School of Media Communication and Culture
Murdoch University

The New Age and Indigenous Spirituality:
Searching for the sacred

Claire Farley
30322833

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Australian Indigenous Studies, Murdoch University.

June, 2010
DECLARATION

I, Claire Farley, declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Signed: .......................... .........................................................

Full name: Claire Farley

Student number: 30322833

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the New Age spiritual movement in its relationship with Indigenous cultures. Indigenous spiritual traditions have been appropriated to support relevant New Age theories. It critiques New Age perceptions of Indigenous cultures as misinformed and argues this misinformation is proliferated through certain New Age practices. It argues that the New Age can achieve a sustaining, earth-based spiritual practice without resorting to the appropriation of Indigenous traditions. Neo-paganism holds many of the qualities that New Agers seek in Indigenous traditions and is a potential alternative avenue of spiritual solace to the appropriation of Indigenous culture. The embodiment of New Age goals can be understood within the context of environmental ethics philosophies. Alternative festivals that operate with a spiritual ethic are explored as evidence that the New Age can and in some areas, does operate in a positive, life-affirming manner. Importantly, the thesis argues that re-interpretation of Indigenous culture by the New Age is neither welcome nor necessary.
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Gratitude is a perspective I attempt to adopt in every circumstance. Completing this degree has given me ample opportunity to express my gratitude to the Universe.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past fifty or so years, the New Age and Neo-pagan spiritual movements have incorporated many aspects of Indigenous spiritualities into their beliefs and practices. This thesis examines cases in which this incorporation culminates in a negative experience, which does not benefit Indigenous people and their cultures today. I argue that a mutually satisfactory relationship encompassing spiritual understanding can exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Historically, most people have ascribed to one or other formal religion\(^1\); today, a growing number of people are moving away from formal religions and are looking for spiritual nourishment that is more appropriate to postmodern sensitivities. Popular spiritual paths include atheism, agnosticism, and religions that were not previously as accessible, especially religions from Asia and the Middle East. Two intersecting paths, which transcend many religious boundaries, are the New Age movement and neo-paganism.

The New Age borrows many spiritual ideas from ancient cultures and applies them to contemporary Occidental life. Wade Clark Roof argues:

Religious symbols, teachings, and practices are easily “disembedded,” that is, lifted out of one cultural setting, and “re-embedded” into another. [In this process] ...depth to any tradition is often lost, the result being thin layers of cultural and religious meaning. \(^2\)

This practice of “disembedding” spiritual traditions is problematic, both for the consumer of the eclectic spirituality that emerges and for the cultures from which they have been appropriated. Many within the New Age spiritual movement admire Indigenous cultures and attempt to incorporate aspects of Indigenous spiritualities into their lives despite lacking the history and connection to that spirituality which Aboriginal people themselves hold.

There are many cases where a member of the New Age has inappropriately utilised spiritual symbols from an Indigenous culture\(^3,4,5\); I discuss examples throughout the thesis. Such behaviour by New Agers is not respectful to Indigenous people.

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Stafford is the President of the Board of Directors of the Cross Cultural Shamanism Network that publishes the widely distributed magazine Shaman’s drum. Shaman’s drum advocates neo-shamanism that appropriates aspects of Native cultures including vision quests, use of ‘medicine plants’ and sweat lodges.

\(^5\) Ibid. Starhawk. p6-16. Starhawk critiques the use of the word ‘shaman’ in a neo-pagan sense. She is concerned that the utilisation of psychedelic plants by neo-shamans to summon spiritual insights is out of context and less meaningful than in traditional societies. She advocates the use of other techniques to attain ecstatic consciousness such as meditation.
Indigenous people regard these New Age followers, who are generally part of the European coloniser class in North America and Australia\textsuperscript{6}, as disrespectful to their heritage and traditions\textsuperscript{7}. I argue that these practices undermine the integrity of the New Age spiritual movement.

In order for Indigenous people to feel comfortable in granting non-Indigenous people access to a deeper comprehension of the lands we live in, there must be a balanced exchange. Indigenous people in the Americas, Australia and elsewhere continue to struggle for survival. Land rights are continuing to be restricted in some nations\textsuperscript{8,9}, and are yet to be recognised in others\textsuperscript{10}. Lack of access and rights to homelands is central


The New Age movement is primarily based in the USA in the middle class elite of all age groups; contains many followers who have rejected Christian religion; and is predominantly made up of women.


\textsuperscript{8} Fay D, James D. Chapter one: Restoring what was ours. In: The rights and wrongs of land restitution: restoring what was ours. Taylor and Francis e-Library; 2008. p1-24. The Mexican government began a policy of ending land restitution in the 1990s in favour of allotting Indigenous people private properties.


“Tasmania is the only State in Australia not to have enacted some form of Aboriginal land rights legislation.”
to Indigenous peoples being able to practice their traditional religions as they are inextricably tied to the land in which they were formed\textsuperscript{11}. These issues need to be addressed; personal spiritual growth can be combined with practical political action to create the change we want to see in the world.

As the fields, which I cover in this thesis, are many and the room to discuss them is limited, I draw on many authors rather than a few key writers. Some of the writers I acknowledge as having had a significant influence on my work include Vine Deloria, Jr for Indigenous critiques of the New Age; Monica Sjöö, Starhawk, Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis on neo-paganism; Karen Warren and Carol Adams on ecofeminist theory; and Graham St John for critique of alternative festival culture.

I begin this thesis by providing an overview of the New Age with a discussion of its aim to save the planet through individual self-enlightenment. I discuss the New Age’s connections with astrological movements in the development of spiritual evolution theory and provide examples of some key texts that have progressed this theory.

In the second chapter, I argue that some members of the New Age reinforce myths about Indigenous people through misappropriation of Aboriginal spirituality. I discuss how this attempt to embody Native spiritual traditions is related to the disconnection that

many people in Occidental society feel between self and nature. I argue that this motivation drives non-Indigenous people who are misinformed about Aboriginal spirituality to proliferate incorrect stereotypes. I discuss how some such people in the New Age movement have misused the term 'shaman', which both adds to stereotypes and is misleading for those who are customers of mercenary spiritual leaders. I argue that Native people who profit from the sale of their spiritual traditions abuse and disrespect their cultures by doing so.

My third chapter focuses on neo-paganism as potentially providing a sustaining earth-based spirituality as a viable alternative to the inauthentic borrowing from other cultures that occurs in some aspects of the New Age. I discuss aims and motivations of neo-paganism and explore how it has come to be in its present forms. I explain how contemporary neo-pagan communities are actively engaging in nourishing, relevant forms of spiritual practice.

In the fourth and final chapter, I argue that environmental ethics are an example of how the New Age operates in the world. Environmental ethics can provide a forum for examining our spiritual and physical relationships with the rest of nature, informing how we address the current ecological and spiritual crises. I describe several New Age counter-culture festivals that attempt to embody environmental ethics principles. I argue that these events initiate dialogue between Native and non-Native people on spirituality and social issues. I conclude that it is possible for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
to share a spiritual dialogue, albeit one that respects the diverse collective cultural and individual histories we have each experienced; and that it is necessary to do so in order to work together to circumvent ecological crisis.
CHAPTER 1: THE NEW AGE

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that the New Age spiritual movement aims to improve the state of the planet through individual and collective enlightenment. I explain what the movement embodies and its motivations. I give a brief account of some of the history and key texts of the New Age as necessary for a contextual understanding of the relationship between the New Age and concern for the future of the planet.

What is the New Age spiritual movement?

In this section, I discuss the premises of the New Age movement, and introduce the relationship between astrological movements and the New Age as a way of supporting the claim for spiritual evolution.

The New Age movement encompasses many ideas, theories and practices of spirituality. It is comprised of eclectic beliefs borrowed from the world’s religions and cultures, as well as maverick and inventive forms of spiritual expression. Keith Gebers, a book critic for a local Sacramento County newspaper in California, states that New Age literature can range from being about “anti-gravity and free energy to ancient...
science and secret societies”\textsuperscript{13}. The New Age movement is not a centralised organisation with prescribed rules about what it is and does. Values and beliefs held by those associated with the movement involve “political, economic, ecology and even health and religion beliefs, sometimes far different from other New Age devotees ... current trends are spiritual, ideological and social”\textsuperscript{14}. The New Age umbrella is undoubtedly broad.

As Gebers states in online newspaper \textit{Elk Grove citizen}, much New Age literature is concerned with a ‘paradigm shift’\textsuperscript{15,16}, or a change in “a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them, especially in an intellectual discipline.”\textsuperscript{17} He is referring to the New Age as presenting spiritual alternatives to societal axioms, seeing a lack of spiritual interconnectedness as the primary cause of our collective suffering. I argue that the New Age movement presents paradigm shifts in spiritual understanding and suggest

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\newpage
that these are useful for people who desire to alter the disastrous ecological direction in which our planet is headed\textsuperscript{18}.

Some use the term ‘New Age’ to refer to an astrological shift, which is upon us at this time. Western astrology recognises that Earth is moving from the Piscean Age to the Aquarian Age\textsuperscript{19}. The Piscean Age is characterised as “violent, selfish and materialistic” while the Age of Aquarius will bring out more cooperative, wise and harmonious traits\textsuperscript{20}. Societal paradigm shifts in these directions will be useful in improving the current ecological and social crises.


In case any readers need convincing that our planet is experiencing ecological crisis, here are some articles that touch on the subjects of climate change, species extinctions and pollution.


Recent channelled information from popular New Age sources supports this theory of spiritual evolution. In *Alchemy of the Nine Dimensions*, Barbara Hand Clow\(^{21}\) writes that Pleiadean extra-terrestrials told her that in the Age of Aquarius, the global power elite plan to control the planet in the New World Order. Hand Clow argues that the elite are creating a dualistic paradigm of good against evil, through such methods as war. If we are to create a more positive future for the New Age we need to become more spiritually evolved\(^{22}\) despite the Illuminati’s skilful attempts to keep the vibration of the planet down through fear mongering and undermining the validity of New Age concepts as well as wisdom from other spiritual traditions\(^{23,24}\).

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Barbara Hand Clow, MA, is an internationally renowned astrologer and spiritual teacher who has led ceremonies at sacred sites since 1987. She is the author of nine books, including the bestselling *The Pleiadean Agenda*.


Hanegraaff writes about a channelled entity named Seth who spoke through the body of a science fiction author, Jane Roberts in the 1970s:

> The core of his teaching is that we all “create our own reality”, in a process of spiritual evolution through countless existences on this planet as well as in an infinity of other dimensions. Few New Agers realize how many of the beliefs which they take for granted in their daily lives have their historical origin in Seth’s messages.

I would challenge his statement that this idea really began with Seth and Jane Roberts; however this explanation of spiritual evolution is succinct enough to suffice here.

\(^{23}\) Hand Clow B, Clow G. Op cit.

\(^{24}\) Prada L. Twelve spiritual principles and laws: as applied to the Aquarian Age or Heaven on Earth and or the liberation of Planet Earth. Brother Veritus’ website [homepage on the internet]. 2005 [cited 2010 Jun 4]. Available from: [http://www.luisprada.com/Protected/ twelve_spiritual_principles_and_laws.htm](http://www.luisprada.com/Protected/twelve_spiritual_principles_and_laws.htm).

“The Matrix”... is the planned scheme of the Illuminati Dark Forces and their Overlords.... The Dark Forces have experts that know spiritual hermetic laws since they penetrate good mystic and
The Central American Mayan calendar is also important for the New Age movement. According to this ancient calendar, on December 21, 2012 the world will end a time cycle of thousands of years and begin another. Academics, New Age writers and Indigenous Mayans dispute the exact time that the calendar begins again. In August 1987, Harmonic Convergence events took place all over the world during what is considered to have been the beginning, of the end of time relating to the Mayan calendar. Tens of thousands of people gathered at ‘Earth’s “acupuncture points”’, or places of natural and spiritual significance such as the Golden Gate Bridge and Mount Shasta in California, Sedona in Arizona, Chaco Canyon in New Mexico and Mesa...
Verde, Colorado\textsuperscript{31}, Mayan and Egyptian ruin sites, Central Park in New York and Hawaiian volcanoes\textsuperscript{32} to pray for the salvation of the planet\textsuperscript{33}. Similar but likely larger events to celebrate the end of the calendar are being planned globally, such as those at Death Valley in Nevada, Chichen Itza\textsuperscript{34} and Palenque\textsuperscript{35} in Mexico.

The Arizonan Hopi prophecies suggest that we are currently in the fourth world; each world has been destroyed based on mistakes that people have made. Some predict that this world will end due to the changing magnetism of the earth’s poles\textsuperscript{36}. Diné (Navajo), also from the ‘four corners’ region of the United States, have prophecies


\nocite{finn.1997}
predicting that the world may end around this time\textsuperscript{37}. The Mexican Aztecs predicted that Quetzalcoatl would return to them around the time that the Spanish invaded, and it is said that the ‘white brother’ was meant to return from his travels across the world and peacefully reunite with the red race. This failure signifies the end of the world\textsuperscript{38}.

Llewellyn Publications describes the New Age as “a major change in consciousness found within each of us as we learn to bring forth and manifest powers that humanity has always potentially had”\textsuperscript{39}. Whether or not a participant is concerned with astrology, those involved in the New Age generally consider a unique leap in spiritual evolution is emerging in this moment of history. The most common thread between individual New Ager’s spiritual beliefs is the idea that the Earth is entering a New Age wherein our goal as humans is to become more spiritually aware or suffer through the demise of the planet\textsuperscript{40}. According to the New Age movement, acting from this higher level of awareness will cause us to make more sustainable, life affirming choices for our communities, the environments we live in and for ourselves.

\textsuperscript{37} Sjöö M. Op cit.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Hand Clow B, Clow G. Op cit.
**New Age history**

In this section, I provide a brief history of publicised events and popular literature that show the development of the New Age theory of spiritual evolution. As ‘New Age’ is an ambiguous term and there is not a centralised institution, there is not a definitive history of the movement chronicled. Further, each individual's own experience of the New Age would vary according to their interests and the resources they access.

Walter Russell’s 1944 essay, “Power Through Knowledge”, provides one of the first known uses of the term ‘New Age’. He discussed “...New-Age philosophy of the spiritual re-awakening of man...”\(^41,42\). Russell followed Richard Maurice Bucke’s theory that human consciousness is evolving. Bucke argued that:

...not only the human body, but also human consciousness, has evolved in stages. Human consciousness periodically makes progressive leaps, such as that from animal awareness to rational self-awareness many millennia ago. Russell believed with Dr. Bucke that humankind is now on the brink of making another such extraordinary -- yet evolutionary -- leap in consciousness.

The next cycle of human evolution, said Bucke, will be from rational self-consciousness to spiritual super-consciousness on the order of that experienced by the great sages, religious figures, and mystics of the past 2,500 years and on up to today.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{43}\) Ibid.
Russell predicted that when this spiritual evolution is academically recognised, measured and documented religion and science would converge, as “[t]he love-principle of giving which dominates the God-Mind will rule the world in the coming new age”\(^{44}\).

Another key aspect of the New Age movement is spiritual ‘ascension’ or evolution of the planet. George King, an extra-terrestrial channel\(^ {45}\) and yoga master\(^ {46}\) since the 1950s, was one of the first in the contemporary Occidental world to discuss spiritual ascension publicly. He founded the Aetherius Society\(^ {47}\) to play out the wishes of the ‘Cosmic Masters’ with who he was in contact. While in a Yogic Samadhi trance, King would channel extra terrestrial beings for audiences in the hundreds. On May 21 1959, King channelled extra-terrestrial information live on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television channel. King describes having entered alien spacecraft and being

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Channelling refers to the body acting as a ‘channel’ for something other than that which normally resides within it. Here I refer to extraterrestrial entities utilising a human body and its functions in order to express a message. The entity is able to project itself into the physical human body with its consciousness.


King practiced Raja, Gnana and Kundalini yoga eight to twelve hours a day.


The Society was founded in the mid-1950s. It is named after a Venusian being who had contacted King. Members work towards achieving world enlightenment and universal peace by the direction of the Cosmic Masters (also referred to by some as the Ascended Masters, these are enlightened beings who have been incarnated on Earth and shared their wisdom, such as Jesus Christ, Akhenaton, Buddha etcetera).
shown the Initiation of Ascension\textsuperscript{48}, which he describes\textsuperscript{49}. King also described meeting Jesus, who appeared as an extra-terrestrial being and gave him an extension of his Sermon on the Mount. He believed Jesus gave him “[t]he most important single Metaphysical task ever undertaken upon Earth...”\textsuperscript{50} which was to perform a series of spiritual initiation rituals on eighteen mountains around the world. There is now a large community of people who openly describe their encounters with aliens, and many who claim to channel messages from other planets\textsuperscript{51,52,53}.

In 1967, Robert Coon published \textit{The rainbow serpent and the holy grail – Uluru and the planetary chakras}\textsuperscript{54}. Coon writes of a series of planetary chakras, just like the chakras ancient eastern religions recognise as energy centres in the body. These chakras follow the path of two intertwining snakes, one female – the Australian Aboriginal

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} King G. The nine freedoms. Los Angeles: Aetherius Society; 1963.
\item \textsuperscript{50} King G. Op cit. Introduction to the Author. p9.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Dvir A. ETmedical.com [homepage on the internet]. No date [cited 2009 Feb 7]. Available from: http://etmedical.com/.
\item \textsuperscript{53} No author. Alien abduction, how to prevent [homepage on the internet]. No date [cited 2009 Feb 7]. Available from: http://www.abductions-alien.org/.
\end{itemize}
rainbow serpent – and one male – Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent from the Mexican Aztec region. According to Coon, as individuals ascend consciousness by activating our Omega chakra, we assist in the Global Omega Point (which is currently in Glastonbury Tor, England) being simultaneously activated, contributing to the evolution of Gaia (planet Earth as a conscious being)\textsuperscript{55}. Tor Webster from Glastonbury in England recently made a film, \textit{Rainbow Serpent project}, about these energy centres. Webster travelled to each of these sites and interacted with local custodians, performing rituals to keep these chakras open and balanced\textsuperscript{56}. This process is similar to ‘healing’ a person in such modalities as Reiki\textsuperscript{57} and my own practice, LUXOR Light\textsuperscript{58}. Coon and Webster recognise that Indigenous knowledge keepers need to play a central role in planetary ascension.


In LUXOR Light, when performing a healing on an individual, major chakras are checked to determine if they are ‘open’ or ‘closed’, and if they are ‘balanced’. Imbalanced chakras can cause or be caused by physical and emotional problems, and blockages to spiritual growth. Any chakras that are not operating at an optimum level are adjusted by sending energy into these points with the use of the LUXOR Light sacred geometry symbol.
A cornerstone publication for the New Age in the United States is Marilyn Ferguson’s *The Aquarian conspiracy*, published in 1987. This book was published prior to the common use of the term ‘New Age’. Ferguson coined the term ‘Aquarian Conspiracy’ to describe the growing number of people who were gathering momentum in this new spiritual movement. According to Ferguson:

Broader than reform, deeper than revolution, this benign conspiracy for a new human agenda has triggered the most rapid cultural realignment in history. The great shuddering, irrevocable shift overtaking us is not a new political, religious, or philosophical system. It is a new mind – the ascendance of a startling worldview…

The Aquarian reference is in regards to the Age of Aquarius, because Aquarius, in the zodiac, represents “flow and the quenching of an ancient thirst”. The book contained the first acknowledgement and description of the movement to reach a mainstream audience.

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62 Ibid. p9.

63 Marilyn Ferguson, 70, dies; writer’s ‘The Aquarian Conspiracy’ was pivotal in New Age movement. Op cit.
The Celestine prophecy, written by James Redfield and published in 1993 was the bestselling American hardcover book in the world for two years\textsuperscript{64}. The parable's narrative follows the story of an American man searching for nine scrolls recently discovered in Peru, each one containing a spiritual insight or prophecy. The insights describe a mass spiritual awakening that is to take place in our time; that the world is full of sacred energy and how to utilise it; and the importance of synchronicity and following your “spiritual mission”\textsuperscript{65}. Redfield claims the book was so successful because it expressed a spiritual experience that people were already having\textsuperscript{66}. The New Age is well symbolised by The Celestine prophecy, as an awakening of consciousness that people are becoming more and more aware of all the time, though don’t necessarily always know how to express with clarity.

Lee Carroll has been the primary channel for Kryon, a prominent teacher “entity”\textsuperscript{67} since 1993\textsuperscript{68}. Carroll has channelled for the Society for Enlightenment and Transformation at

\textsuperscript{64} Redfield J. The Celestine prophecy: an adventure. 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. New York: Time Warner Books; 1997.


The term “entity” is regularly used in New Age circles to specify a spirit being whose body most humans are unable to see but whose energy field can influence our own.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
the United Nations\textsuperscript{69} seven times, more than any other channel\textsuperscript{70}. Through the publication of his first book with Jan Tober, \textit{The Indigo children: the new kids have arrived}\textsuperscript{71} in 1999, he was heavily involved in the popularising of the ‘Indigo children’ theories. Carroll and Tober assert that:

\begin{quote}
Indigos... share traits like high I.Q., acute intuition, self-confidence, resistance to authority and disruptive tendencies, which are often diagnosed as attention-deficit disorder, known as A.D.D., or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or A.D.H.D.... the indigos [are] a leap in human evolution.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Psychologist Nancy Ann Tappe first documented the Indigo children in the early 1970s\textsuperscript{73}. Tappe perceived\textsuperscript{74} the new indigo ‘life colour’ or aura of these children who arrived on the planet with a higher evolution in consciousness than most other humans on Earth at this time\textsuperscript{75}. This idea of evolutionary consciousness continues to be the central and most active concept in the New Age movement.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

“The Society for Enlightenment and Transformation (SEAT) is part of the United Nations Staff Recreational Council (UNSRC). This is a group of clubs that is sanctioned by the UN for members, guests, employees and delegates of the United Nations.”


\bibitem{73} Ibid. Chapter One: what is an Indigo child?

\bibitem{74} In regards to being able to ‘perceive’ one’s ‘life colour’, see: Tappe NA. Understanding your life through color.  Carlsbad (CA): Starling Publishers; 1982.

Tappe has been medically diagnosed with synesthesia. I was not able to access this text but it is referred to in the Carroll and Tober work.

\bibitem{75} Carroll L and Tober J.  Op Cit. Chapter three: spiritual aspects of indigos.
\end{thebibliography}
Conclusion

Members of the New Age movement are interested in stepping away from formalised religion towards a spirituality that aims to improve the current state of the world. New Agers are concerned with raising the spiritual vibration or enlightenment of everyone on the planet to smooth the transition into the Aquarian Age or the end of the Mayan calendar. New Age spiritual paths are critical of the current state of humanity, believing humans to be destroying our world through selfishness and greed. Our current planetary crises have resulted from a lack of connection to the sacred, they say. These new spiritualities allow individuals to access the God experience for themselves; each person is their own channel to the Divine.
CHAPTER 2: MUTATED MESSAGES

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that some members of the New Age misappropriate Indigenous spirituality as a way of reinforcing their own beliefs. In the first section, I argue that some New Age people generalise about Aboriginality thus failing to recognise the differences in values and religious beliefs between tribal nations in Australia, North America and elsewhere. I follow with a discussion of the misrepresentation of Aboriginality in the New Age, which I argue devalues and undermines contemporary Aboriginal cultures. I then discuss how the term ‘neo-shamanism’, which has grown popular with the rise of the New Age movement, is utilised by individuals in a manipulative and mercenary manner. In the final section, I discuss how similar behaviour is performed by some Aboriginal people in the sale of culture to non-Native consumers. These examples exemplify how generalisations and misrepresentation of Indigenous cultures occurs in the New Age movement.

Disregarding the local

...I understand the complexities and difficulties experienced by white young Americans who are on a spiritual quest. They feel that they are aliens and without real roots in the land where they grew up, a land in which all the places of power and sacredness belong not to them but to the indigenous peoples.  

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In this section, I argue that some members of the New Age appropriate aspects of Indigenous cultures in an attempt to engage in a spiritual relationship with the natural environment. While doing this, some individuals misinterpret Native culture and propagate these myths within New Age communities. The misuse of Aboriginal tools and rituals ignores and disrespects existent, authentic engagement with these in contemporary cultures.

Non-Indigenous people living in colonised states face a quandary concerning spiritual connection to place. According to Peter Read\textsuperscript{77}:

\begin{quote}
The problem which [the book \textit{Belonging}] confronts is this: those places which we loved, lost and grieved for were wrested from the Indigenous people who loved them, lost them and grieve for them still. Are such sites of our deep affections to be contested, articulated, shared, foregone or possessed absolutely?\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

In many places throughout the world, people are “disembedded”\textsuperscript{79} from our homelands and spiritual cultures. Some people are now searching for spiritual nourishment from the people whose lands they or their ancestors have conquered or migrated to. These people use aspects of Indigenous cultures to formulate new beliefs that the originators did not intend. Further, those seeking spiritual insights from Indigenous cultures often do not have direct contact with the people whose traditions they are appropriating.


Read is Professor of History at University of Sydney.


Some participants in the New Age thus continue to fuel stereotypes that serve to
generalise Aboriginality.

For New Agers the combination of prophecies culminating in an ‘end of time’ period
around the millennium, as discussed in Chapter One, is confirmation of the
transformation of the planet. However, they have taken these prophecies out of their
cultural context. Only knowledgeable people from within the appropriate Indigenous
nations can properly interpret them. The re-telling of the stories between non-
Indigenous people, further facilitated by the Internet, has allowed for unscrupulous
untruths and a deluded game of Chinese whispers being played out\textsuperscript{80}. While the
Internet can be a valuable tool for Indigenous communities to record and distribute
knowledge\textsuperscript{81}, much of what is published online is done so by unreliable sources that are
not held accountable for the information they make available to anyone with an Internet
connection.

Misappropriation of Indigenous culture occurs in some New Age practices that utilise
props including ‘medicine cards’\textsuperscript{82}, with a tarot-like purpose, or daily wisdom books such

\textsuperscript{80} Johnson W. Contemporary Native American prophecy in historical perspective. Journal of the

\textsuperscript{81} Wemigwans J. Indigenous worldviews: cultural expression on the world wide web. Canadian Woman

\textsuperscript{82} No author. Jamie Sams. Medicine cards [homepage on the internet]. No date [cited 2009 Feb 24].
as *Native Wisdom for White Minds* by Anne Wilson Schaef\(^{83}\). One popularised Native American ‘tool’ is the “Medicine Wheel”. Marilyn Ferguson writes about the “Indian Medicine Wheel, or the Cheyenne Wheel of Knowledge”\(^{84}\) in *The Aquarian Conspiracy*. The term ‘Cheyenne wheel of knowledge’ refers to an ancient stone formation in Cheyenne lands in Wyoming\(^{85}\). Anthropologists and other researchers\(^{86}\) call similar stone formations with ceremonial uses that exist in other Native American lands, ‘medicine wheel’. When New Age practitioners apply these terms to something other than these physical ceremonial spaces, they are taken out of context, misinterpreted and disrespected\(^{87,88}\).

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\(^{87}\) The term ‘medicine wheel’ is clearly an English term and does not specify the purpose of each stone formation to which the title is applied by anthropologists or other researchers. I do not mean to imply that these medicine wheels indeed have similar purposes or that the title is one which is suitable for them; I simply wish to point out that these formations do have a place in some Native American tribes' ceremonial lives and that the ambiguity of the term fuels and exemplifies its misuse by the New Age.


Cherokee activist Andrea Smith criticises North American feminist publications for appropriating medicine wheel insignia. Such practices are attributed to Native cultures being perceived as less patriarchal than dominant society by non-Indigenous feminists.
Each tribe that utilises a ‘medicine wheel’ is a nation with unique spiritual belief systems that have developed over thousands of years. If a tool such as this medicine wheel is appropriated into the non-Indigenous community, it would not be appropriate to name it the Indian Medicine Wheel. ‘Indians’ exist all over the Americas and each nation has their own spiritual belief system, some may incorporate something akin to the medicine wheel, but certainly not all or even most tribes would be familiar with it. It is a broad generalisation to call something Indian or Native simply because it is utilised within one cultural group. Misappropriation of aspects of Indigenous culture such as the medicine wheel is a common occurrence within New Age circles and devalues authentic, contemporary, and traditional Aboriginal spiritual practices.

**Misrepresentation and misinformation**

In this section, I argue that non-Indigenous people who have been misinformed about the nature of Aboriginal religions, and subsequently assist the proliferation of incorrect stereotypes misrepresent Indigenous cultures. In some instances, non-Native people emulate Indigenous culture to such an extent that they believe they are part of it. This practice of ‘going Native’ is perceived as legitimate by gullible New Agers who are invited to participate in the reinterpretation of cultural practices of those claiming Aboriginal heritage. I argue that false claims of experience with Indigenous culture that are publicised by non-Native New Agers are damaging to public contemporary Aboriginal cultures.
Goong Native

In an effort to identify with the Native people of a land, some non-Indigenous people attempt to ‘turn Indian’ or ‘go Native’\textsuperscript{89}. Popular films such as \textit{Dances with Wolves}\textsuperscript{90} and \textit{The Last Wave}\textsuperscript{91} portray white men who discover that their identities are destined to be ‘Indigenous’. Author Shari Huhndorf asserts that this is a common fantasy of non-Indigenous people occupying another’s lands\textsuperscript{92}. In the 1960s, Vine Deloria Junior wrote that while Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians, he witnessed a surge of white Americans claiming Native American blood. While there are many Indigenous people worldwide with mixed ancestry whose Aboriginality is not obvious in their appearance, Deloria was suspicious of the vast majority of people claiming Indian descent. Most people claimed to be from a well known tribe such as Cherokee, Mohawk or Sioux; these people rarely knew where their ancestral lands were; and all but one person claimed their ancestry on their grandmother’s side, which


“Over the last century, going native has become a cherished American tradition, an important - even necessary - means of defining European-American identities and histories.”

\textsuperscript{90} Wilson J, Costner K, producers; Costner K, director. Dances with wolves [motion picture]. Burbank (CA): TIG Productions; 1990.

In this film, a white soldier is posted to the Lakota frontier in South Dakota. He forms a friendship with the Lakota, marrying the white adopted daughter of the medicine man, and thereby becoming a member of the tribe.


A white lawyer representing a group of Aboriginal men in a Sydney murder case learns that he has magical powers. By disobeying Aboriginal law, he causes a tidal wave to engulf the men’s sacred cave.

\textsuperscript{92} Huhndorf SM. Op cit.
Deloria attributed to them not wishing to identify with a male ‘savage’ Indian. Deloria concluded, “Whites claiming Indian blood generally tend to reinforce mythical beliefs about Indians.” We can see this practice continuing to occur with the proliferation of the New Age.

The Pan American Indian Association

The Pan American Indian Association (PAIA) was founded in 1984 by a masseuse named Skyhawk Ojala for the membership of “those who have tried to enroll into their ancestral tribe and for whatever reason have been denied and individuals who have felt the calling of the Ancient Turtle Lodge. All are welcomed into the Pan American Indian Association, as Brothers and Sisters.” The association has appropriated Native American terms and rituals. Although some people in PAIA may actually have Indigenous heritage, members need not have spent time within their claimed tribes and therefore would not know the protocols within which religious

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94 Ibid, 3.
98 Ibid.
knowledge is shared\textsuperscript{99}. I posit that members of PAIA participate in inauthentic rituals without the context of kinship and tradition within which their claimed tribes operate. PAIA has formed a religious culture that takes Native American symbology and ritual without permission, adjusting and moulding ceremonies such as the sweat lodge, which are alive in Native American groups today. Behaviour in this vein by people who claim to have Native heritage could be perceived as validation for others who “have felt the calling of the Ancient Turtle Lodge”\textsuperscript{100} to do the same.

\textbf{Marlo Morgan}

The epitome of inappropriate New Age literature on Australian Aborigines is Marlo Morgan’s \textit{Mutant message down under}\textsuperscript{101}. This novel is the fictional account of an American woman who a group of traditional Aboriginal people unexpectedly whisked away to the middle of the bush. The story follows their ‘walkabout’ from the eastern interior to the west coast of Australia. Morgan embellishes her narrative with contemporary and ancient Aboriginal history as well as pearls of Indigenous wisdom demonstrated to her for her learning purpose. Morgan claims that the story is true, and that she has only sold it as fiction to protect the tribe in question. This tribe, she says, is the last remaining group of traditional Aboriginal people in Australia, who are currently in hiding in a remote area of the desert awaiting their own demise. The story has however

\textsuperscript{99} Macy T, Hart D. Op cit.
\textsuperscript{100} Church of Loving Hands. Op cit.
been proved entirely false, although Morgan continues to be adamant that this journey really did occur.

*Mutant message down under* reeks of New Age rhetoric and a lack of knowledge of the Australian environment and Aboriginal cultures. Comments such as “My suggestion is that you taste the message, savor what is right for you, and spit out the rest; after all, that is the law of the universe”\(^{102}\) are suspiciously akin to those that often materialise in the New Age movement, suggesting that she has manipulated her characters to conform to her preconceived notions of Indigeneity. She patronises Aboriginal people, particularly the urban youth with whom she apparently had strong bonds. *Kansas City Star* journalist Elaine Adams discovered that Morgan had never been involved in any such small business venture; in fact, she had worked voluntarily in a pharmacy in Brisbane\(^{103}\). Morgan’s business apparently relied on the sale of fly screens that she believed she had introduced to Australia\(^{104}\). She said that, “Working with urban-dwelling, half caste Aboriginal adults who had openly displayed suicidal attitudes, and accomplishing for them a sense of purpose and financial success, was bound to be noticed sooner or later”\(^{105}\). Such condescending statements belie Morgan’s lack of experience with Aboriginal people. Although the book was not popular in Australia,

\(^{102}\) Ibid. p.xv.


\(^{104}\) Ibid.

\(^{105}\) Ibid.  p3.
many overseas readers, especially American university students\textsuperscript{106}, refer to her novel as a factual account of the lives and teachings of Aboriginal Australians\textsuperscript{107}.

Robert Eggington and the Dumbartung Aboriginal Association in Western Australia have conducted a concerted campaign to prove Marlo Morgan’s work fictitious. Eggington argues that works such as these are damaging to Aboriginal culture. He asserts, “This distortion of cultural understanding in the future will lead to greater difficulties for our future generations to identify and relate to ancestral knowledge within each tribal area”\textsuperscript{108}. Thankfully, the work of Dumbartung has been able to publicly disprove Morgan’s fantasy. However, the novel continues to be published with Morgan’s declaration of truth, and some readers will likely take up her invitation to “savour what is right for you, and spit out the rest”.

\textbf{Neo-Shamanism}

It is fashionable in the New Age to label others or be labelled a ‘shaman’. Members of the New Age have misused this label. Bob Gustafson, Native American activist, states “the current vague, and often erroneous, articles and discussions of Shamanism in the

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\item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
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non-Indian Pagan community are the most recent and disturbing manifestations of this [cultural] takeover.”

In this section, I argue that acts performed under the misnomer of ‘shaman’ are misrepresentative of Indigenous cultures, both contemporary and traditional and that these acts can be harmful to those who take part.

‘Shaman’ is a Tungus (Siberian) word for “specialist in the sacred”110. It is now used to describe Indigenous spiritual experts the world over. Monica Sjöö, a Swedish pagan feminist critic of the New Age, wrote in her book *New age and Armageddon* that:

> the shaman is a healer, transformer, artist, soul guide and mediator between the seen and unseen worlds, the living and the ancestors/the dead... a ‘wounded healer’, who usually has gone through terrible illness or psychic breakdown similar to mental illness, and who has gone to the ‘lower and upper worlds’ emerging from this initiatory experience healed.111

Sjöö calls the appropriation of 'shamanism' a form of “spiritual imperialism”112. Sjöö suggests that when non-Indigenous people call themselves shamans and charge money for receipt of their services, if they are not willing to cease these practices, they should donate some profits from these enterprises to the Indigenous cultures from whence the teachings came. She explains that shamans spend years developing their understanding of spiritual matters; therefore it is not possible in a weekend course, no

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111 Ibid.

112 Ibid. p231.
matter how much you pay, to become a shaman overnight. I agree with Sjöö, that as poverty and illness are rife throughout most Indigenous groups today, and governments continue to encroach on native lands, non-Aboriginal people should assist with alleviating these social issues rather than attempting to take more from people who continue to suffer under the weight of continuing colonialism.

The sweat lodge

The incorrect, uninformed use of Native rituals in a neo-shamanic sense can prove dangerous. Those in Lakota/Dakota/Nakota (Sioux) traditions must earn the right to lead a sweat over a four year period of training and initiation. An untrained person leading a sweat lodge ceremony out of context is a recipe for disaster. Chief Arvol Looking Horse, Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Medicine Bundle in the Great Plains, voiced his concerns over the misuse of the sweat lodge ceremony. He says the exchange of payment before the ceremony diminishes its potency. He insists that this method of sweat is “not our ceremonial way of life, because of the way they are being conducted” and asks for “all Nations upon Grandmother Earth to please respect

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113 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
our sacred ceremonial way of life and stop the exploitation of our Tunka Oyate (Spiritual Grandfathers)".  

James Arthur Ray once had clients who would spend up to sixty thousand dollars a year attending his self help workshops. Much of Ray’s success has been attributed to his part in the popular New Age book and film on manifestation, *The secret*, which teaches audiences how to reach goals, specifically financially, through visualisation. On October 9th, 2009, three people were killed and eighteen injured during a Native American style sweat lodge in Sedona, Arizona. Ray, as the leader of the lodge, has been charged with manslaughter. There are other instances documented where people have died after a non-traditional sweat lodge, such as the case in South Australia in 2004. Navajo senator Albert Hale has proposed legislation to prevent

116 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
non-Native persons from charging money to partake in “traditional and authentic Native American practices”\textsuperscript{122}.

**Entheogens**

Entheogens are “mind-altering plants used in sacramental contexts”\textsuperscript{123}. There are New Age leaders who explore the use of psychedelic plants as an aspect of neo-shamanism. In South America, where many tribal people use psychedelic plants such as ayahuasca for medicinal purposes, non-Indigenous people regularly engage in ‘rituals’ with these drugs, which can be dangerous for the psychological wellbeing of users\textsuperscript{124}. According to Winkelman, who writes about the experiences of ayahuasca ceremony participants, these rituals are often inauthentic “staged dramas”, run by mestizos from nearby towns rather than local Indigenous spiritual leaders\textsuperscript{125}. The people facilitating the ceremonies usually have a travel agent in developed nations representing them and charging up to


ten thousand dollars for a short trip to South America\textsuperscript{126}. Most people ingesting the drugs would have little experience in similar situations, and are therefore in a vulnerable situation. Ayahuasca tourism is also an intrusion into the traditional lifestyles of the Amazon tribes. While I do not deny that valuable, meaningful spiritual experiences can be had by foreign participants at a ritual involving the ingestion of sacraments such as ayahuasca, I feel that the depiction of ceremonies designed for tourists as culturally authentic is potentially harmful and that its commercialisation likely increases the spread of such misinformation.

To me, neo-shamanism is an appropriation of Indigenous spiritual culture. Those involved aim to, and assume they can, comprehend the experiences and abilities of Indigenous religious experts without the context of years of training and preparation within an ancient culture. The sale of this knowledge to misinformed consumers is unethical. More education on contemporary and traditional Indigenous cultures in schools and other institutions would prevent further misrepresentation of Aboriginal spirituality.

New Age Natives and Snake-Oil Salesmen

Here I argue that Indigenous people who sell their culture to New Age consumers encourage misinterpretation and perpetuate misinformation of Native culture. It is possible for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to share meaningful spiritual relationships, if the contexts in which this is attempted is one of respect. The individuals involved must recognise the impact their behaviour has on wider Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. New Age Natives misconstrue Aboriginal cultures and put people’s lives in danger by not following protocols. As Vine Deloria Jr, writing in 1969 explains:

Interest in Indian culture, particularly in Indian religion, has escalated beyond anyone’s wildest imaginings in recent years. Initially a product of the participation of medicine men in some of the protests, the expansion of the Indian religious traditions into non-Indian society has now become something of a missionary movement with all its accompanying successes, failures, and dangers. Today Indian shamans, medicine men, and snake-oil salesmen follow the lecture-workshop circuit, holding ceremonies and otherwise performing feats of power for their disciples and fellow practitioners.127

Native people who sell their traditions to non-Aboriginal people perpetuate the misappropriation of Indigenous spirituality. As an Australian travelling overseas, I have observed that this practice is prevalent in North America, particularly in the United States in areas such as Sedona, Arizona and throughout California. Usually this sharing of culture is performed without the permission or support of the tribe. Often the rituals or knowledge that is shared is not authentic to that person’s tribe. This is problematic as non-Indigenous people regard the person as an authority on Aboriginal

127 Deloria Jr V. Op cit. pxi.
spirituality due to their genetic connection to traditional culture and because they are representing themselves in this way. This in turn creates a distorted understanding of Indigeneity by wider society\textsuperscript{128} throughout the world in places where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people rarely communicate directly, especially regarding spiritual beliefs.

The issue of sharing traditional Aboriginal culture with non-Aboriginal people is a contentious one. Deloria, said on the topic:

\textit{...it seems beyond dispute that within the tribal religions is a powerful spiritual energy that cannot be confined to a small group in the modern world. It would be hazardous to predict where this movement is headed, but if it influences people to deal more kindly with the earth and the various life forms on it, then there should be few complaints about its impact on people's lives and practices.}\textsuperscript{129}

While Deloria felt that this “powerful spiritual energy” should be shared, four years later he expressed deep criticism of how it is done:

In the last decade there has been a deluge of nonsense as non-Indians, along with a few Indians such as Wallace Black Elk and Sun Bear, have developed a curious interpretation of Indian religion that includes crystals, medicine wheels, sweat lodges, prayer circles, and almost any other kind of adaptation of popular non-Indian group dynamics to Indian traditions. The deluge of books on tribal religions is simply an appropriation of external Indian symbols to meet the

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  \item[\textsuperscript{129}] Ibid. \end{itemize}
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emotional demands of the age and has no relationship whatsoever to what traditional Indians did religiously even several decades ago.\textsuperscript{130}

Cultural exchange is positive when it is done respectfully. Indigenous religions do not proselytise or welcome converts\textsuperscript{131}. Non-Indigenous people can instead look to our own heritages to discover life-affirming, earth-based spiritual sustenance.

\section*{Conclusion}

Young white kids come to me and say, “Oh, Janet, please, please, you got to help me. I’ve got to get back to nature.” I say, “do you need a laxative, or what?” That’s crazy, how can you get back to nature? We are nature…. “give me a pill, give me a chant, I need to be spiritual, right now.” I say you have to learn to be a human being first. If you don’t know how to be a human being, you’ll never be spiritual.\textsuperscript{132}

Janet McCloud, Washington Tulalip\textsuperscript{133} activist who often spoke\textsuperscript{134} about the appropriation of Indigenous culture by New Age practitioners\textsuperscript{135}, touches on the

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\textsuperscript{130} Deloria Jr V. The Indians of the American imagination. God is red: a native view of religion. 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. New York: Putnam Publishing; 2003. p43.

\textsuperscript{131} Macy T, Hart D. Op cit.


McCloud died in 2003.


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frustration native people experience when non-Indigenous people look to them for spiritual solutions. Aboriginal people do not want to be stepping stones on the way to Occidental society’s spiritual enlightenment. The idea that Indigenous people hold the solutions to our evident ecological and perhaps spiritual crises is a romantic one. Non-Aboriginal people looking to Indigenous religions for an alternative paradigm through which to experience the world need to take into account the unique differences between Native cultures, rather than rendering them invisible.

For the non-Indigenous person living in the land of another, a strong spiritual basis can be hard to find. This is particularly the case for people who reject dominant interpretations of Christianity in its mainstream forms because they regard it as contributing to these crises. It is understandable that some people will turn to the original people of the lands for guidance. However, it is no one’s place to take another’s culture out of context. Looking to each person’s own heritages and ancestors for guidance at this time will provide a stronger basis for spiritual integrity. All of us are able to participate in an experiential spiritual relationship with the planet that will assist us in navigating the ecological crisis. In the following chapter, I discuss neo-paganism as offering an earth-based spirituality based in one’s own ancestry and cultural history as an alternative to appropriating those of another.
CHAPTER 3: NEO-PAGANISM

Introduction

When non-Indigenous people look towards the Native custodians of the lands in which they live for spiritual nourishment, they are searching for two things: a sense of place connected with self-identity; and a relationship with spirit that encompasses a sacred view of the earth. Rather than “ripping off” other cultures’ spiritual identities, non-Indigenous people may turn to nature, which plays a central role in our own ancestral religions. Most cultures stem from a nature based spiritual history. I argue in this chapter that neo-pagan avenues of sustainable spirituality are a viable alternative to the appropriation of Indigenous cultures; that they can provide sustenance in similar forms to Aboriginal religions; and I explore how some people are achieving this in contemporary society. I support my argument by discussing the centrality of nature in pre-Christian pagan religions. I then discuss the burgeoning neo-pagan movement.

137 I recognise that colonialism has taken place in every continent. However, I prefer to speak from experience, and Australia, my country of origin and North America, where I have spent approximately two years, were colonised by British, French and Spanish powers. My own heritage is English, Northern Irish, German and Maori in that order; and I am interested in exploring topics that are relevant to my own ancestry.
138 I recognise that I could focus here on other ancestral religions as an alternative to the appropriation of Native cultures. Reinterpreting Christianity with a more earth focused perspective is one possibility that I
What is Neo-Paganism?

In this section, I define neo-paganism and describe what I interpret its main attributes, aims and motivations to be.

Neo-paganism is essentially “the conscious attempt to revive religious attitudes and practices common around the world before the appearance of major religions”\(^{139}\). Neo-pagan paths are sometimes referred to as the ‘earth traditions’\(^{140,141,142}\) because they are “spiritual paths based upon worship or reverence [sic] towards the Earth”\(^{143}\). Paths that come under the heading of neo-pagan include Pan Native American spirituality; neo-shamanism; a variety of Goddess religions; Wicca; witchcraft; Celtic spiritual traditions from throughout Europe; African neo-traditional religions including Santeria, have not had room to discuss here. In Australia and North America, many people have backgrounds from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe that hold nature and community in high regard. People with heritage other than Western European are also interested in Indigenous cultures that are not their own. However, because of space restrictions, I concentrate on Western European pre-Christian earth-based spiritualities. This is relative to my own cultural position and therefore I feel I have more authority to speak.


\(^{141}\) Crowley V. A woman’s guide to the earth traditions. London: Thorson’s. 2001.


Voodoo and Cadomble\textsuperscript{144}; Heathen paths from northern Europe such as Asatru, Norse, Odinism, and Vanatru; and Druidism including Welsh Druidism\textsuperscript{145,146,147,148}.

John Peck identifies four characteristics that neo-pagan spiritual paths tend to follow\textsuperscript{149}:

1. seeing nature as divine;
2. reverence for a Goddess and/or seeing the Earth as Mother; sometimes the Goddess is an equal consort of a God [although these are usually used as symbols of the masculine and feminine aspects of people and the planet rather than seen as actual beings]; also the view that lesser spirits live within the cosmos;
3. a working belief in ritual and symbolism as a means of access to the divine powers of nature; and
4. a prevailing interest in religious and mystical antiquity, especially pre-historical and late medieval.

\textsuperscript{144} Crowley. Op cit.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Peck J. Op cit. p135-136.
Often those who follow neo-pagan spiritual paths are attempting to revive and return to their pre-colonial Indigenous spiritual traditions\textsuperscript{150,151}. Today, little is known about pre-Christian pagan religions in Western Europe\textsuperscript{152}. Christians, in Europe and elsewhere, converted pagans en masse and eventually persecuted those practicing the ‘old religion’\textsuperscript{153,154,155}. Some pagan practices survived in different forms in Christianity, for instance religious festivals including Christmas\textsuperscript{156}. Many pagans feel that the influence of religions, in particular Christianity, has diminished the connection to land that our ancestors held\textsuperscript{157}. Occasionally, people will follow a neo-pagan path because they feel an affinity with it although they do not have any genetic connection to that tradition. For instance, there are many people in the United States and other Occidental nations who


\textsuperscript{153} Sulak J, Vale V. Margot Adler. Modern Pagans: an investigation of contemporary pagan practices. San Francisco: Re/search publications, 2001. p27. Adler explains that Native Americans are searching for their roots because they “were forced into colonization and Christian beliefs”.

\textsuperscript{154} Sulak J, Vale V. Op cit. Sulak J. Darryl Cherney. p53. Cherney speaks about the Spanish Inquisition. He quotes from a Catholic friend: “there isn’t a Christian on the planet who didn’t have an ancestor converted at the point of a sword”.


attempt to follow a Native American spiritual path but who have no blood connection to it and were not raised in that tradition. There are other cultural groups following various neo-pagan paths to which they have no history, such as the Sistahs of the Moon yahoo group, a community of African-American women following a neo-pagan path that encompasses European spiritual traditions as well as neo-traditional African religions\textsuperscript{158}.

Neo-pagan spiritual paths emphasise spiritual practice, particularly in rituals and magick (spelt archaically so as to separate the idea of real magick from magic ‘tricks’). Magickal rituals sometimes stem from ancient traditions, but many groups and individuals create their own rituals. Often the loss of traditions makes it impossible for a person to source an ‘authentic’ ritual, song or prayer, and instead the inner self is trusted by practitioners to form a ritual which will have meaning and effect for those who take part in it\textsuperscript{159}.

The neo-pagan movement attributes many of the world’s problems to the prevalence of patriarchal societies. Reconnection with the feminine is one of the central goals of contemporary paganism. World religions including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam all contain male embodiments of divinity. Patriarchal religions, especially Christianity, according to King, have vilified women and nature in a mutually reinforcing


\textsuperscript{159} Starhawk. Op cit.
way which he argues has caused the detrimental state of Earth today. For Monica Sjöö, Swedish neo-pagan artist and author, part of the problem is that, “In patriarchy men are sacred and women are profane”. Neo-pagan spiritualities seek to redress the damage caused by patriarchy by emphasising the Goddess or Earth Mother in order to rebalance the feminine and masculine on the planet and within ourselves. Neo-pagans see nature as sacred as it was in pre-religious traditions, rejecting the Christian notion that the Earth was given to us by a male God to ‘use’ as we desire. Neo-pagans believe that reconnecting with these ancestral values will create a more harmonious and compassionate world.

Neo-paganism places an emphasis on the Goddess as an embodiment of the sacred feminine, or “the image of the legitimacy and beneficence of female power”. Californian born Jewish Wiccan Starhawk argues that they do this because “the model of the universe in which a male God rules the cosmos from outside serves to

legitimize male control of social institutions”\textsuperscript{166}. Witchcraft draws on feminism in recognising that women’s spirituality has historically been oppressed in many cultures. In the ‘Burning Times’, women all over North America and Western Europe were killed under suspicion of being witches\textsuperscript{167}. Neo-paganism engages with this history to expose it as a deliberate attack on women. An important strategy in doing this is as Starhawk argues to reinvoke the word ‘Witch’ because:

> to reclaim the word \textit{Witch} is to reclaim our right, as women, to be powerful; as men, to know the feminine within as Divine. To be a Witch is to identify with nine million victims of bigotry and hatred and to take responsibility for shaping a world in which prejudice claims no more victims.\textsuperscript{168}

For neo-pagans, the Goddess (divine feminine) is the world; is apparent in everything\textsuperscript{169}. Seeing the world as sacred necessitates treating it with utmost respect.

\textbf{History of Neo-Paganism}

In this section, I explore some possible origins of neo-paganism, including the Romantic period; geographical origins; gnosticism; and the role of popular media.

According to Gaskill, neo-paganism in its modern form may have originated in the Romantic era of the nineteenth century\textsuperscript{170}. During this period, some were rejecting the

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid. Ten years later: commentary on chapters one through thirteen. p231-261.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid. p31.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid. p32.
Industrial Revolution and romanticising the agricultural way of life in England. Scientific rationalism was also being criticised for lacking spirituality. For instance, the science fiction author Villiers de l'Isle Adam interpreted science to be developing mystical and mysterious qualities, in part due to the rise of spiritualism and discoveries in physics. He characterised scientists as wizards in his novels. Neo-pagans reject the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, as they reject the differentiation between sacred and profane, seeing all of nature as sacred.

The origins of neo-paganism are varied. Celtic neo-paganism traces Scottish and Irish origins, whereas Druidism follows Welsh traditions. Nature-mystic groups such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the Ordo Templi Orientis arose during the Romantic period in Europe. The term ‘Wicca’ was possibly invented by one of the most important figures in Wicca, Aleister Crowley in the 1920s, who was a prominent member of the Ordo Templi Orientis. Three novels posing as historical research on witchcraft by Margaret Murray, published in the 1920s to 1950s, were championed as the foundational texts on ancient Western European paganism until discredited in the

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172 Ibid.

1970s. Many early Wiccan teachings have likely been influenced by these texts\textsuperscript{174}. Gerald Gardner, founder of Gardnerian witchcraft, is also credited with playing a large part in the resurgence of paganism\textsuperscript{175}. Wiccans sometimes but not always refer to themselves as ‘witches’. Some prefer the term Wiccan as it does not carry “a history of negative connotations”\textsuperscript{176}. Some people self identify as witches but do not reference the work of contemporary witchcraft, believing themselves to be intuitively sourcing an inherent, perhaps ancient, spiritual practice\textsuperscript{177}. These witches would generally be ‘solitaries’ who practice witchcraft alone rather than in covens or circles.

Gnostic traditions, from whence some believe neo-pagan ritual and magick practice originates\textsuperscript{178}, began shortly after Jesus Christ’s death and the initial proliferation of Christianity. Those who see a connection between neo-pagan beginnings and Gnosticism see the shared goal of Gnostic and neo-pagan rituals as uniting the human with the cosmos; the human soul with the world soul. However, a traditional reading of

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\textsuperscript{178} Peck J. Op cit.
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Gnosticism would appear to be in conflict with the values of paganism, as Gnostics are usually portrayed as devaluing the earth and the body, seeing the world as a prison which the soul must temporarily endure\textsuperscript{179,180,181}. Jeffrey J. Kripal has interpreted some of the Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945 as presenting an alternative understanding of early Gnosticism\textsuperscript{182}. He states that the Gnostics, like Wiccans, value the masculine and feminine equally. His interpretation of these texts has led him to believe that the ancient Gnostics saw that direct access to spiritual truths was possible for the individual, and hence the Church condemned them. The texts found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt suggest that as Gnosticism was necessarily suppressed, its original nature is difficult to identify and thus its relationship to contemporary spirituality and religion.

Fiction has played a large part in forging awareness of neo-paganism, though not often accurate. For instance, the popular American television show, “Buffy the Vampire


Slayer”\textsuperscript{183} featured sensational depictions of witches and magick in the lives of a group of young people\textsuperscript{184}. The film “The Craft”\textsuperscript{185} featured four high school girls in a ‘coven’ who perform ‘black magic’. Some way into the film one of the girls discovers that she is a ‘real witch’ with magickal powers\textsuperscript{186}. Although these representations of neo-paganism are not realistic and do not portray the day-to-day experiences of those who follow pagan spiritual paths today, they are successful in highlighting their existence to the masses and are probably somewhat inspired by the burgeoning popular interest in paganism.

Neo-paganism has both an ancient and a contemporary history which continues to evolve. In Britain, Australia, North America and elsewhere\textsuperscript{187} neo-pagans are meeting

\textsuperscript{183} Buffy is a vampire slayer, contracted to kill vampires in the evening hours after school. Her friends evolve into similar roles with her best friend Willow becoming a witch with inherent magickal powers.

\textsuperscript{184} Alessio D. “Things are different now?”: a postcolonial analysis of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. The European Legacy [serial online]. 2001 [cited 2009 Feb 7]:6(6):731-740.

\textsuperscript{185} In this film, the protagonist, Sarah, moves to a new school. Three misfit girls take her under their wing in order to achieve the necessary fourth member of their coven. The girls proceed to perform rituals together with successful results. Eventually the original three witches turn against Sarah but her power overrules, as she discovers that her mother was a natural witch who transmitted her powers to Sarah genetically. The film ends with one of the characters, Nancy, distraught in an insane asylum apparently disturbed by the intensity of power she experienced when invoking the earth deity (which, interestingly in this film, is portrayed as male).

\textsuperscript{186} Nugent G, Tornell L and Wick D, producers; Fleming A, director. The craft [motion picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures; 1996.

up, celebrating the sabbats, forming covens and hand-fasting\textsuperscript{188}. As neo-pagan communities grow, rituals are formed, and a creative, authentic spiritual culture is moulded from Western European ancestral roots, suited to contemporary lifestyles.

**Contemporary Neo-Paganism**

Neo-pagan communities are alive and vibrant throughout the world. These spiritual practices which draw on one’s own ancestry and religious roots are being brought into the postmodern world with modifications appropriate to the lives of contemporary pagans. In this section, I give the examples of the Reclaiming tradition of Wicca and the use of sacred sites in England as two expressions of neo-paganism. I do this to provide a contemporary example of sustainable spirituality which does not appropriate Indigenous cultures and provides spiritual sustenance.

There are several variations of Wicca practiced today, including Gardnerian, Feri, Eclectic and Alexandrian. Wiccans practice rituals and magick both alone and in groups, including covens. The Reclaiming tradition began in San Francisco in the 1970s. The most publicly known founder is Starhawk who has published several high selling books including *The spiral dance*, which is one of the most referred to texts for many Wiccans\textsuperscript{189}. Reclaiming arose during a period of heavy direct action in the 1980s

\textsuperscript{188} Sabbats are the eight pagan seasonal celebrations; covens are groups of initiated witches who practice magick together; hand-fasting is the practice of marriage for a year and a day, though sometimes longer, by tying the lovers’ hands together.

in San Francisco with Starhawk and the other founders feeling the need for a spiritual community that was inherently active in political issues. They created rituals around the protest actions\textsuperscript{190}. This practice has continued, as at the 2002 protest at the World Economic Forum in New York when the main organising cluster requested the pagans who were there to begin the direct action with a ritual. Starhawk claims that this was due to the healing New Yorkers required after the terrorist attack in 2001\textsuperscript{191}. Active community engagement is one of the basic tenets of Reclaiming.

The Reclaiming tradition, as much neo-paganism does, aims for an earth based spiritual practice. Starhawk regards the tools learned in practicing Reclaiming as the basis for “bring[ing] about global economic justice and ecological sanity”\textsuperscript{192}. Groups of neo-pagans were involved in the large protests against globalisation in the United States in 1999 and 2000\textsuperscript{193}. Stewardship of place is advocated in Reclaiming, as witches have a personal relationship with their natural surroundings. For instance, many rituals are held outside in natural settings; witches often grow their own herbs and organic fruit and vegetables; and many tools and props such as wands and altars are found in the local environment.

\textsuperscript{190} Vale V, Sulak J. Op cit. Starhawk.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid. p16.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
Jenny Blain\textsuperscript{194} and Robert Wallis\textsuperscript{195} explain that:

…‘sacred sites’ become locations for communion and direct communication with ancestors, land-spirits, otherworld beings, in line with engagements described for indigenes elsewhere …, and people and identity may be constituted by place and landscape.\textsuperscript{196}

Neo-paganism in Western Europe attributes importance to sacred sites, their preservation and continued use in ritual. Neo-pagans living on the grounds of their pagan ancestors are fortunate to have connection with the land of their ancestors. Neo-pagans living in North America and Australia have only access to sacred sites that belong to the history and culture of the Indigenous people. Despite this advantage that European neo-pagans experience, conflict has still been apparent. In 1985 over three hundred people who attempted to gather at the sacred site, Stonehenge, in England for summer solstice were arrested. Police were sued by twenty one people involved in the confrontation for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment and damage to property. One police officer was charged with causing bodily harm to one of the festival participants\textsuperscript{197}.

Since the first open access event managed by English Heritage in 2000 it has been


Blain is the Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Applied Social Sciences at Sheffield Hallam University.


Doctor Wallis is an Associate Professor of Visual Culture at Richmond University.


legal for druids and others to gather at Stonehenge and to hold festivals\textsuperscript{198}. Approximately 36,500 people gathered at Stonehenge in 2009 for the summer solstice, a figure which has been increasing annually\textsuperscript{199}. Engagement with sacred sites is essential to neo-paganism practices in Britain.

Pagans, local residents and government agencies continually contest the management of sacred sites in Britain. Some sites, especially the more iconic ones such as Stonehenge and Avebury, are managed by National Heritage\textsuperscript{200}. In the spirit of stewardship of place, contemporary pagans take action to protect their local sacred sites when others may potentially cause harm to such places. However, general tourists and pagan visitors often leave a trail of destruction at sacred sites including vandalism or offerings to the spirits of the place\textsuperscript{201}, which become rubbish. Wallis and Blain observe that the appearance of these offerings has increased since the early 1980s\textsuperscript{202}. Participation in pagan celebrations such as summer solstice at Glastonbury can include dancing, ritual performance, voyeurism, playing music, meditation, and


ingesting drugs including alcohol. Now that the site is open to the general public, as opposed to being only available to those who purchased tickets as in 1999, the pagan, ceremonial element of the festival has been overshadowed by the ‘partying’ element\textsuperscript{203}. How engagement with sacred sites is encouraged is central to how they will be and preserved for future generations.

Pagans in Britain are concerned about the appropriation of their local heritage by those whose ancestry is more distant, especially those living in other nations. Blain\textsuperscript{204} gives the example of an author in the North American magazine ‘Shaman’s drum’ who discusses his own journey in ancestral homelands in Scotland. According to Blain, Frank MacEowen publicises incorrect information about an area of sacred sites with which Blain has been intimately acquainted since childhood. MacEowen believes that he was transmitted ‘cellular history’ by his pagan ancestors by spending time at these sites and entering trance states. Blain contests the legitimacy of ‘remembering’ through bloodlines that for hundreds of years would have been practicing Christians rather than pagans performing rituals at sacred sites\textsuperscript{205}. The white spiritual seeker living in Britain’s colonies is so displaced that one cannot expect to arrive in the homeland and to have instant understanding of one’s cultural heritage. The tourist is not an authority simply for having ancestors in a place that is occupied by a living continuation of that ancestry.

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
Conclusion

Our spiritual worldview is central to how we conduct ourselves in the world, and how we relate to each other and the environment. The resurgence of paganism presents potential alternative paths of spirituality than those that have traditionally been anthropo- and androcentric. While some in the New Age and neo-pagan spiritual movements believe that Indigenous people better comprehend how to live harmoniously with our environment, colonisers, invaders and conquerors must be willing to enter into mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous people to receive the assistance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. By misappropriating their sacred cultures, we are continuing the cycle of mistrust and continuing to break protocols. We must first respect other cultures and learn what is expected of us in a mutual relationship; we must work towards healing and reconciliation in order for spiritual and sacred knowledge is to be shared; and we must also respect and recognise our own Indigenous heritage, a spiritual heritage that is connected to our own homelands, in order to understand that we all share in a similar history.
CHAPTER 4: ETHICS, CELEBRATION AND ACTION

Introduction

...[o]ur global environmental and social crises are of our own making and can only be transformed by us. Therefore it is imperative that humanity finds ways of protecting and sustaining the natural environment for our collective survival. This necessarily depends on human beings’ ability to co-exist in harmony with other humans and species and to feel connected to and protect nature.  

In this chapter, I argue that the current environmental, social, economic and spiritual crises can be effectively approached within the New Age movement by addressing our relationships with self and the rest of nature. Here I utilise the ethical theories of deep ecology and its feminist counterpart, eco-feminism, as examples of how to achieve this with a New Age spiritual ethic. Environmental ethics are an example of how the New Age operates in the world. I argue that open dialogue and knowledge sharing is essential in comprehending and achieving alternative, life affirming axioms, as is ecstatic spiritual experience. I offer alternative festival subculture’s attempts to incorporate environmental ethics as a living example of the New Age in action.

206 Schmid E. An ecological sense of self as a necessary development for an ecologically sustainable future: the contributions of three spiritual or wisdom traditions to constructions of self and other in educational contexts. Masters [thesis]. Canberra: University of Canberra; 2006.
Environmental ethics

In this section, I argue that the New Age and Neo-Pagan movements value nature and have an ethic of care for the environment. I argue that our individual and collective relationships with nature can be effectively addressed by utilising environmental ethics as a platform for understanding the context of our perspectives. I highlight the ways environmental ethics complement New Age and Neo-Pagan values of nature. I then discuss the field of deep ecology and its argument that humans need to see ourselves as part of nature rather than separate from it. I build on this concept with the theory of ecofeminism and its critique of patriarchy as interrelated to the domination of nature.

Clark Roof attributes the evolution of environmental ethics to the new spiritual movements. He argues that:

> Metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers have led the way in shaping a new ecological ethic, defining it as spiritual at its core – with emphasis on the connectedness of all creation. ... As older monarchical conceptions of God fade, anthropocentric views of nature and notions of “dominion” over it should likewise give way.\(^{207}\)

The New Age and Neo-pagan spiritual movements share characteristics of environmental ethics philosophies. Neo-paganism calls for a less anthropocentric worldview, which would shift values from being human-centred to encompassing the rest of nature in a more balanced way. The New Age looks forward to a time when society has overcome its ills:

[New Agers] share a very negative image of established society as sunk in materialism and heading for disaster. Many of them have intense millennial expectations, viewing the present society as in the last stage of degradation before the dawning of a new era.\textsuperscript{208}

The adoption of environmental ethics such as deep ecology and ecofeminism could be one way to raise this consciousness and bring us into the new era.

Arne Naess coined the term ‘deep ecology’ in 1973 in an attempt to surpass reformist environmentalism\textsuperscript{209} and move towards a “comprehensive spiritual and philosophical worldview, an ‘ecological consciousness’”\textsuperscript{210}. Arne Naess is considered the founder of ‘deep ecology’\textsuperscript{211}, an environmental ethic that stresses the idea that people need to become less anthropocentric; that we need to see ourselves as part of nature as

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Warren KJ. Chapter 4: How should we treat nature? In: Ecofeminist philosophy: a western perspective on what it is and why it matters. Lanham (Maryland): Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc; 2000. p84.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
opposed to separate from it\textsuperscript{212}. Deep ecology attempts to blur the lines between human and other-than-human nature, assisting us to comprehend ourselves as part of our environment, not apart from it. According to Ruether, “[d]eep ecology... examines the symbolic, psychological, and ethical patterns of destructive relations of humans with nature and how to replace this with a life-affirming culture.”\textsuperscript{213}

Some attribute the spiritual aspect of deep ecology is attributed by some to Native American traditions\textsuperscript{214}. Naess champions a perception of Indigenous animism when outlying his ‘ecosophy T’. This is Naess’ own eco-philosophical view on which he bases his support of the deep ecology movement. Its primary foundation is to advocate self-realisation for all beings\textsuperscript{215}. According to Naess:

\begin{quote}
It is noteworthy that a ‘democracy of life forms’ is or was characteristic of some primal societies. Their conception of the human situation is more realistic than that offered in our techno-natural scientific education. While we derobe nature as such of all sensory diversity, and assert that it is really colourless, animism moves in the opposite direction.\textsuperscript{216}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{216} Naess A. Ecology, community and lifestyle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; p175.
Sheridan and Longboat describe Indigenous animism as “the first Deep Ecology”\textsuperscript{217}. They use the term “animist realism” which they argue portrays “a planet where everything is alive and sentient... that familiarity [with the land as embodied Creation] confirms a knowledge and faith in Creation’s necessary architecture of ecological and spiritual interrelationships”\textsuperscript{218}. The New Age can address the ecological crisis through environmental ethics by undertaking animist realism without appropriating foreign Indigenous culture.

Ecofeminists such as Ariel Salleh critique deep ecology as being too theoretical and lacking a necessary emphasis on the oppression of women which, if overcome, “could provide an immediate ‘living’ social basis for the alternative consciousness which the deep ecologist is trying to formulate and introduce as an abstract ethical construct”\textsuperscript{219}. Eco-feminism as an environmental ethic takes a step further than deep ecology, relating the ecological crisis to the oppression of women and nature, which has been ultimately intertwined throughout the patriarchal reign in many societies\textsuperscript{220}. Eco-feminism contributes a more social interpretation of deep ecology, insisting that the domination of women by a patriarchy is inherently similar to the domination of nature, as is the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{218} Ibid. p368.
  \item \textsuperscript{219} Ibid. Warren KJ. Chapter two: what are ecofeminists saying? p25.
\end{itemize}
oppression of races, cultures, sexualities and anyone else who is deemed ‘other’. According to Andrew Ross, whose work focuses on men’s relationship to the women’s and ecology movements in the early 1990s, although not all neo-pagans identify with eco-feminism (and certainly not all eco-feminists are pagan), the philosophy complements the pagan aim of returning to ancestral animism and provides reasons that nature and the feminine should be revered in our culture in an effort to stay the ecological crisis.

Indigenous cultures have a lived experience with the natural world that many non-Aboriginal people searching for answers to our current crises often look to for guidance; however, ignorance of the realities of Native peoples’ perspectives often appears in the fields that these activists are engaged in. Carol Adams argues in *Ecofeminism and the sacred* that while attempting to garner spiritual insights from Indigenous cultures, non-Indigenous people must not ignore the political struggles these cultures face. Such struggles are largely due to the beliefs and actions of the dominant society which eco-feminism aims to critique. Ignorance of current political endeavours of Indigenous peoples affirms the continuation of the colonial project. Participants in the New Age,

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like some of those in the neo-pagan movement, can be aware of and actively involved
in these endeavours while simultaneously working on their own self-realisation.

**Alternative festivals as sites of New Age education**

Alternative culture in North America and Australia is fervently expressed at underground
music and lifestyle festivals. As someone who attends these events and associates
with others who do, I feel that the festival is a safe environment to express the idealistic
manifestation of self one attempts to embody in everyday life, but is significantly more
successful in achieving when surrounded by a nurturing and supportive community of
like-minded others. At the festival, creativity and openness are valued; spirituality is at
the fore of expression. In this section, I discuss the inclusion of indigeneity at
alternative festivals in Australia and the United States. I argue that the festival is a
powerful convergence for the New Age movement and the stimulation of political ideas
within its community; and that a cultural exchange between Indigenous and non-
Indigenous can occur here if done correctly.

**ConFest**

ConFest (Conference Festival) is an Australian event in which education of and by
participants is the central goal. Deputy Prime Minister Jim Cairns\(^{224}\) initiated ConFest in
1976, which has since been held at various rural locations in the Australian Capital

\(^{224}\) The tribute web site team. Confest: Conference Festival [homepage on the internet]. 2000 [cited 7
Territory, New South Wales and Victoria\textsuperscript{225}. The demographics are not published but cultural anthropologist Graham St John\textsuperscript{226} suggests that there is a large presence of delegates in their early to mid twenties, mostly Euro-Australian\textsuperscript{227}. The participants come from diverse professions; predominantly the delegates are from the educated middle class. In the many workshops held at ConFest, “there is an evident increase in the popularity of techniques, myths and rituals attributed to indigenous, Asian or other ethnicities”\textsuperscript{228}. Workshops are the spaces at festivals that most directly intend to achieve a sharing of knowledge. St John refers to these workshop offerings as a spiritual supermarket where festival goers consume and receive initiations as they desire\textsuperscript{229}.

Action towards positive change is encouraged at ConFest. For instance, as St John describes, the ‘Forest village’ where political groups are stationed:

\ldots has functioned as a recruitment centre for logging blockades mounted in East Gippsland and anti-nuclear industry activism at Roxby Downs and Jabiluka. Forest features the GECO (Goongerah Environment Centre) organic/vegan kitchen which raises funds for the defence of the Goolengook and Otway Forests. Information about the current state of forest management, boycotts and

\footnotesize{228} Ibid. Part 2: Heal thy self – thy planet. Chapter 7: Sacred drama: self, earth and indigeneity.
\footnotesize{229} Ibid.
blockades are disseminated by eco-radical tacticians. One experienced Forest activist, Banyalla, voices his frustration with Down to Earth's (DTE) ecologically quiescent constituency: '[T]he more activists get involved [in DTE/ConFest] the more ... you're gonna get people actually doing something [ie. promoting forest awareness], rather than just believing having seven days walking around in the nude is fuckin' alternative.'

Participants may engage in brief interactions with various spiritualities during ConFest, they are also likely to be confronted by challenging political alternatives and invited to build on their inner growth by becoming involved in active social change.

**Rainbow Serpent**

The Rainbow Serpent festival in Victoria has an Indigenous knowledge sharing component. The name of the festival refers to the rainbow serpent that many Indigenous groups in Australia recognise as an important creator being. Rainbow Serpent in 2010 included an Indigenous knowledge workshop space where dance, art, cooking, basket weaving, Didgeridoo/Yidaki and healing were taught to festival participants. The Indigenous Liaison for the festival, David Beaumont (Wiradjuri), is

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Wiradjuri country comprises approximately eighty thousand square kilometers of central New South Wales.
also a disc jockey who performed an electronic set incorporating didgeridoo. Uncle Phil performed a workshop on preparing a Torres Strait Island feast, teaching participants protocols for taking from the natural environment and accepting responsibility for community\(^{233}\). Such workshops provide valuable learning for (largely non-Indigenous) festival participants, and opportunities for Indigenous educators to share in the other workshops and music that is showcased at these events where alternatives to many of society’s current paradigms on community, ecology and economy are presented in an uplifting and hopeful manner.

**Rainbow Gatherings**

The Rainbow Gathering is a unique New Age event. Taking place on international, national, and regional levels in countries all over the globe\(^{234}\), the Gatherings are grassroots organised meeting places for the ‘Rainbow Family’ to converge and share an utopian lifestyle for up to a month at a time. Sites are chosen for the Gatherings that are naturally beautiful and void of fences or development. Age demographics at rainbow gatherings are diverse though usually within the twenty to forty age bracket,

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Rainbow gatherings are held regularly throughout North America and Europe, and have also been held in Australia, parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Wikipedia is not usually credited with being a reliable resource, but considering the grassroots nature of the rainbow gathering movement, I feel that Wikipedia is more reliable than other websites as it is frequently updated and there are many contributors to the final publication. Literature on the rainbow gatherings is difficult to find as most of it is self-published and distributed within social networks.
with concentration on young single attendees\textsuperscript{235}. Workshops are spontaneous offerings by anyone who feels they have something to share\textsuperscript{236}, such as hitch hiking\textsuperscript{237}, ger or yurt making\textsuperscript{238}, and the alleged Hopi rainbow prophecy\textsuperscript{239}. Here the ‘Rainbow family of living light’ can gather knowledge and strength as skills to help change the world. As the Rainbow Gatherings are void of leadership or ‘officialdom’\textsuperscript{240}, history is ambiguous and always contested. Tavory and Goodman describe the change that Rainbow Family members participate in following a Gathering as:

\begin{quote}
...a shift in the experience of self. On the one hand, it is an expressive journey of self-discovery, complete with a language of individual transformation. But on the other, this change is done by and with others, and has interactional effects which signify the communal, through the dislocation of embodied tie-signs of intimacy.\textsuperscript{241}
\end{quote}

Living in a temporary community teaches participants tolerance and that their actions affect those around them. These lessons will inform their future behaviour.


Identification with the term 'rainbow' in alternative culture is significant, though its roots are ambiguous. One unofficial website describes the purpose of the name as recognising that:

...it takes the full spectrum of hue-manity to make it happen; it literally 'takes all kinds' ... IOW, many hands make light work. :^) -or- Ya' know (the Rainbow) "it's made up of light". Living Light that is.\(^\text{242}\)

Another popular reason for the identification with the term rainbow is the myth of a Native American prophecy stating that a rainbow tribe would arrive to save the planet in its time of need. Ethnographer Michael Niman debunked this myth in his published PhD People of the rainbow: a nomadic utopia as originating from a book written by evangelical Christians in 1962 called Warriors of the rainbow. Niman criticises elements of 'fakelore' that he sees at rainbow gatherings, where Native American culture is taken out of context and relayed as authentic. He believes that borrowing ideas from other cultures is positive; as long as recognition is given that, the knowledge has been removed from its source\(^\text{243}\).


Earthdance

Earthdance is an international music and New Age spirituality festival that electronic musician Chris Deckker began in 1997. It has taken place in over five hundred locations in eighty countries since its inception. The central unifying event of the festival is the synchronised prayer for peace conducted in recognition of the United Nations’ International Day of Peace.

The Earthdance hub event in Laytonville, California successfully achieves two way Indigenous/non-Indigenous education, and that there lies potential for this to develop further. The ‘Gathering of the elders’ is a discussion forum incorporating delegates from local Indigenous tribes, Indigenous elders from other places in the United States and other countries, as well as some non-Indigenous elders.

Examples of the diversity of the delegates in 2009 include:

- Agnes Baker Pilgrim, a Takelma elder from nearby Ashland, Oregon, who serves on the Council of Thirteen Grandmothers that travel the globe bringing feminine wisdom to such places as the Vatican.

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• Oren Lyons, chief of the Onondaga nation in New York state; traditional Faithkeeper; director of Native American Studies at the State University of New York, Buffalo; and Indigenous rights activist.247

• Nicki Skully, a non-Indigenous American woman who teaches on shamanism and conducts spiritual tours in Egypt, Peru and other “sacred power centres”; Skully says she opened up to spirituality while taking psychedelic drugs with the Californian bluegrass band The Grateful Dead.248

• Leslene della Madre, a non-Indigenous American woman who teaches eclectic shamanism.

These and other delegates answered questions from the audience on topics such as prophecy, conservation and Indigenous health issues.

In 2009 there was a component of the forum entitled “Youth meet the elders”, where a delegation of younger festival contributors249 asked questions of the elders. As part of this forum, one invited speaker, an Australian woman who was teaching yoga at the festival, expressed having seen her Akashic records and that she had “walked as a


249 Most ‘youth’ delegates appeared to be between the ages of twenty and thirty five.

Native American”. She was quickly shooed off the stage. Despite this being a festival with New Age components, flaky statements of authenticity such as this are not tolerated. I feel that it would be of value to the non-Indigenous New Age youth, particularly in an area such as Northern California where many of the participants come from second or third generation New Age families, to hear from Indigenous Elders their understandings of reincarnation. The idea is prevalent in New Age circles that one could have had many past lives in different cultures. This raises questions as to what kind of authority someone such as this woman may have to speak on Indigenous issues if able to remember their past lives. I believe that dialogue about ideas such as this is necessary in order for us to better understand where each other are coming from. Festivals such as Earthdance are a perfect location for this type of direct communication on spiritual issues between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Electronic dance music culture

Referred to as ‘doofs’ by those who participate in Australia, Electronic Dance Music Culture (EDMC) parties are similar to the rave but are usually held outdoors. Locations are often in illegal places such as private properties or state parks without permission. Directions to the party are received by word of mouth and text messages in order to ensure that police or people outside the social circles of organisers do not discover the

The Akashic records are a reference in Hindu religion to a cosmic or universal record of all that has ever existed. The concept is present in other spiritual traditions including Christianity and Islam. Information is stored in a similar way to files on a computer, and therefore people can have individual records which they may ‘see’ in a vision such as those induced by meditation, dream or intoxication.
Another important difference between the rave and doof is the type of music played: while raves feature many types of electronic music, doofs focus on trance and ambient styles that allow for more of a spiritual focus at the party, rather than hedonism.

I agree with musicologist Rupert Till\textsuperscript{251} that “EDMC is a process of re-enchantment, of addressing the problem of the [spiritually] homeless self”\textsuperscript{252}. St John describes all night trance dance parties as neo-pagan exercises. According to Krusty, the organiser of a trance dance at ConFest which was referred to in the advertising material as a “tribal rave celebration”:

The all night dance ritual is a memory that runs deep within us all, a memory that takes us back to a time when people had respect for our great Mother Earth and each other. A time when we came together as one tribe united in spirit. We understood the cycles of nature and the power of the elements. We danced around fires, we chanted and we drummed, invoking the great spirit to empower ourselves and our community\textsuperscript{253}.

Krusty infers that Aboriginal people have been practicing trance dance for forty thousand years, which legitimises its practice at doofs\textsuperscript{254}. He mentions the idea of


\textsuperscript{253} St John G. Op cit. 2000.

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid.

“Trance Dance, regarded as 'an ancient Shamanic practice which invites Spirit to embody us; to heal us through spiritual ecstasy,' is authorised as a practice employed by indigenous people worldwide 'for over 40 000 years' (and as a means by which 'significant memories of this life, lives past, even those of prehuman form' can be retrieved).”
retrieving ancestral memories through this state, similar to the concept raised by Blain that I discuss in Chapter Three\textsuperscript{255}. St John argues that trance parties are neo-pagan\textsuperscript{256}, contemporary versions of seasonal rites where “the sacra are transmitted”\textsuperscript{257}. By experiencing these ecstatic spiritual events, a direct connection is made to the sacred that is ultimately entwined with relationships between self and nature.

**Neo-tribalism**\textsuperscript{258}

Related to this effort to reestablish a spiritual relationship with the earth, the word ‘tribe’ is frequently used as a synonym for community in alternative culture\textsuperscript{259,260,261}. Trance disc jockey Ray Castle describes doofs as “tribadelic” in reference to indigeneity:

\textsuperscript{255} See Chapter Three, p15-16.


\textsuperscript{258} I personally take issue with the term ‘tribe’ being used in communities I find myself part of. I understand the term as originating from a colonial perspective on pan-Indigenous ways of life and kinship. Some Aboriginal groups, especially in North America, describe themselves as belonging to a particular tribe. For this reason I prefer to steer clear of the term ‘tribe’ or ‘neo-tribe’ to describe New Age community. However, I respect the right of others who are aware of the vast differences between our community and Native tribes to use it as a postmodern reinterpretation of language.

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid. Neo-paganism as eco-spirituality.


We are like the Australian Aborigines who, for eons, have contemplated the planetsphere with their dreamtime, while beating their sticks and blowing through a hollowed out pipe (didjeridu). These open-air, wilderness, tribadelic, pagan-like parties (rituals), are along this line of primordial communion.\(^{262}\)

The Rainbow Family is often described as a nomadic tribe, traveling the world to set up camp and share with old and new friends.

‘Neo-tribalism’ is a redefinition of the term ‘tribal’, which signifies the connection that members of various alternative cultures such as rainbow or EDMC feel with each other; a social network that extends beyond your local neighbourhood. The tribe is sometimes physically present around you, either in temporary autonomous zones such as festivals; in bohemian quarters of a city; or in communal living spaces. There are alternative modes of government being played out; sustainable structures being made; gardens planted and food distributed. Other times the tribe is but a memory or perhaps present on the Internet or radio. Neo-tribalism suggests belonging to a tribe of choice, one that defines itself as other than mainstream. It indicates a willingness to connect with Indigenous values and perceived ways of living.

Activities engaged in by New Agers at festivals are often positive, life-affirming practices that are informed by a nourishing spiritual ethic. Festivals are sites wherein participants are invited to grow their spiritual ideas as well as learn practical skills for building a more environmentally ethical world. Direct, ecstatic spiritual experience is engaged through

\(^{262}\) Ibid. p159.
music, performance, being in a natural environment and by some, through the ingestion of entheogens. At the festival, the New Age community can live its deep ecology utopia, if just for a weekend, a week or a month, and bring this experience with them into their regular lives.

**Conclusion**

The New Age movement can and does have practical application. Non-Indigenous people can support the efforts of those we, our ancestors and/or culture have oppressed to overcome a grievous number of obstacles: from environmental degradation to deaths in custody; from broken treaties to plastic shamans. We can stop the sacred places, which are really every place\(^{263}\), from being disrespected. In order to do so, it is necessary to examine our own ethics and relationships with our environment in order to create paradigm shifts firstly within ourselves, and eventually in wider society. Spaces are being created where there is an aim to achieve this, such as subculture festivals. Bringing initiatives into the mainstream is the challenge of those involved. If the dominant colonial societies can take responsibility for what has been done to Native people and Native lands, more authentic spiritual relationships can develop between parties.

CONCLUSION

The New Age movement represents paradigm shifts in spiritual understanding. Through astrology and prophecy, New Agers predict that the collective spiritual vibration will influence the outcomes of the current transition period in Earth’s evolution. If we do not recognise that those who hold the power are working to keep our evolution at bay, and attempt to reverse their influence on planetary operations, life on Earth will suffer.

The New Age is perceived by many to be full of unrealistic, partially formed ideas that are often used in a manipulative, mercenary fashion. However, the theories about conscious evolution are gaining some clout in conventional fields, as seen in the film *What the bleep do we know?*[^264], which draws on quantum physics, neurology and molecular biology to demonstrate that humans are able to create our own realities. The continued amalgamation of New Age spirituality and science will continue to strengthen the validity of New Age concepts to a wider audience.

Paganism and the New Age often intersect, and I argue that the two fields are well complemented: paganism with its connection to history and with the earth, and the New Age awakening to the larger cosmos and conscious evolution. Unfortunately, New Age authors are not always trained writers; hence, despite having many valid spiritual

experiences, academics often regard them condescendingly. I understand this because, I experience this with my own mother’s work: although I know firsthand that she has a great ability to channel intense healing energy, her writing often makes me cringe. She often writes long, detailed explanations of her work that become pages upon pages without paragraph breaks; she makes bold claims of spiritual truth that only she knows the origins of as she rarely cites her influences; and she publishes the most personal details of her life, which are often unnecessary and mundane (sometimes with mention of my own name), on the World Wide Web265.

The New Age aims to be a non-religious spiritual forum. Its philosophies assert that the world is not operating in a balanced state due to peoples’ damaging behaviours, which ultimately stem from a separation from the sacred. The New Age movement advocates experiential spirituality that places authority in each person as a sovereign being. By raising our own and others’ spiritual consciousness about environmental ethics and strategies for caring for the planet, the New Age contributes to combating the current ecological crisis. Strategies for this include advocating Indigenous knowledge.

Aboriginal people, however, sometimes interpret the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge into New Age theories and practices as disrespectful. Such instances discourage Native people from engaging in open dialogue with New Age members who

265 Much of this critique must be assigned to the fact, that though I love her more than anyone else on the planet and value her as my first and most influential spiritual teacher, she is my mother.
are drawing on this knowledge. In some cases, aspects of Indigenous cultures are appropriated and used out of context, often ignoring the differences between Indigenous cultures. This has a history in stereotypes that generalise Aboriginality. Non-native people who are misinformed about Native cultures spread misinformation through New Age mediums. People claiming to be Native and misinterpreting Native practices also provide validation for others to do the same. Some non-Indigenous people thus create and reinforce myths regarding Native spirituality by re-telling and re-creating them.

Misinformation of Aboriginal spirituality is propagated in the field of neo-shamanism. Acts performed under the misnomer of ‘shaman’ are misrepresentative of Indigenous cultures, both contemporary and traditional, and these acts can be harmful to those who take part. Workshops that claim to teach shamanism dismiss the years of training it takes within traditional cultures to be considered a spiritual authority. The use of entheogens as a path to spiritual enlightenment is dangerous particularly when the motives of those facilitating their use are largely mercenary. Native people who sell their traditions to outsiders present a distorted view of culture to non-Indigenous people who rarely have direct dialogue with Aborigines. Spiritual authorities in Indigenous cultures rarely accept payment for services aside from donations; anyone demanding large sums of money from their clients for this work are likely involved in charlatanism. Laws to prevent the appropriation of Indigenous culture are a necessary development to prevent harm both to unsuspecting New Age patrons and contemporary Aboriginal cultures.
Neo-paganism broadly aims to revive pre-colonial animistic spiritual traditions. These are usually one’s own ancestral traditions, but occasionally people are inspired to research another’s history. For instance, some people in North America believe that they practise Native American spirituality despite not being Indigenous themselves or being raised in Aboriginal culture. The lack of recorded information on pagan traditions necessitates a large amount of contemporary pagan practice left to intuition.

As neo-pagans see the earth as sacred, they treat it with respect. Neo-pagans are concerned with the feminist project, and believe that spirituality should encompass the feminine and masculine equally because, for them, doing so will assist in bringing the planet back into balance. Neo-pagans reject the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, just as they reject the separation of sacred and profane in Occidental society. As neo-pagan communities grow, the spiritual practices are gaining depth and new traditions.

In order to grow healthy relationships between cultures, we must learn relationship protocols to respectfully engage with each other. We must know where we come from, our own heritage, in order to have meaningful connections with people who are strongly connected to land and spiritual cultures. If we believe that our own ancestors had healthy spiritual and practical relationships with the earth, we are urged to ask the questions: what inspired us to turn away from that; what pain have we caused from
making that break, to ourselves and others; what would we prefer our world to look like, and how do we bring that about?

Contemporary pagans are actively involved in their communities and in politics. Engagement with sacred sites is a central tenet of paganism, one that often extends beyond the sacred sites of one’s own ancestry to those of other spiritual traditions. Neo-pagans spend significant time maintaining and protecting sacred sites, both in their ancestral grounds and those of others. Balancing engagement with these sites and their protection for future generations is often problematic.

The New Age spiritual movement inspires impetus for spiritual investigation of our relationships with our environment such as that which is present in the field of deep ecology. This is done through examination of destructive human relationships with nature, and focus on how to reverse these trends. Ecofeminism expands on deep ecology by asserting that the domination of women and nature are entwined. This argument complements neo-paganism’s avocation of the divine feminine, embodied as the earth or Gaia. We must ensure that while investigating spirituality, we do not let practical, political action fall to the wayside.

Alternative festivals are powerful places to challenge paradigms and engage in meaningful dialogue. They are well attended by the New Age community as a means of
nurturing and developing their spirituality. Festival workshops can appear consumerist and shallow, as participants can pick and choose from what to learn; however, they can also be effective spaces for exchanging knowledge. Indigenous speakers at these festivals share knowledge on a wealth of topics. Some festivals such as Earthdance engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in working towards a common goal, such as prayer for peace. Festivals, such as the rainbow gatherings, challenge dominant ideas of hierarchy because all participants, rather than a central organiser, are responsible for the organisation and operation of the celebration. Doofs are an alternative to popular rave culture that aim towards spiritual enlightenment and ecstatic experience, seen by some as sacred neo-pagan rites. Some people believe that the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge at festivals can be positive, as long as recognition is given to where it originated and the fact that it is being reinterpreted.

A stewardship ethic is necessary to ensure that sacred places exist into the future. Access and rights to homelands is central to Indigenous peoples being able to practice their traditional religions as they are inextricably tied to the land in which they were formed. Projects that involve Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working in partnership to achieve sustainability are effective when power balance is maintained between those involved. It is vitally important that Indigenous knowledge is shared in ways that respect protocols.
Non-Natives living on stolen land during this period of planetary crisis are attempting to improve comprehension of ourselves in context with the other-than-human world. The New Age spiritual movement is a community of people who recognise the inadequacies of Occidental society and are aiming to address them. Some in the New Age movement look to the Traditional Owners of the lands occupied by our colonial cultures to provide them with a spiritual solution. These relationships are often one-sided and contribute to the continuation of the colonial project. Each person has a rich heritage of spiritual cultures from which to draw. Combining the wisdom of our ancestry with an experiential relationship with people and the rest of nature is a more appropriate method for attuning to our natural selves.
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