the 'personal is political is spiritual' then witches reflect their politics on a personal level through ritual. Rituals allow for the psychological and spiritual growth that many witches believe is necessary to make changes in their own lives. On a collective level, contemporary eco-feminist action is diverse and growing in expression worldwide. Groups of women are acting together to save the earth and continued existence of life on earth. Consider the following examples: Since the 1970s the Chipko Movement in India has received support and attention as women have banded together to defend the forests, by hugging trees to protect them from the chainsaws; it was Professor Wangari Maathai of Kenya who initiated Africa's Green Belt rescue operation, with women planting more than seven million trees (Abzug, 1991:29); in the United States women have been vigorously campaigning against toxic waste dumping since Lois Gibb, 'an ordinary housewife' in upstate New York exposed the chemical poisoning of her community; in Los Angeles, when the city council decided to build an incinerator to burn waste in a poor, residential Black and Hispanic community, the women there said, "No"; some ten years ago, women in the United Kingdom set up a women's peace camp at Greenham Common, the site of an American Military base. This protest found its way to New Zealand in 1983, when Greenham Common women sent out an appeal to women around the world. In New Zealand, 15,000 women marched in Auckland, and other town centres saw similar protests (Dann, 1992:340); during the 1980s women of the Pacific region protested against nuclear testing, and Maori women linked with other indigenous groups for this demonstration.

Not only are women mobilising, they are also using women-devised techniques in their protests. The activist-based spirituality of feminist witch Starhawk has inspired radical, but non-violent action worldwide. In the summer of 1981, Starhawk and other members from within the Californian Pagan community descended on the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, which had been constructed close to an earthquake fault in an ecologically sensitive area of

the Californian Coast (Starhawk, 1982a). Their blockade was done in the form of a ritual, which has since become the basis of action policy and her type of activism has spread. In November 1980, the Women's Pentagon Action protested against militarism, using ritual, music, theatre, and singing for performances. Women from Vermont wove a web across one of the main entrances, blocked by guards. Each time it was ripped down, they simply rebuilt it. Eventually they were arrested (Foglia & Wolffberg, 1982:459).

In New Zealand women protesting at the Waihopai Valley Spy base in 1988 and 1989 used rituals, chants and music (Alice, 1992:147). In Wellington, responding to the Greenham Common request, women stuck flowers, photos of children, banners and other objects on the Defence Headquarters (Dann, 1992:340). In Dunedin, as part of the welcome to women completing the training programme at the Women's Refuge, a ritual was performed. I received a call from a distressed friend, who felt she and some other women needed assistance in dealing with a male voyeur, who was becoming bolder leaving messages for them and taking items of clothing off their clothesline. Under New Zealand's current laws the police are unable to take action unless a crime has been committed. The women, themselves were tired of feeling vulnerable and helpless, and wished to take positive action. I provided them with the resource material to perform a ritual to cleanse their rooms and lay a boundary for their space. I have since been assured he has not returned. Witches are using ritual in their jobs, their creative expression, their own healing and in endless other aspects of their lives (discussed in detail in Chapter three). Renee who was a member of the Values party performed a ritual at one of the party conferences,

It was very similar to what I would have organised for women. They were a group that I knew very well, and I had an idea of their spiritual beliefs, because Value's philosophy is basically my spiritual belief as well.

Many women feel that by bringing their spiritual beliefs into their politics, a source of inspiration and strength is provided to protect them from political 'burn out'. Wiccan rituals, meditations and even group bonding create new psychological patterns of positivities and affirmation of personal goals and ideals. They argue that by focusing only on the negative, one is inviting burn-out and disillusionment. Similarly, by focusing only on the extent of damage to our environment, or the plight of the poor, or women's oppression, the sense of injustice becomes overwhelming. Starhawk advocates a workable ethic based on a simple message given by a friend, "I know I can't clean it all up, but I believe in

picking up the garbage that you find in your path," (Starhawk, 1982a:422). Rage is an entirely appropriate response to injustice, but for many would be activists it can become exhausting and depressing. Witches feel that positive thought attracts positive solutions, and both meditation and ritual can help fortify and add fuel to the political actions of the movement (Spretnak, 1982:570).

4.4 SUMMARY

Most feminist witches feel the spiritual and political can be successfully combined. Few, however, actually intellectualise their politics. Grounded in their own belief of what is right and wrong, these women have little use for feminist theorising. The majority feel very strongly about the environment, women's oppression and other social injustices. Their own knowledge and spirituality affirm the earth is in danger, and women are oppressed. As women, they feel a strong connection with nature. To articulate a theoretical framework for their thoughts, most witches philosophise an eco-feminist stance, because 'deep ecology' continues to ignore the important link between women and nature. The concern for women and nature falls into two categories, radical and socialist eco-feminism. As discussed, each of these respective feminist perspectives has analytic value and limitations. The answer lies in developing a dialectical feminism that not only provides a position for feminism and environmentalism, but also a discourse for other forms of oppression.

Because few witches intellectualise their stance, analysis must be developed by political feminists, but this group of feminists remain sceptical of combining the spiritual and political dimensions. Their analysis informs them that religion pacifies women and in general controls any political dissent. Material gains, they argue, will only be made with a sense of material reality. Given their position, a 'dialectical feminism' will not develop until political feminists realise the potential of the feminist spirituality movement. Its potential lies in the woman-centred, non-violent political action, and the strength to avoid political 'burn out' by retreating, when necessary, into spirituality. However, the future of eco-feminism as a new dialectic feminism lies in the hands of those who can articulate it most clearly - political feminists. One can only conclude that eco-feminism will develop faster as a grass roots political movement than as a feminist analytical framework.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT'S IN STORE?: THE WICCAN FUTURE

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the various explanations given for the religious explosion that appeared from the 1960s onwards. These are issues that witchcraft as a movement will have to confront and deal with. Some future considerations are outlined: the ability of witchcraft to critique itself and its future direction, the potential to bridge the ideological differences between women regardless of background, the intricacies of groups dynamics, the future generation of witches and lastly the impact of male spirituality on both men in general, male witchcraft, and feminist spirituality. These concerns have been articulated by some witches, and from my own observations. It is not my intention to negate witchcraft, but rather point out difficulties it may face in the future.

The growth in new religions is a source of curiosity and in some cases concern for scholars, the media, mainstream churches and the public. Witchcraft has been labelled as the fastest growing religion in America, and falls into the category of the new religious movements. Academic response to the growth of the new religious movements has been varied: some view it as a regression or retreat, (Kroeber, 1952, Prince, 1974, Harris 1974, 1981), others as a innovative response to the technocracy of contemporary society, (Roszak, 1969, Tiryakian, 1974, Whitehead, 1974) and still others feel it will be short-lived as we move into a secular age, (Geering, 1983, Wilson, 1976). Witchcraft, I feel will flourish, as it embodies many of the secular ideals of the creative arts, the alternative health, peace, green, the women's and other social movements.

The first issue voiced by a minority of witches is the current inability of the Wiccan movement to critique itself. This is a problem common to many movements in their infant stages. My own observations indicate that as a movement strengthens and membership increases it will engage in critical discourse. Witchcraft has the added advantage of encouraging an open

environment with its inherent flexibility. Wicca's future contains a vision of binding women of all backgrounds in spite of their ideological differences, a failure made by the early women's liberation movement which was unable to realise its original aims. If however, Wicca follows in the same footsteps as the women's movement, it will attract white middle-class women, who are able to benefit from and use it to their advantage. Current observations indicate that pakeha middle-class women of a "...particular and not uncommon temperamental cast - not people with similar socio-economic profiles," (Luhmann, 1989:100), are attracted to witchcraft, as well as a large group of lesbian women. Small group dynamics could be a source of potential problems, power imbalances need to be recognised and addressed, or they will lie dormant before causing conflicts and in some cases group break ups.

The issues surrounding the children of witches are equally ambiguous, and cause undue concern for the public that reads stories of child and ritual abuse through sensational journalism. For witches, the concerns for their children delve into future gender relations, and the possible restructuring of the Wiccan traditions. Finally, as there is little or no literature focusing on the growth in male spirituality, concern is voiced regarding the involvement of men in what has traditionally been for New Zealand, a feminist and lesbian based spirituality. Witchcraft's vision for the future lies with a society where men and women have equal roles and mutual respect, and yet there is evidence to show feminist witches are denying men access to spiritual resources.

5.1 THE RESURGENCE OF RELIGION: IS THERE A FUTURE?

To account for the current resurgence of occultism in the popular culture of America by means of any monistic psychological or sociological theory is to oversimplify the reality of the many movements.
(Truzzi, 1974:252)

Terms such as new religions, new religious movements, cults, and the occult have been used interchangeably and in widely differing contexts. The phrase 'new religious movements' is used by social scientists as a 'catch all' umbrella term for the distinctive religious groups that emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s in the United States of America. It applies not only to the deviations within mainstream religions, but also to the human consciousness movements of a questionably religious kind. Fascination with the spiritual extends to four main categories: those in the Asian traditions, the quasi-religious groups, the revival or esoteric groups, and those of the Western tradition (Beckford, 1987:391). The new

religious movements are not new in the sense that they derive from new traditions, but rather in their reaction to contemporary ways of life. Upon examination, it is clear the new religious movements are mere derivatives of ancient traditions.

The majority of people greet this resurgence with explanations conforming to their individual beliefs and personal experiences. Those religions with the most publicity principally carry the most ambiguity, and distortions circulate easily about most occult groups. Academic considerations are equally varied. Adler (1986) systematically places theories that attempt to explain the explosion of new religious movements into several categories: first, those theories that view this resurgence as an escapist, regressive or retreatist movement, second, theories that see this growth as a positive reaction to Western thought or the limitation of scientific technology, and third, theories that do not fit easily into either category (Adler, 1986:355).

Theorists who fall into the first category posit arguments that range from viewing it in purely psychological terms to that of an economic determinist model. On a purely simple level, religious members are portrayed as neurotic, and unable to mature and interact at a societal level. Donovan (1983) shows how this type of analysis has been transmitted into the everyday lives of secular society. Pluralism, he argues, only "tolerates and advocates religious diversity so long, that is, as religions are domesticated, according to a common set of values, a shared view of what counts as needful for the good of all," (Donovan, 1983:231). When practices of some religions come into conflict with social expectations they are scrutinised as "...outrageous, or at least irritating, inviting unfavourable comment," (Donovan, 1983:232). Despite the prevalence of this type of analysis, which derives from early anthropological works that placed village shamans and spiritualists as psychotics in a unique and acceptable societal role (Kroeber, 1952), there are a number of psychological interpretations that deserve comment. Prince (1974) wrote that contemporary youth were seeking mystical and religious experiences as "a self-imposed *rite de passage*," (Prince, 1974:255). As an alternative to its negative implication, the term 'regression' is softened; these people are not regressing but rather are engaging in a kind of 'cocoon work', in a society that lacks model images of adults.

Writing from an economic-determinist position, Marvin Harris interprets the new religious movements to constitute "...a misunderstood attempt to save

America's dream of worldly progress by magical and supernatural means," (Harris, 1981:141). Refuting Bellah's argument that the movements were "...a crisis of meaning, a religious crisis," (Bellah, 1976:339), Harris insists that opposite occurred, whereby religious searching is for "...solutions to America's unsolved economic and social problems," (Harris, 1981:145). In earlier writing, Harris (1974) asserts primarily a political argument. Launching an attack on the advocates of the counter-culture, in his final chapter, 'The Return of the Witch', Harris posits,

...our modern witch blunts and befuddles the forces of dissent...Like the rest of the counter-culture, it postpones the development of a rational set of political commitments. And that is why it is so popular among the more affluent segments of our population. That is why the witch has returned.
(Harris, 1974:257-8)

On the other side of the coin lie those theorists who debate the positive steps taken by people attempting to regain some sense of control in a technocratic world that has alienated humanity. The main proponent of this theorising is Theodore Roszak. The people involved in the new religious movements are regarded as rebels and innovators, and Roszak, in particular, perceives the current religious resurgence as a protest against the scientific world view, and technocratic ethic. The critique of this system, Roszak argues, "...is pushed even further when the counter culture begins to explore the modes of non-intellective consciousness," (Roszak, 1969:207). He proceeds to state,

Yet, if there is to be an alternative to the technocracy, there must be an appeal from this reductive rationality which objective consciousness dictates. This, so I have argued, is the primary project of our counter culture...
(Roszak, 1969:240)

Others, such as Tiryakian, believe the occult provides new dynamic images for many artistic and political movements. The occult, he has written, functions as a 'seedbed', a source of change and innovation, both historically and in the present. Although regarded as marginal, and at odds with the modernisation process, the occult is often the source of new paradigms, that provide the impetus for the "build-ups", and "break-downs" of history (Tiryakian, 1974:3). Another 'positivist' to encourage the new religious resurgence is Harriet Whitehead. She argues that Western tradition is guilty of "...creating an experiential void in established religion, and a frustrating 'gap' between the accepted modes of comprehending the universe and man's [sic] place in it," (Whitehead, 1974:586). The aim of occultism is to search and explore, and "...reunite the separate pieces

of the intellectual, emotional and apprehensional jig-saw puzzle..." (Whitehead, 1974:587).

Adler's (1986) final category, those theories that do not fit comfortably in either sphere, include several ideas that are worth noting. Moody (1974) studied the Church of the Trapezoid, a branch of Anton La Vey's Church of Satan. Moody feels that institutions such as the one he observed serve two purposes: to socialise the individual where traditional therapy had failed, and thus, second, to bring these people closer to an acceptable societal norm. It is an "...attempt by various people to regain a sense of control over their environment and their lives," (Moody, 1974:381). Marcello Truzzi (1974) suggests that the occult revival is largely a demystification process. Occultists, he argues, are playful with feared ideas, and usually seek scientific validation for their claims, whereby "...much of yesterday's occultism has become part of today's science," (Truzzi, 1974:245).

There is clearly no consensus to explain the resurgence of religions and witchcraft. Some theorists even doubt whether such a growth or religious explosion exists. Proponents of the secular society believe religions are a thing of the past, and predict the future to be secular. Lloyd Geering is among the best known proponents of such a secular future. New Zealand, he argues, "...is increasingly disengaging itself from the religious structures of the past," (Geering, 1983:176), and the transition to a secular society, he argues, 'is ultimately irreversible.' Wilson (1976) has taken this argument further, and suggests that today's new religions are trivialised and commodified into consumer items and designer religions, hence indicating the level of secularisation. However, other scholars accept that secularisation provides a context for the growth of religious experimentation, (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985), and these theorists predict a future of religious revival and innovation.

Levels of active participation in religion have been dropping and New Zealand provides no exception. Census data indicates both a drop in the active membership of the mainstream churches, and a large growth in those who have 'no religion' (Hammond, 1992:22). Donovan warns that "...interpreting such results is notoriously difficult and prone to wild oversimplifications," (Donovan, 1990:256). Quantification inevitably smooths over differences among small religious groups. This is misleading, as the power behind minority religious groups lies with their being different, not their numerical significance. To conclude, mainstream religions are losing their active membership, and the new

religions appear to be gaining in strength, although their numbers are relatively small in comparison to the growing number of people with 'no religion'. The future is uncertain for many of them, and witchcraft is no less vulnerable. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, witches, eco-feminists and a minority of men are looking for an alternative framework to the often misused scientific technocracy of contemporary society. The goddess, eco-feminism and witchcraft provide that alternative and will continue to do so until needs change.

5.2 WHERE TO FROM HERE?

5.2.1 Self Critique

Witchcraft prides itself on its flexible and non-authoritarian nature and that the environment provided for women to voice their concerns is both open and nurturing. In contrast to most other religious movements, witchcraft allows and encourages conditions for critical debate. Similar to other social and political movements witchcraft is not beyond engaging in self criticism, however criticism can be very damaging for any movement at its inception and early beginnings. The reluctance to engage in critical discourse can be evidenced in both the early New Zealand Women's Liberation Movement and the Maori renaissance. The experience of the women's movement, in its infant years of the early 1970s, was that any criticism was viewed as anti-feminist. As the movement grew differences between Maori, working class, and lesbian women were acknowledged. A similar process was experienced by the Maori renaissance. Maoritanga is an idea/concept that has come under increasing criticism from Maori and non-Maori alike. The movement, strong enough to withstand criticism by its own people, is now directing its energies towards the differences between tribes, and the inability of Maoritanga to speak for all. In the past criticisms of this kind were viewed by many as anti-Maori.

My observations of witchcraft point to a similar trend. The process of critical discourse is problematic, despite the implicit freedom within Wicca to critique its own movement, subsequent changes and statements to the contrary of the status quo. Witches are hesitant to critique their own doctrines, assumptions and practices, because to do so will appear anti-Wiccan, and depending on where their critique lies, either anti-feminist or anti-nature. When asked to identify possible shortcomings, many witches both quickly and defensively assured me no such concerns existed and if they did, they could be ironed out very easily.

Rachel, a former member of a lesbian coven, was the only woman interviewed who felt this was a problem but simultaneously felt she had little right to criticise because she has left Wicca,

I'm being cynical now. Politically correct politics is about all you can afford to have in a lesbian community. It was very, very censorious. I feel it really stifles debate. It is very heavy political muscle if you can't say anything.

Rachel had a lot of misgivings about voicing these concerns,

I feel a little hesitant to talk about that, because lesbians need to have a strong community and a strong sense of community in order to survive. But I do think it should be said, especially in an academic work, because it is a reality I feel, and I think it needs to be addressed.

Although Rachel was part of a lesbian community and coven, application can be made to witchcraft. Witchcraft is currently a small and vulnerable movement in New Zealand. If the trends remain constant with increased participation and networking, Wicca will increase its debate on various issues, in particular the link between women and nature and feminist theory.

5.2.2 The Ability to Bridge the Gaps: Singing Across the Space

As Pakeha women reclaim their spiritual traditions, Maori women sustain their own heritage, both adding to the spiritual nourishment of Aotearoa. At some time in the future we may begin to sing across the space that lies between. (Batten, 1990:14)

The 'politics of difference' is at the forefront of the women's movement in Aotearoa during the early 1990s. Through the mid 1970s and early 1980s lesbian, Maori and working class women articulated their concerns that the women's movement was not serving their respective goals and was (and still is) predominantly a white middle-class movement. On a more practical level middle-class feminists are attempting to understand their position as privileged through post-modern discourse. Spirituality has the potential to bind women together despite differences between them and feminist Wicca seeks a common humanity beyond the ideology of difference. Theoretically, the only group of women unable to bond are those who identify themselves within and articulate an anti-feminist stance. Spirituality and ritual play a key role in the understanding of ideological difference, particularly ethnic difference, and the differences of other ethnic spiritualities. A forum is provided where women of

all backgrounds can meet on mutual ground. Whether this will provide the catalyst for mutual understanding remains to be seen.

Ritual courses also teach us physical ease with women whom we would not ordinarily meet. Ages at rituals I have attended have ranged from Liz at 10 to Irene at 70. Lesbian [sic] separatists mix with heterosexuals. Everyone seems to enjoy this.

(McLaren, 1988:51)

Spirituality also contains the ability of bringing perceptions of 'others' into Pakeha culture. While feminist witchcraft holds appeal for lesbian women, for obvious reasons of an accepting all-female environment, there is a distinct lack of involvement of working class and Maori women. In terms of Maori spirituality, Pakeha feminists involved in feminist spirituality seek out mutual appropriations. The names of Maori Gods and Goddesses are used interchangeably with other mythologies, and some Maori customs are being employed by some witches, such as burying an infant's placenta. But just how mutual these graftings are is a matter of contention among witches.

As Pakeha we live in a spiritually bereft culture... It is sad that the response to this recognition is so often not to address Pakeha failings and work towards wholeness and a vision of a just society, but to act as a leech on Maori spirituality, stealing its energy for ourselves, just as we have stolen their land, their life, their rights.

(Batten, 1988:55-56)

The majority of witches interviewed held similar feelings. Felicity is but one example,

I wouldn't like to take on Maori spirituality to be my spirituality, because I am not a Maori, and I feel it is too easy to go in and cash in on somebody else's stuff. I feel like Pakeha people have taken enough of theirs, their lands, taken heaps of stuff, and I'm not about to take their culture or their spirituality and pretend that it is mine.

The lack of attraction of Wicca for Maori women is best expressed by Donna Awatere in her lecture at Auckland University in 1985,

When I was very young, a book by Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, had a big impact on me. White people were once, like Maori people, rooted in nature. You, too, once moved to her rhythms before you got all clever and decided man [sic] was greater than nature and cut yourselves and progressively the rest of us off from spiritual communion with her.

(cited in McLaren, 1988:52)

While most witches have a lot of admiration, respect and more than a little envy for Maori spirituality, by far the majority do not feel comfortable claiming it as their own, or combining it with their own. This does not mean the myths and rituals of taha Maori cannot be acknowledged. Juliet Batten's (1988) work remains a source of inspiration and resource material that attempts to speak from a bicultural experience. To have a culturally sensitive feminist spirituality, Pakeha feminists must connect with their own spirituality, and for some women this involves tracing their roots back to their European past. Carol, who is heavily influenced by her Celtic roots, feels, "I can go back to my own tribal roots, which answer my needs, but I respect the Maori spirituality, but I don't wish to imitate them, because I have no need." Paula has similar ideas,

I think it is very important to have a sense of background, to know where you are from. Hopefully it will make us understand Maori people a little better, like witches have been persecuted and Maori people have been colonised. I hope there can be some dialogue between the two.

5.2.3 Group Dynamics

Although some witches prefer solitary practice, by far the majority form or join a coven, and traditionally membership of these covens is thirteen, but as with all Wiccan practices, there are exceptions. A certain percentage of witches feel more comfortable meeting in groups of four or five, but this will depend on the nature and philosophy of the group. The coven works, not for any reason such as magical powers contained in the number thirteen, but rather because it is small and comfortable. A similar exercise was exploited by the women's liberation movement with the use of consciousness raising groups, a useful analytical tool and organisational method. It built solidarity between women, and drew on women's personal knowledge and experiences.

While providing a useful and beneficial tool for both witchcraft and the women's movement, small group dynamics can be the source of a number of problems. These concerns in particular were raised by Rachel who has since left Wicca and lay with the conflict and sometimes eventual disintegration and break up of covens. Having experienced the pain and trauma of a group break up, Rachel felt in some cases the suffering was not worth the risk of being involved. A Dunedin coven split during 1992, and when I interviewed some of these witches, the pain I found was very exposed and obvious. On the other hand Renee was involved in two group break ups, and with one of them she felt, "It

finished beautifully, very happily." It is important to realise that because witchcraft is so decentralised, and each coven is autonomous, each develops its own identity. It is easy to talk of a coven's particular tradition, or the rituals it practises, but difficult to analyse the differences between groups, because of their respective characters. Because decentralism and individualism are the basis of witchcraft and overshadow any 'tradition' or 'ritual', the dissolution of groups will vary. In many situations women will turn to individual or solitary practices, that stemmed when earlier covens were forced to dissolve.

The priority of politics over spirituality or the Craft itself is cited by Rachel as the reason for group termination. In addition Rachel feels power imbalances exist in the circle, that are chosen to be ignored. That denial, she argues, can cause dissension:

An argument I have heard so often is, "Look we are all equal here. This is our special circle, we've created this safety." We are not all equal. We come from all different backgrounds, with different abilities and especially abilities at speaking out. There are group dynamics, and not every person is having the same amount of empowerment within a group.

Renee, when discussing the group break-ups she has been part of, admits the reason for the second group break up is similar: "There was a lot of difficulty, and a lot of pain, and in fact on looking on it now I think there was some power issues that probably weren't addressed." Rachel levelled a second criticism against Wiccan in terms of small group dynamics. Rachel feels that women use the Wicca groups as a place of psychotherapy, similar to the way that feminist groups have been used in the past.

Women, not all women, but women often join these groups because they have problems and are using the group as a cover from which they can work through them. I just don't think I have met a group that has avoided it. I think it is full of needy, needy women.

When conflict occurs between the various political agendas of women and the idea of the coven being used as a self help group for women, Rachel feels that Wicca stands little chance of survival. She concludes,

I think this is what destroys Wicca all the time. Women are not meeting together to practise their craft. I think they are meeting together to sort out these other problems, or to be politically correct, or to gain some stature, you know.

The link between healing the person and politics was explored in chapter three. Rachel was the only witch interviewed to suggest these issues could cause conflict. As concluded in chapter three, most witches feel healing is a strong part of spirituality and do not anticipate the conflict of interests given above. Thus some of the issues discussed may cause conflict and damage for women - which will depend on the character of the coven and women concerned.

5.2.4 The Children of Witches

The issues surrounding the children of witches raise ambiguous and contradictory feelings, such as whether to raise them in the Wiccan tradition, and what traditions will they carry into the next generation? Will the children restructure the Wiccan tradition? Many witches have visions of how they want their children, and in particular sons, to relate in a society that has differing values. The issues these women face concerning their children's future are tied to the women's personal aspirations of an ideal future. In rare unanimity, all witches wish for a future devoid of gender power imbalances and attempt to instil these ideals in their children, by seeing themselves as the catalysts of a quiet revolution. However, when questioned on rituals for children and the future of their children's spirituality, many witches were quick to differentiate between their male and female children. The reason they gave was that as long as a patriarchal system existed, it was unfair to expect their sons to remain untouched by societal values. As Frances points out,

I don't want my boys to grow up to be soldiers, or all that stuff...but if I don't give them an alternative [witchcraft], well then you know, because they are already partly conditioned. Even though I try really hard to bring them up non-sexist, they are still very male. It is out there, on the TV, at school, it's everywhere. They are being conditioned into males in this society, and I find that really hard.

While wishing their sons to retain their nurturing and sensitive sides and to achieve respect and equality in their relationships with women, some witches expressed concern for the need for their sons to have a positive image of themselves as males. They express hope that their sons will not enlist what society gives them, that is, male power, but as Jenny points out, most mothers want their sons to be accepted and survive in the world. She also has reservations about the socialisation of males,

...and bringing up boys to, it becomes complicated because it is hard to know what you can actually expect from them, where you can expect

them to be anything but themselves, whatever that happens to be. And who's to say this is the part you can socialise out of them, or maybe that is the part that is really them, and it is really strong for them, and if you try to socialise it out of them, you are squashing who they really are.

Most witches with children will practice ritual with their children and aim to furnish them with an alternative world view. Many rituals have incorporated male aspects for their sons' benefit. Raising children in the Wiccan tradition does not occur at a formal level, where children are initiated into the coven. In a current affairs programme, screened on New Zealand television, the viewer is introduced to Lori Cabot, High Priestess of the witches of Salem, USA.²⁶ The report meanders through the history of the Salem burnings and the local minister despairing for the souls that have been given to the Devil. Finally, the minister alerts the viewer to the dreadful harm involving the children. The scene switches suddenly and pans in on the circle inducting children of Wiccan members into the coven. Lori's words, "I anoint you with the energy of the Goddess, the chalice of will. We bring the energies to this child." The group replies, "So mote it be." The child is slowly passed around the circle, as each member gives a gift to the child. On this particular occasion the child is given the gift of integrity. When the reporter comments that people would find the parents crazy for bringing up their daughter as a witch, the proud mother simply answers, "There's a lot the world doesn't know."

Not only are children inducted into the coven, comparable to a Christian christening, but they also attend a class at Lori Cabot's temple (her living room). She calls the lesson Witchcraft One, and proceeds to explain magic to her class of a dozen young children. The next scene pans a room of four people engaged in a meditation. We learn this is a family, Tony and Marie and their two daughters Ann Marie (8 years of age), and Melissa (21 years of age), who we are told does her own tattoos. When asked about the impact of witchcraft on their children's lives, Tony replies that it has enabled them to be open with each other, and they have something common that they share, something by the way, that is not forced on any of them. As noted with other areas of Witchcraft, there is no formalised teaching or induction of children of witches in New Zealand. The closest ritual I am aware of was a Goddess blessing, described by Noreen Penny in *WomanScript*. The Children's Festival (December 1991) at Waikuku was "... a

²⁶ The current affairs programme was a fifteen minute presentation, "Devil's Playground", from TV3's *60 Minutes*, screened on New Zealand television.

childrens' [sic] festival with a floral wheel, a fire for the sun-goddess, blessings for some older children, dancing and a party," (Penny, 1992:30).

The success of a religion is customarily achieved through formalisation. This is often quantified to include the number of followers, ministers or other leaders, and an established place of worship. Although in the United States of America two such officially sanctioned feminist churches exist, witchcraft does not necessarily seek to be acknowledged as an organised church. Similar to other small cult groups, many Wiccan members feel to 'spread the word', or any other attempt to assert themselves, will be their own undoing. Their power, they argue, lies with the small groups in which they meet. Groups or covens are localised and do not seek to spread 'the word' nationally or internationally. It is of concern to some women, whether the children of witches will allow the structure to remain so loose and flexible. Ellen expresses these concerns,

When you get a new thing, and people only join it because they are in line with the beliefs, therefore it is relatively harmonious at the start. But when you get the second generation, then you start to get people who are in it because their relations are in it. Religion tends to be full of sweet, pure and kind people in the first generation, because they joined it voluntarily, but then later on they will have to deal with the general mass of the population as it gets bigger and that's when you get your problems.

In contrast to this view, many witches feel the whole basis of Witchcraft lies in the doctrine of flexibility, and to change this will be to lose the entity of the entire religion. Miriam responds in this way,

If they change the structure of Wicca, or Goddess Craft, change in structure comes from the mental, the logical structuring, which has got limitations, so therefore it is the opposite to freedom, which has got limitations... I firmly feel that it will come from a feeling level, an intuitive level and it is flexible.

In summary, most witches hope for their utopia vision, and wish their children to share in it. Miriam expresses this hope when questioned about her daughter's future,

They are going to be the matriarchy. Here we all are, lots of women saying 'We are the daughters of the Goddess, we are the Goddess.' So it is a similar sort of thing. I feel that our girls coming up, our wee maidens will come into their motherhood just in their full power, if they are nurtured in the correct manner.

5.3 THE GROWTH OF MALE SPIRITUALITY

5.3.1 Men's Place in the Wiccan Movement

Evidence suggests that a parallel to the growing women's spirituality exists among men, that is, a small but growing spiritual movement has sprung up among men. The question that many Neo-pagan men are asking is, "What is our role within this movement?" Adler suggests that British based traditions of Wicca are not exploring this issue, as much of the Craft practises dualistic aspects. The god and goddess are given equal roles (Adler, 1986:338). The men's spirituality movement identifies with the feminist craft in its critique of patriarchal ideas of religion. Many view spirituality as a way for men, both homosexual and heterosexual, to create new definitions of masculinity or masculinities. There is every indication that male spirituality is linked to the men's movement, their aims being similar in many aspects. Smith describes the men's movement as

...about personal growth, getting in touch with the man within, reconnecting with other men, including fathers, and being more confident with one's own masculinity and expressing it without violence, domination and control. (Smith, 1992:39)

Men, she argues, must also take a step further and recognise societal structures that oppress people, and the ways different people are oppressed by diverse means.

While many men acknowledge their privileges and the power imbalances, they are now becoming angry with the lack of support from the feminist movement. American journalist Don Shewey notes,

The word male is more commonly a prefix for domination, violence and chauvinistic pig. Having heard those words for years, flung like spears by angry feminists, many men have gotten used to ducking them, backing away from asserting their maleness, lest it be labelled machismo, effectively neutering themselves so as not to be identified with the enemies of women. (cited in O'Hare, 1992:16).

Although ideas about men's roles have been examined in depth by intellectuals,²⁷ the man speaking most publicly about these questions is the poet

²⁷ See Carrigan et. al. (1985) for a review of literature on masculinity.

Robert Bly. Bly's argument suggests that although men have begun to acknowledge their feminine characteristics, they have lost their masculinity in the process. His solution is to gather men together on all male weekend retreats to search and locate the beast within, to turn them from 'Yoghurt Eaters into Wild Men' (Faludi, 1992:339).

Within the Pagan community many men are awakening to their need to explore these realms. Within the American and English based Neo-pagan movement, many men (and some women) in the more mainstream groups are upset by the growth of feminist covens. Until the 1970s the Neo-pagan revival was a movement for both men and women. Adler distinguishes between what she terms 'feminist covens' and 'traditional covens' (Adler, 1986:206). Stemming from Western magical traditions, the Pagan movement has a fairly rigid set of symbols and rituals that are governed by gender polarity. Symbols long associated with the 'male' such as air, fire, sword and wand are balanced by their 'female' opposite of water, earth, cup and pentacle (Adler 1986:218). The feminist covens adopt both sets of symbols and traits, male and female, thus nullifying the gender polarity. In traditional covens men and women have come to the Craft or Neo-paganism as an alternative religion. They are upset at the way feminist covens purposively reject some of the principles, norms, and structures of the modern craft. Feminists have stated that women are witches by right of the fact that they are women and are initiated along the lines of repeating, "I am a witch" three times and thinking about it. Jane expresses some of these views,

The word witch for me is a word of power, it's a word of women. I don't believe there are male witches, they can call themselves something else, if they like. But I claim witch as a word for women. I may be being incredibly sexist here, but there we are, so be it.

It is obvious that these ideas easily come into conflict with notions of formal training, priesthoods and hierarchical structures. Jenny who objected to the word Wiccan explains her objections,

My understanding of the Wiccan tradition is a certain way of performing, or I tend to think of it like Druidic, and more English. More with initiation, with priestesses and that kind of Horned God thing, that duality. That thing about a god and goddess and the way they involve the male parts is not where I want to be. I like the word witch, and I think it's about me being a witch.

As stated in chapter one, the New Zealand pagan movement is predominantly feminist. Of the women interviewed only one had ever practised rituals with

men. Her (Renee's) response was, "I have done a few rituals with men. They went very well, to my surprise." The development of Witchcraft in New Zealand is different from other countries. Evidence points to the Neo-pagan movement developing initially, and the feminist spirituality movement splitting from it. However, development in New Zealand has been primarily within the feminist covens. This raises the questions, 'Is this a transitory separation?' and 'Does the future lie with mixed covens as evidenced overseas?'

5.3.2 A Transitory Separation?

The extent of male involvement in spirituality in New Zealand operates on a very low level. Woman-based spirituality is still very strong. Juliet Batten, a New Zealand witch, notes in her book,

A time may come for connection with men who are making their own changes; it has not yet arrived, but may not be too far away. For me, much work remains to be done in this area, and when the time is ripe I will write rituals using positive male figures as well as the goddesses. Meanwhile, it is time for men to do their own exploration and to heal their own psychic wounds. (Batten, 1988:55)

Most witches were unanimous in their replies to the question of the possibility of practising with men. The problem, they argued, was not with men per se, but rather women felt they themselves were not ready to practise with men until they had achieved a comfortable balance in their own lives. Many witches were recovering from the effects of patriarchy and felt to admit men into the group was not a step they should be taking. A typical reply is voiced by Jane,

No, I'm not ready to practise with men. I will be one day, but I'm not now. Why? Because my need is to have male-free space. I will practise Wiccan rites with men when I feel I have achieved a greater balance for myself.

Many women express a fear to practise with men, because it will change the nature of their ritual and practices. Some went so far as to describe a scenario of men joining a group, and no matter how well intentioned, slowly taking over. The reason, declared one witch (Ellen),

It would certainly be a difficult problem, because men do tend to take control, they have been brought up to take control of things, and they will inevitably end up trying to take control, with the best possible motivations.

They envisage the groups becoming more formalised, hierarchical and the focus changing from women-based ideas to those suggested by the men. Due to these fears, it seems likely that until women who practise as witches become strong enough in their spirituality and gain their own autonomy, they will not wish to practice with men, in fear of losing what little they have gained. Most witches feel eventually the craft will open up to men as they become more interested, and the majority feel it will change the type of rituals they do. Obviously a larger role than already exists will have to be given to men.

5.3.3 Access Denied or Just not Interested?

When first examining the lack of male involvement in witchcraft, I was eager to explore the notion that either men were denied access to witchcraft because it is so woman-centred, or that they were not interested. Exploring the first idea, I was concerned with the message that men would receive regarding the Goddess. After all, witches view the Goddess as central to their spirituality simply because she is female. Many of the witches held similar concerns for male involvement. Cathy has these feelings,

I don't know whether men can identify with the Goddess. I read something in a trashy book, where a woman was defending her religion, and she said that she worshipped a Goddess. When the guy said, "...that is absurd", she replied, "...only to a man. It is perfectly natural for a woman." So I thought there is probably some truth in that, that for women to worship a Goddess is natural, and for men to worship the God is also natural.

And when asked whether men had access, Renee replied, "In New Zealand? No, I think it is quite difficult for them. I think it is really hard to go into something that is so female." This idea of a Goddess was of little concern to male witches and pagans interviewed. Male witches all acknowledged the Goddess, but not exclusively. Ben, when asked about the structure of gender with his deity, described it as,

It is all about the Goddess isn't it? There is a female at the top. But I think there is lots of male smaller Gods underneath. It is equal. I don't think that one is better than the other. I mean everyone has got male and female traits in them. If you try suppress one, the other one tries to suppress it.

Andrew's structure was slightly different, but again the Goddess was a central part:

...There is an absolute, which is neither sex, which is one, and from that proceeds the all father and all mother. So depending upon which God and Goddess the individual choose to worship, and it can be a range. It doesn't have to be one.

So for male witches, this issue lies not so much in the Goddess transcending sexuality or gender, but in her position being balanced by male counterparts. The Goddess is still seen in a feminine light of being the creator, nurturer, bringer of life, etc. Their God is not a patriarchal one. In most cases men think of their Pagan God as Pan, the Horned God, or a consort of the Goddess. Many men can identify with the Goddess as a lover, a partner, a mother, or anything.

My other concern was with the gynocentric nature of covens in New Zealand. Men have responded to this differently. Some feel that the pendulum has swung too far, and the male or 'God' aspects of witchcraft have been neglected. This could certainly be the case when the feminist witch, Z. Budapest, has occasionally declared Witchcraft to be "Wimmin's Religion", a religion closed to men (cited in Adler, 1986:178). Ben feels this way, and is disappointed that women are claiming witchcraft as their own,

I always like to think of witchcraft as open to both men and women, but now you can get feminist covens, and I think you can get gay covens, which gets too specialised. It is not exclusively for females, is it? They are sort of twisting it, taking it to themselves, and claiming that it is for females only, which it not true, not true at all.

Men find all-female covens disconcerting because Neo-paganism and witchcraft in particular allow women to participate on equal footing, as strong, independent, powerful people; Why, therefore they question, is there a need for a separatist spirituality? Neo-paganism has always been less authoritarian, less dogmatic and less dominated by male ideas and male leaders than other religions, or quasi religious movements. Feminist witches still feel Neo-paganism is too many of these things. Most witches expressed wariness over the idea of a High Priestess, even in feminist covens, because it implied hierarchy. This may be an issue of labelling only: my observations have shown that in some covens a woman or several women may end up leading a coven, for the simple reason that they have more experience. This was the case in the development of the coven I participated in. Renee felt something similar occurred with the Cones coven in Auckland, where Juliet Batten, the most knowledgeable, was looked to for advice and guidance. The label, High Priestess,

would never be applied. Similarly, another witch described a friend's experience in an Australian coven,

She had to find a mate that was going to be her lover and a spiritual kind of partner, and they do have High Priestesses, and what she says is the final decision about their everything. This woman feels fine about that, but I couldn't do it; like I would feel suppressed once again, by hierarchy.

Some male witches have no problem supporting women's spirituality, and support women's rights to be lesbians, and celebrate a separatist spirituality. Andrew is one such witch:

I think it is perfectly valid that women reclaim their spirituality and they work together to do that. I don't see that as necessarily excluding men. I think it is very valid, and it is a growth that is really important. I am looking forward equally to the homosexual magics.²⁸

In all fairness, some Neo-pagan men have taken strong stands to support the women's movement, and the right to a celebrate separatist spirituality. The criticism that most feminist witches level against other Neo-pagan religions is the way women are still essentialised, that is, any woman who does not want to have children and nurture is somehow incomplete. Cathy is angered by these ideas which she feels are still prevalent in our society and among New Agers,

...the New Age philosophy is supposed to be liberating, but women are still the passive ones, still the dependent ones, still the quiet ones, barefoot, long hair and flowing dresses, and looking after and nourishing other people's needs, which is just bullshit.

The other problem, whether men are just not interested in Witchcraft is a two-fold issue. On the one hand, I think we are dealing with a culture in which the New Zealand male culture is very strongly masculine, in the sense that the traits prescribed to masculinity do not lend themselves to Neo-pagan or Wiccan aims. On the other hand, my observations of those men interested in spiritual aspects suggest that men are attracted to different kinds of magic, rather than that of the feminist Wiccan tradition. Addressing the first problem is an endless debate on the issue of gender that may never be resolved. As one male witch (Andrew) pointed out,

²⁸ Adler describes an American male spirituality group; the radical faeries, who consist of gay men (Adler, 1986:341-348).

I think we are a long way from the British covens, where most female and male covens are well and truly established. I think the difficulty here is that we have a small population. I find the males here are really conservative, few seem to want to be involved in discovering their own spirituality. At the moment males are still sucked into the whole power, competitiveness thing. They are not into analysing the roots of power. It is too comfortable for them.

Addressing the second observation, men appear to be interested in what is called higher magics. Ritual magic has been emphasised as a system of spiritual development, that is a lot more structured, formalised, and hierarchical. Many Neo-pagan groups have incorporated the use of the qabalah, which is seen as a universal language, "...through which people from different disciplines can communicate and a map which any mystical and magical system can be grafted," (Crowley, 1989:41). Their magical rites are highly scripted and rigid in performance. Initiation is one elaborate rite that is rarely performed in feminist witchcraft. Although all who are initiated become priests and priestesses, with the power to perform their own rituals, feminist witches argue that status is still conferred upon its adherents and this they argue is hierarchical. In addition higher status can be conferred beyond the first initiation, commonly "...the difference is one of 'degree', a quantitative difference which recognizes greater competence, rather than a qualitative one," (Crowley, 1989:10). Crowley (1989) leads her discussion on Wicca through a historical development of modern day magic. She explores the early eighteenth and nineteenth century magical groups, such as the Order of the Golden Dawn, and the Freemasons. From these groups developed the many occult groups. Wiccan groups are in turn a branch of the many magical Neo-pagan groups, the more renowned ones named after their founders, for example the Gardnerian and Alexandrian traditions. Some of the more popular areas to emerge are the Druidic priesthood of the Celtic and Greek traditions, the mysteries cults from an Egyptian tradition and shamanism. Feminist witchcraft is a mere branch within the Wiccan tradition and feminists show very little interest in exploring other areas of the Neo-pagan tradition. One witch (Renee) explained this difference,

I don't particularly consider myself a Wiccan. I would call mine a feminist spirituality. Have you read Gerald Gardner? Well, he was a Wiccan, but he wasn't a feminist.

It appears logical that men would be attracted to other areas of Wicca and Neo-paganism. Andrew explains what he views as the differences between Wicca and other magics,

Wicca has been really responsible for developing my sense that the spiritual is related to the earth. The trouble with high magicians is that they have their head in the clouds and they don't have their feet on the earth. The Wiccan sense of balance is where magic needs to be; in balance with one's livelihood, one's family life and one's self development. I know of students of high magic...who are lusting so much for their spiritual development that they seem to do it to the detriment of those in their surroundings. I like the Wiccan holism.

5.4 SUMMARY

There is no consensus on the future of religion in contemporary Western society. Many academics view the resurgence of religious fervour as a regression, 'cocooning' or escape from worldly concerns. Roszak and others regard the members of these religions as rebellious innovators and associate religious growth with periods of the most rapid, intense and wide-ranging social changes. Secularisation has been suggested by some scholars. It would be a mistake to infer that changes in religion are merely responses to changes in other aspects of society, for in fact the relationships between them are highly complex. As the Aquarian Age approaches, witches and other Neo-pagans argue that their spirituality will provide a holistic framework and provide an alternative world view for future generations.

Witchcraft's decentralised nature and the loosely constructed network should guarantee its existence in the future, but is likely to inhibit major growth. In order to survive in what appears to be an increasingly changing environment, Witchcraft will need to remain adaptable, flexible and able to engage in critical discourse. At present because the movement is small and prefers anonymity, this requirement has been largely ignored. Witches are very quick to defend their spirituality with as much zeal as other religious zealots. However there is no church authority to speak on their behalf. The future may be quite different with the impact of the children of witches. Witches as parents do not formally induct their children into covens; instead children are introduced to witchcraft practices through rituals at the discretion of the parents. Attempts may be made by the next generation of witches to formalise the Wiccan tradition into a legitimate church authority and/or as evidenced in other religions the spawning of various Wiccan offspring.

The Wiccan vision of society is one without power inequalities of gender, race, class, religion etc. Feminist spirituality has gone to great lengths to welcome

women of all ideologically different backgrounds, but remains stand-offish with regard to male spirituality in New Zealand. Despite the inherent contradictions the Wiccan practice remains strongly feminist and separatist. Given time, mixed covens should emerge, but in doing so the content of rituals will have to change to accommodate for male inclusion. I predict that women will not allow men into their covens but rather will form additional new mixed covens. New Zealand men, however, are slow to want involvement and this may be for two reasons: the strongly male character of New Zealand's culture, and the interest in other types of magic.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion: Finding an Alternative World View

Marise Wipani, the actress portraying the character of Morgana in television's *Shortland Street*, commented on her role, "It is a great role. I loved playing a witch and was interested to learn the storyline is *actually true* [my italics]," (Rule, 1993:11). Her role and the subsequent article in *Woman's Day*, did little to remove perceptions of the negative stereotyping of witches and in fact provided reinforcement of it for a lot of television viewers. The aim of this thesis was to record, understand and analyse contemporary practices of witchcraft in New Zealand, extrapolated from data gained in the Otago and Canterbury regions. Due to the lack of space, one disadvantage of analysing the movement in general has meant directing the focus of this research away from the women themselves and as a result their individual stories have not been heard in any great detail. Another problem I faced was the small size of my sample and the source of location which has meant speculating on particular trends that may merely reflect national ones, and in contrast generalisations on New Zealand witchcraft that may have been regional differences.

Before I began this research I was at odds as to whether or not witches deserved their misplaced image. As time passed it became imperative that this thesis serve to remove the often negative and at best misunderstood imaging of the modern witch. In an increasingly secular and rational society, much confusion and trepidation exists in people's attitudes towards witches and witchcraft, and misinformed programmes such as *Shortland Street* only serve to strengthen these images, despite their well intentioned aims. Modern witchcraft is a spontaneously growing development encompassed by a much larger Neo-pagan movement and in fact general resurgence of a phenomenon known as the 'New Religious Movement'. The movement in New Zealand is in its infancy, is probably no older than fifteen years, and has developed as a predominantly feminist and lesbian based spirituality. The progression of New Zealand witchcraft deviates from development in other Western countries, where mainstream Neo-pagan groups initiated the revival, and an off-branch of

feminist spirituality appeared simultaneously with the Women's Liberation Movement. The feminist form of Neo-paganism has been transmitted into New Zealand, which has inhibited the growth of other Pagan spiritualities.

Yolanda Wisewitch (1987) concluded that as long as patriarchal religions continue to suppress women's religious expression, there will always exist the need for other alternatives such as witchcraft or women's spiritualities. Her conclusions, although correct are too simplistic; for example the implication that witchcraft is an effect of patriarchal religions. Witchcraft is more than a religion, a means for women to express themselves religiously; it is a way of life, hence the adamant use by witches of the word 'spirituality' to describe their practices. This becomes obvious when the religious side of witchcraft is a secondary factor in the conversion process. The majority of witches have an ideology that is harmonious with or predisposing to witchcraft beliefs long before they meet and connect with it. The majority are feminist in ideology and are ecologically aware, harbouring angry and frustrated emotions toward the current ecological destruction and the continued oppression of women. Their world view challenges the norms of society, but is compatible with Wiccan goals; the sacrality of the feminine and nature.

Changes occur in their ability to name their experience, and to actively participate in their experience through ritual and eco-feminist premises. The ability to name and self label empowers women, and so the labels 'witch' and 'witchcraft' are of central importance in establishing an understanding of the contemporary resurgence and practice of witchcraft. The word witch is a chaotic picture of images that reaches back into the ancient past of the Old European goddess religion and the horrific history of the burnings. Other labels such as 'Greenie' or 'femie' are not all encompassing, and thus do not provide the holistic framework witches are seeking. Therefore, not only does witchcraft hold political consequences for the patriarchal churches, by challenging it as an earth-based and gynocentric spirituality, but it holds political implications for social and psychological consequences.

I was interested to place witchcraft into a broader feminist model, and eco-feminism is not only appropriate, but is likely to have developed from Wiccan beliefs. Eco-feminism is a number of things; an earth-based feminist spirituality, a feminist theory that makes important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature, and a description for the grass roots

mobilisation of women activists using women-devised pacifist protest strategies. Witches engage in eco-feminism at all three levels; their spirituality is obvious through the use of rituals that focus on women and nature, manifested in the Goddess, healing, creativity and celebration, and empowerment and self affirmation through the use of magic. Ritual provides other benefits; the activist strategies of feminist witch Starhawk, and the regeneration of energy for political burn out and exhaustion. Few witches, however, articulate their feminism, which leaves eco-feminism, a promising but often ignored feminist discourse, open for harsh criticism from political feminists who deplore the connection between spirituality and politics. Spirituality, they argue is a withdrawal into mysticism and a waste of women-time and energy, as it does not seek real world solutions.

However, the areas that witches fail to realise their Wiccan aims, will likely become potential problems for the future. Seeking an alternative world view can leave women with split consciousness, although all witches attempt to modify any personal conflict. Contradiction exists with their attitudes to male involvement, technology, group dynamics and Maori spirituality, where their responses to these areas are sometimes contrary to the future they envision. Their vision is based upon a society devoid of power imbalances, whether they exist between men and women, humanity and nature, between women and between different ethnic peoples. Witchcraft in New Zealand is primarily a Pakeha feminist and lesbian spiritual practice, that does not exclude different groups of people, but can result in denying them access to its resources. These areas deserve further consideration, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Questions remain unanswered as to why Maori women are not attracted to witchcraft. The answer may lie with their own culture's spiritual practice, that nourishes them spiritually, or alternately Pakeha feminist witchcraft may not be answering the needs of Maori women because of ethnic differences. The same problem exists for other groups of women, such as the lack of attraction for young and working class women, a phenomenon the women's movement is also experiencing and in fact may provide a partial explanation when one explores the strong links that exist between the two movements.

To conclude, witchcraft is not a withdrawal or retreat by people who are frightened and bewildered by societal change, nor does it conform in behaviour with general social expectations and is thus perceived not play the pluralist game properly. Instead witchcraft reflects the need for people, women in particular, to

search for an alternative world view to the prevailing bureaucratic technocracy, and to reaffirm their position in a world from which they feel alienated. Their consciousness directly seeks to challenge or counter balance the current world view, in a way that is compatible with Wiccan ideology. Witchcraft provides women (and men) with the resources and techniques (ritual, magic, the Goddess and an activist strategy) to live their ideology and achieve their future goals.

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