– ARTICLE –

AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF DEATH NOTICES:
UNEARTHING THE CULTURE SHAPING DEATH NOTICES IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have established that the local social or moral order impacts on aspects of death announcements in various societies, though few have consequently sought to problematise that order. Those studies appear to presume the homogeneity of the studied society although modern societies typically include diverse peoples. This article assesses whether death notices in Aotearoa New Zealand are circumscribed by the dominant social/cultural order or reflect its multicultural character. Examining a large number of notices from the New Zealand Herald, we found most incorporated the same structural elements and employed a common vocabulary, evidence that the writers were guided by a single social order. Utilising published research and death notices deviating from the standard we were able to identify cultural characteristics of that local social order that were being rendered ordinary in the sample of death notices. Identified features of that dominant order are: it fixes a gulf between past and present; it limits relationships of the deceased to their immediate family; it expects positive portrayals of the deceased; and overtly religious language is largely absent. Underpinning these notices were two cultural characteristics: an understanding of time as a unidirectional flow of empty instants and a taken-for-granted a-social individuality.

Keywords: death notices; local social order; time as a flow; asocial individuality; New Zealand culture

…mass-mediated rituals…promote a sense of social collectivism that legitimizes the existing social order and affirms common sacred values. (Pantti and Sumiala 2009, 121)

INTRODUCTION

In exploring the way in which media developments have impacted on mourning rituals, Pantti and Sumiala (2009, 121) focused on exceptional events, 'national tragedies'. They examined how coverage of such events changed as newsreels gave way to television and the virtual mourning enabled by the internet. Like McNeill (2008), who examined online memorials to the murder victims at Virginia Tech, Pantti and Sumiala (2009, 128) looked for the 'kind of social centres they [the rituals] construct and what kind of social order they naturalize'. Billig's (1995) compelling argument that the social order of a nation is primarily produced through its everyday practices suggested to us that we could learn much about the naturalising of the national social order by examining everyday sources. As an everyday counterpart to national tragedies, we gathered short newspaper pieces informing readers that someone has died (death notices) and explored their part in reproducing a social order.

We understand a social order to be the expression of a people's episteme – the cultural resources through which they relate to themselves and their worlds, both the natural and the supernatural (Tau 2012). Languages are suffused by their episteme so talk and thought are both grounded in and give expression to the ontology of a culture creating a symbiotic relation between language and social order. Given the closeness of the relationship between a people's social order and their language there is no need to naturalise their social order – it is already the obvious ordinary for everyone in that society. However, such homogeneous societies are unusual in the early twenty-first century where most include multiple cultures each of which has, or had, its own language and social order. As such diversity of social orders is incompatible with imaginings of nations as essentially coherent (Anderson 1991; Hage 2000) modern societies privilege a particular social order and language (Goldberg 2002).

Colonies and the colonising societies they became (Belich 2009; Hage 2000; Reicher and Hopkins 2001; Thompson 1990) necessarily include a plurality of peoples, and colonisers have been shown to expend considerable effort ensuring that their episteme and social order achieve naturalised authority (Hage 2000; McCreanor 2012; Miller and Ross 2004). Wetherell and Potter (1992) provide a wide-ranging exploration of how discursive and argumentative resources are utilised by Anglo-settler colonisers in one such society. They showed how their informants' talk constructed the social order as self-evidently natural. Investigations of the social order in Aotearoa New Zealand (Abel 2006; Barclay and Liu 2003; Gregory *et al*. 2011; McCreanor 1997; Nairn and McCreanor 1990; Nairn *et al.* 2009; Phelan 2009; Smith 2001; Walker 2004) have shown

that the colonising social order has been successfully rendered natural and ordinary. That achievement means the cultural character of the social order is consistently masked creating a priority for research that unmasks the culture of the dominant social order; a necessary step if it is to be recognised as a possible order amongst the many offered by peoples living here (Gregory *et al.* 2011; Moewaka Barnes *et al.* 2012; Reicher and Hopkins 2001; Thompson 1990; Wetherell and Potter 1992). This article contributes an account of how death notices published in Aotearoa New Zealand, give material expression to the local social order and the cultural characteristics underlying it.

At the heart of all death notices, or announcements, lies the common factor – a person has died and the writers wish to inform other people. Their wish results in newspaper notices that Al-Ali (2005, 6), employing Carolyn Miller's (1984) term, calls a 'homely' discourse, an – 'easily recognizable socially constructed text genre[s] of everyday life'. Commonplace, everyday discourses that are widely familiar have been shown to play important roles in asserting and naturalising the dominant social order (Abel, McCreanor, and Moewaka Barnes 2012; Essed 1991). Wetherell and Potter (1992) described one component of that 'common sense' and how it was utilised. Amid various debates and discussions, they identified Rhetorically Self-sufficient Statements (RSS) used to close discussions in favour of the colonising status quo. Examining this effect they concluded that an RSS works effectively because it expresses a significant social value in a familiar form that cultural insiders accept as self-evidently authoritative. Examples of RSS include (significant social value in parentheses): 'Nobody should be compelled' (freedom of choice) and 'Everybody should be treated equally' (equality).

Given the flexibility of discourses and the diversity of cultures, it is expected that such notices will differ across different societies (Alali and Adjaye 1998; Moses and Marelli 2004; Ondimu 2014) or that they should be variously labelled. Researchers who include family-authored 'obituaries' in their studies (Al-Ali 2005; Matiki 2001; Moses and Marelli 2004; Ondimu 2014) have shown that these texts differ considerably from obituaries prepared by professional writers to mark deaths of prominent persons. Family or friends writing a death notice may be assisted by an undertaker or seek guidance from a website that explains 'How to write a death notice' (examples include: Watson (2008); Funeral Help (United Kingdom) (2015); Obituaries Help (United States) (no date); Roadhouse and Rose (Canada) (no date). In comparing English and German-language death notices Fries (1990b) noted only occasional instances of newspapers imposing their in house style: editorial style interventions did not account for the observed variability. Inspection of the relevant page of the

Herald shows the paper provides little guidance (Fig 1 below). Those writing the notice must provide a 'valid death notice' although there is no onsite direction as to the form it must take. However no notice can be submitted unless it also includes: name and surname of the deceased, the writer's relationship to the deceased, and name of the funeral company engaged. It appears that regularities identified in samples of death notices underpinning their classification as a generic textual form (McNeill 2004) generally owe more to guidance the writers have accessed than a newspaper imposed structure. Categorisation as a 'generic textual form' does not imply death notices follow a rigid form; indeed, researchers have found that family-authored texts show considerable variability. Despite that variability, analyses of death notices in different societies reveal sufficient consistency to identify common components enabling researchers to specify which elements are required and which are optional (Eid 2002; Fries 1990a).

Utilising Enkvist's notion of a 'template text' in which the macrostructure is set in advance and writers merely enter relevant data into the appropriate slots Fries (1990a) analysed death notices published in *The Times* (London) over a 200 year period. He identified nine components in those notices: 'Date, Place, Age, Circumstances, Name, Relations, Origin, Occupation, and Other Information' (p. 60), noting that the form of 'Name' and 'Date' entries were becoming more rigid and most elements were somewhat optional. He also noted that there was a 'conspicuous absence of words denoting death … dying is only mentioned in the headline of the entire section' (Fries 1990a, 58). Consistent with the understanding that each society has its own social order, the names researchers have assigned components reveal similarities to and differences from components identified by Fries. Analysing family-authored texts in the 'Deaths' section of the *New York Times,* Moses and Marelli (2004) considered that: 'name of the deceased, a date of death, funeral announcement, and listing of family members' were obligatory elements. Other elements such as: 'age' (of deceased), 'request' (as in 'donations should be made to'), and 'circumstances' (such as 'place of death' and adjectival modifiers; 'peacefully', 'suddenly' or 'surrounded by family'), though not obligatory, occurred frequently. Canadian notices (McNeill 2004; 2007) include an 'Accomplishments' slot and separated out 'funeral details' from 'Other Information' (Fries 1990a). McNeill treated these notices as instances of life writing that memorialised the deceased in ways expected to encourage other people to mourn 'the loss of someone they have not known personally' (McNeill 2008, 387). Subjecting Ghanaian death notices to a genre analysis (Afful 2012) revealed seven elements: 'caption', 'list of family members and organisations', 'profile of deceased', 'funeral arrangements', 'prescription of attire', and 'invitation' noting that the deceased is not formally

named until the 'profile'.

As this paper explores the possibility that death notices help naturalise a social order we need evidence that death notices link to values, beliefs, and practices of a society's social order. Writers of Canadian death announcements routinely portray the deceased, their life and identity, in ways that are consistent with public notions of who is worthy of being mourned McNeill (2004) a priority shown to influence representations of women who were abducted and murdered (Gilchrist 2010). While both White and indigenous women were portrayed as having '"good victim" characteristics' such as beauty, being loved, spirited, gifted, and contributing to family and society, those characteristics were clearer and more personalised in coverage of the White women.

Some studies have mined death notices for evidence of gendered values (Eid 2002; Kastenbaum, Peyton, and Kastenbaum 1977; Moses and Marelli 2004). Newspaper notices in Birmingham, Alabama, 1900–1985 reflected the gendered character of United States society: statements about deceased women differed from those about men by being more passive (Halbur and Vandagrif 1987). Rubinstein (2007) revealed a similar effect in death notices in Jerusalem there, in a woman's notice, her name will be followed by the prayer 'may she rest in peace', whereas a man's name is followed by affirmations such as 'of blessed memory' or 'of pious memory'. Kenyan death notices require a 'List of family members' (Ondimu 2014, 17) and these regularly affirmed Kenyan gender relations. In Kenya a man is first and foremost a son and an adult woman is firstly a wife, consequently, the list in a man's death notice normally begins, 'son to …' before his identification as 'husband to …' whereas a married woman's list begins 'wife to …' before she is identified as 'daughter to …'.

Investigations of death notices for signs of a society's cultural beliefs and values include an analysis of a mix of 'Obituaries, In Memoriam, and Funeral Notices' from two English-language Ghanaian newspapers (Alali and Adjaye 1998). They reported that death could be: 'cold and unfeeling'; providing calm and peace; and a comfort to the survivors who considered the deceased to be 'resting with the Lord' (224). More recently (Afful 2012) showed Ghanaian death announcements named death as: a harsh imposition, a transition to glory, a promotion, or a noble rest, glosses paralleling those of the earlier study. One feature of a death notice that is influenced by the social order, concerns who the notice addresses. Like the notices described by Fries (1990b; 1990a), Ghanaian notices (Afful 2012; Alali and Adjaye 1998) spoke about the deceased, whereas obituaries in three popular Malawi newspapers were consistently addressed to the deceased rather than the reader (Matiki 2001). In Malawi that

imperative to address the deceased is so strong that notices for children who die before attending school are in Chichewa [the dominant indigenous language] 'the only language they [the child] understood before they died' (Matiki 2001, 46). Obituaries in popular Malawi newspapers differ from Ghanaian death notices in two further ways; they make few direct references to death and, as mandated by a cultural reticence about age in Malawi, the deceased's age or birth date rarely appears.

Most social orders value status and success, and studies have identified ways in which writers of death notices display and affirm the status of the deceased (Afful 2012). Status can be asserted by the language of the notice. In African societies that were British colonies, English has high status because it is formally learned and consequently, is widely utilised in death notices (Afful 2012; Alali and Adjaye 1998; Matiki 2001). Status can also be signalled by including titles of the deceased and their close surviving kin, particularly those with prestigious occupations, and in the ordering of individuals in the obligatory list of members of family, clan and organisations in Ghanaian death notices. Granting wealthy and important persons prominence in such a list being presumed to enhance the status of the deceased (Afful 2012, 127–128). Unlike societies where the practice is to list only immediate relations (Al-Ali 2005), the breadth of social connections in Ghanaian notices also speak of the deceased's wider social involvement (Afful 2012; Alali and Adjaye 1998; Matiki 2001; Ondimu, 2014). In Jordanian death notices, the practice of omitting any mention of a martyr's living relatives is understood to affirm the status of those dying as martyrs whose relations are other martyrs especially of their own kin (Al-Ali 2005). Further, as longer notices cost more, researchers have noted that length may stand proxy for socio-economic status (Alali and Adjaye 1998; Matiki 2001).

As stated earlier we are concerned about two aspects of death notices. First, we are interested in the way the published texts relate to the local social order and second, we want to show what features of that local order are being naturalised in the notices. The cited studies offer sundry instances of the form and content of death notices being affected by the local social and cultural order; however, few authors consider whether aspects of the local order are being naturalised. Al-Ali's (2005) study of Jordanian death notices is an exception as he centres his analysis on differences between a typical death notice and that of a martyr; presenting his analyses within a relatively detailed account of the sociocultural context where it makes sense 'to have a happy celebration on the occasion of the death [of a martyr]' (p. 9). He concludes that the martyr's death

notice offers a highly positive appraisal of both the martyr and their choice of martyrdom, potentially promoting the possibility of martyrdom to some readers while displaying the 'pride and honor [sic] on the part of' the martyr's surviving relatives (Al-Ali 2005, 28). Al-Ali shows Jordanian death notices are material expressions of its cultural order. This article seeks to provide a similar account of how death notices in Aotearoa New Zealand give material expression to this country's social order.

METHOD

To identify the template slots in and the cultural order shaping New Zealand death notices we collected and analysed death announcements published in the country's largest circulation daily, *The New Zealand Herald*. The notices appear in a sub-section of 'Family Notices' labelled 'Deaths' and were collected from weekend editions in 2010: April 24–25, May 15–16, June 26–27; 2012 April 7–8, and a further three days, May 27–29 in 2015. The last tranche was added to assess whether the form of the notices had changed since the earlier dates. *The New Zealand Herald* offers two options for death notices – publication on one or four days – and, rather than providing a template requires just four items of information apart from the text of the notice: '(given) Name'; 'Surname'; 'Relationship to deceased (the first option is 'Main notice')'; and 'Funeral Company' (see Figure 1).

A 'Main notice' is the text prepared or approved by those arranging the event. Notices purchased by co-workers, friends, or family members to express their loss and support the family may appear on the day of the main death notice or in the following days.

Our analyses focus on the main notice for each deceased setting aside 242 secondary notices. Most (190, 79%) of the notices set aside were from the deceased's immediate family, 37 (15%) from friends or neighbours and only one in sixteen from co-workers or other social groups. The seven days sampled provided a total of 334 main death notices for analysis. As New Zealand is an Anglo-settler colonised state (Belich 2009) we adopted a version of Fries' (1990a) list of slots: Name, Date, Place, Age, Circumstances, Relationships, Origin, Occupation, and Other Information, for describing the form these death notices took. Variations in the use of particular slots were noted and categorised. To identify the naturalised cultural order we utilised repeated critical reading and discussions between two or more of the authors seeking to answer the questions: Why is this included/absent? Why is it said this way?

YOUR AD DETAILS

Deceased First Name *

Deceased Middle Name

Surname Prefix — Select —

(optional) Mc, Van, de etc

Deceased Surname *

Generally known as

Nanna

Maiden Name Prefix — Select —

(optional) Mc, Van, de etc

Maiden Name

(nee XXXX)

Date Born Month / Day / Year

Date Deceased Month / Day / Year

Deceased Notice *

Please note: Ampersands (&), Macrons, Accents and Abbreviations cannot be used in family notices.Please call our call centre 0800437253 for assistance with macrons.

My Relationship to Deceased * — Select —

If your notice is not the Main Notice it will show up online under 'Guest Book'. All notices are subject to moderation. Not for publication – internal use only

Funeral Company *

If there is no Funeral Company for the deceased please type "none" and call Herald on 0800 437 253 once the notice is booked, during business hours and before the deadline. If you do not phone us, your notice may not be published.

Figure 1. Screen shot New Zealand Herald death notices

FINDINGS

Death notices in our sample are tightly constrained averaging less than 120 words – around twenty-two lines of print slightly exceeding the six (online) lines of the *Herald*'s standard package. A few occupy more than thirty print lines. Most death notices in the sample (78%) appeared over the name of a funeral home or provided evidence of having been prepared in consultation with staff of a funeral home while exhibiting key markers of a family authored text (Moses and Marelli 2004). Those signs include: occasional grammatical problems – mostly failures of agreement (number or tense) – instances of awkward word choice, inappropriate punctuation, and lack of clarity. The sample included only three notices where the death was due to misadventure and none stated the deceased had been killed – the most common reason deaths become news.

Death notices and the social order

(a) The New Zealand template

    Name:
In this sample of New Zealand death notices the first slot 'Name' captions the notice. Notices are ordered alphabetically by family name (upper case) followed by the given name or names of the deceased all of which are in bold. Unlike *The Times* the slot content does not follow a rigid prescription (Fries 1990a, 60). More than half the notices (184, 55%) included one or more of the following items in this slot: the name by which the deceased was familiarly addressed, their nickname, a woman's maiden name, a military service number or, very occasionally, an award or honorific. Fries observed such details appeared amid 'Other Information' in *Times*' notices.

    Date:
Intrusions, material relating to a later slot in the template presented at an earlier point in the notice, create considerable variability in the second slot 'Date' (of death). Declarative statements such as: 'On 23 May 2015', constituted a minority of entries (124, 37%). Many notices preceded the date with some 'Circumstances' (surrounding the death – slot five) such as 'Passed away peacefully' (87, 26%). In a smaller number of notices 'Place' (where death occurred – slot three, 16, 5%) or 'Age' (at time of death, slot four, 32, 10%) replaced 'Date' in the second slot. A further 46 notices combined 'Circumstances' with either 'Place' (40, 12%) or with the 'Age' (6, 2%) before giving the 'Date'. The vast majority (111, 83%) of 'Circumstances'-related intrusions included the word 'peacefully'.

A further 25 notices (7%) inserted details of military service (the force, rank, number, and commendations or other awards) before 'Date'. Consistent with United Kingdom usage (Fries 1990b), only seven notices (2%) omitted 'Date' entirely.

Place, Age:

Slots three 'Place' and four 'Age' were more obviously optional than 'Date'. 'Place' was omitted from 136 notices (41%), more than the 30% of English notices omitting that information (Fries, 1990b) whereas 'Age' was included in more (204, 61%) notices than Fries' English sample (33%). Of the 198 notices that included 'Place' slot three (106, 54%) was the preferred location from slots two (44, 22%), four (36, 18%), and five (12, 6%). The earlier 'Place' appeared, the more likely it was to be associated with 'Circumstances', in slot two 81%, slot three 57%, and slot four 49%. 'Place' was identified in two different ways, a minority (36) named only a town or city, the remainder, of which a minority also included the relevant town, named a hospital or hospice (62), a rest home or retirement village (20), or the deceased's home (24). Of the 204 notices that included 'Age' slot four (90, 44%) was the modal location, the entry sometimes appearing in slot two (38, 19%), three (51, 25%), or five (25, 10%). A small number of notices 20 (6%) interwove 'Date' and 'Age', as in '6 November 1973 – 10 May 2010', allowing Age to be calculated.

Circumstances:

Information about the circumstances of the death like: 'passed away peacefully', 'died suddenly', 'after a long battle with cancer' that Fries (1990a) assigned to the fifth slot in his death notices template more often appeared elsewhere in our sample. Only 12 notices (4%) provide any 'Circumstances' in the fifth slot and many more notices, 60 (18%), include no details identifiable as 'Circumstances'. As described above, 'Circumstances' routinely intruded into earlier slots, of the 274 notices that included some 'Circumstances' this material appeared in slots two (134, 40%), three (100, 30%), and four (25, 7%). A very small sub-set (6, 2%) employed variants of 'peacefully ['Date' or 'Place'] surrounded by family', spreading 'Circumstances' across two slots. Across all slots the most common circumstance was 'peacefully': the word occurred in 186 (56%) notices, of which the majority (97, 52%) used only that single word. The prevalence of the phrase 'passed away peacefully' in slot two was noted earlier. Other 'Circumstances' referred to the presence of family: 'peacefully surrounded by loved ones', 'in the arms and love of her family', or specific features of the death: 'after a courageous battle', 'suddenly and peacefully in his sleep', 'unexpectedly after a long life and short illness'.

Relationships:

Although slot six was the modal location for 'Relationships' in Fries (1990a) template, in our sample, this information appeared anywhere from the second to the seventh slot, mostly (251, 75%) occupying slots four-six. Unlike Ghanaian notices (Afful 2012; Alali and Adjaye 1998), the slot is focused on immediate family especially the surviving members, usually named in the following order: spouse, children and their marriage partners, grandchildren less often named, great grandchildren, siblings, nieces and nephews, wider family and, in fewer than 10 notices, a friend or friends. Barely 1% of the notices mentioned the deceased's grandparents and only 41 (12%) named their parents. A further 102 (31%) named siblings including 'in-law siblings' and 'step siblings' from a parent's re-marriage. Typically siblings preceded mention of nieces and nephews, wider family, or friends. As noted by Moses and Marelli (2004) these relationships are often characterised by 'adjectival modification', for instance: 'dearly loved and devoted husband of', 'loving brother of', 'most wonderful dad in the world', 'much loved grandma', 'loving great-grandmother'.

Origin, Occupation:

Of Fries' (1990a) optional slots it is the seventh ('Origin') and eighth ('Occupation') where the New Zealand death notices differ most clearly from those in the *Times*. Neither slot was widely used in this sample, only twelve notices (less than 4%) gave any 'Origin'. Five notices stated where the deceased was born, as in 'Bowral New South Wales' and others used phrasing like 'of Orewa (formerly Birmingham)'. Service numbers and, more rarely, other details of military service constituted the majority (20, 65%) of the few notices (31, 9%) giving any 'Occupation'.

Other Information:

Fries' final slot 'Other Information' (1990a) becomes, in these notices, a miscellany that includes one or more of: funeral service details, ways to get a message to the family, statements about the deceased, and expressions of gratitude to those who had provided care. Information about funeral or memorial services was most common, appearing in 289 (84%) notices of which most (244) provided the day, time, and place of the service being held to farewell the deceased or celebrate their life. A minority 34 (12%) said that, in accord with wishes of the deceased, a private service either had or would be held. Others (11, 4%) advised that funeral details would be provided. In 74 notices (30%) funeral details included a request for donations to a hospice or charity like Salvation Army that assisted sufferers and their families, or Cancer Society to support research. A third of all notices (114, 33%) told readers how to get a message to the family or obtain further information about funeral or tangi (funerals

conducted according to Maori tikanga – protocols). Slightly less than a third (109, 32%) of the notices included statements from the bereaved about the deceased's passing in 45 (41%) of which the deceased was addressed directly. Statements not addressing the deceased spoke about them in ways that might encourage readers to join in mourning their loss (McNeill, 2004). Half of the 64 notices that spoke about the deceased emphasised uniqueness for instance: 'Most wonderful, strong and generous lady, sorely missed, forever in our hearts'. Nearly as many (28 of 64) highlighted the family's loss, as in 'Sadly missed by family and friends' and, as in the first example, some notices did both. A few notices spoke of the deceased's current circumstances: 'Now returned to the care of his parents'. Of statements directed to the deceased 29 (of 45) assured them they were special and not forgotten: 'Thanks for being part of my life, I will always miss you'; 'Your passing leaves a heartache no one can heal, your love leaves a memory no one can steal'. Other comments, exemplified by the classic 'Rest in peace' wished the loved one well: 'May your spirit fly free like a shiny blue dragonfly', and a smaller subset did both: 'You have inspired us all and you deserve more than anyone we know, to rest peacefully'. Expressions of the family's gratitude to hospital or rest home staff, District Nurses, or other carers were confined to a minority of the notices (36, 11%).

(b) The local social order

Interrogation of the practices constituting the genre of death notices (Al-Ali 2005) enabled us to identify features of the dominant social order in Aotearoa New Zealand. First, and perhaps least marked of these practices, is the consistency with which New Zealand death notices are structured by the past tense exemplified in the repeated use of 'passed', 'passed away', and 'died'. That usage enacts and confirms the cultural gulf fixed between the present and what has gone before. Each notice repeats this separation of the past – when the deceased was a significant member of this family and an implied community – from the present where the deceased is absent. Some notices attended to that gulf, speaking about their past with the deceased alongside their current experiences:

> Words cannot express how much we miss you already, but we know
> how lucky we were to have laughed with you and held you near for
> so long. Sleep easy now and go with our love.

As represented in these notices that chasm between past and present seems self-evidently obvious, yet, despite that apparent naturalness, there are notices in which the deceased is addressed as if still present:

> May you walk through the Highlands again and travel through your
> beloved jungles of Borneo.

Addressing the deceased as one who hears what is said is a feature of poro-
poroaki (leave taking) and tangihanga (Maori funerary processes). This prac-
tice is evident in notices in which the loved one is addressed, often in te reo
Maori (the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand), as present to the
bereaved:

> E te Rangatira, moe mai ra i to moenga roa (Esteemed one, sleep
> your long sleep);

> Moe mai, Mama, kua haere to mamae inaianei (Sleep Mother, your
> pain has gone now).

> Haere i te rangatira, moe mai, moe mai, moe mai i nga ringaringa o
> te Atua, no reira. Haere atu ra (Go esteemed one, go to sleep in the
> arms of the Lord. Farewell).

Although these notices included te reo Maori and did not assign the deceased
to the past, they are otherwise indistinguishable from the majority consequent-
ly they also contribute to naturalising the dominant 'past – present – future'
model of time. Most obvious evidence of that conformity is routine use of
familiar phrases: 'passed away', 'passed away suddenly' or 'peacefully'; saying
the deceased 'will be missed'; and eulogising them. Despite their paucity, the
notices offer some challenge to the dominant understanding of time, a re-
minder that, however natural and obvious it appears, that understanding of
time is cultural.

Ascribing people an asocial individuality is the second feature of the local
social order observed in these death notices. This is particularly clear in the
bounded content of the 'Relationships' slot. In these main notices, 'Relation-
ships' are confined to members of the deceased's immediate family, routinely
omitting any reference to the deceased's life outside that circle. Inspection of
the omitted notices, most of which (79%) were provided by family members,
found they added little to portrayals of the deceased's wider social life. Only
one notice in 16 (6%) mentioned work or participation in another social organ-
isation. Further, most notices (88%) portray the family as beginning with the
deceased's generation, thrusting the social world further into the background.
Less than one notice in a hundred named grandparents of the deceased and
fewer than one in eight named the parents. Among the small number of no-

tices that broke with the conventional – 'starting with this generation' – construction of family, we identified several as definitely written by Pacific Island families and, it was a Pacific Island family who wrote the only notice placing the deceased within a network of relationships: village, island, church congregation, and associations. The non-conforming character of that notice was striking, not least because friends and colleagues (the world beyond the family) were represented only by the minority (21%) of the secondary notices that they had written and paid for. This emphasis on the nuclear family (parents, children and their offspring) has the obvious effect of obscuring the wider world of communities, relations, friends and co-workers in which the deceased participated. Narrowing the deceased's life in this way may be spur efforts to establish their uniqueness with 'adjectival modifications' (Moses and Marelli 2004), brief comments, or sketches, elaborations that do little to challenge the restricted portrayal of their social participation.

Unlike the Jordanian death notices in which the Islamic faith is explicit and central to the texts (Al-Ali 2005), there are scant instances of explicit religious or 'God talk' in New Zealand notices. In marked contrast to Ghanaian death notices (Afful 2012; Alali and Adjaye 1998) references to God or heaven, most lacking biblical authority, appear in only 15 notices (4%). All fifteen, like the Ghanaian notices, appear to be referring to the Christian God. Nearly half the non-biblical instances referred to heaven directly '… the more perfect rhythm of heaven in God's presence', or more allusively 'Gone to glory and back with NAME', 'Dearest Mum we know that you and Dad are now smiling down at us'. A similar number spoke of God's anticipated actions: 'May the Lord encompass you with His love and glory'; 'God shall now take you to His garden…'; 'Kei roto koe i te temepara o te Atua' (You are in the temple of the Lord). The paucity of overtly religious elements in the text of death notices may, like the preferred sites for funeral services, reflect the explicitly secular character of New Zealand society. Of the 274 notices that specified where the service would be held only 83 (30%) named a church. Nearly half (49%) of the services were located in non-denominational chapels at funeral homes, schools, or cemeteries, with the remainder being on marae, or in secular spaces – memorial halls, club rooms (golf, bowls, boating) – or at the graveside.

Finally, writers of these death notices appear to be guided by the culturally grounded injunction to speak well of the deceased rather than focusing on the status of either the deceased or their family. Notices valorised the deceased, reporting emotionally valued qualities either by adjectival modification, as in: 'devoted and loved father', 'treasured and loved sister' or by including statements about or directed to the deceased, such as: 'Our courageous hero…';

'A beautiful and courageous lady'; 'A good bloke to his many friends'. Such praise, also identified in Kenyan death notices (Ondimu 2014), is consistent with public notions of who is worthy of being mourned (McNeill 2004). Ondimu argued that valorising the deceased in these ways encourages readers accept that the person chose this valued life rather than living a less worthy one. These death notice eulogies echo the part such expressions of respect for the deceased play in diverse funeral rites. Descriptions of tangihanga (Barlow 1991; Salmond 2004) record diverse ways of showing the deceased respect. Speakers, on behalf of various whanau (extended family), hapu (sub-tribe) and other groups honour the deceased by: lauding their strengths and successes, laughing at their foibles, telling tales of particular exploits, and challenging them about controversial or unpopular actions. The orators often speak directly to the deceased person, recognising them as rangatira (leader, chief). While a death notice offers little space for families to show respect in these ways, the existence of alternative ways of speaking well of the dead underscore the culturally mandated nature of currently dominant practice.

DISCUSSION

Death notices as template texts

As described, these notices differ in two important ways from those Fries (1990a) analysed. First, these notices show considerably more flexibility both in ordering and filling template slots, so much so we believe it is more appropriate to analyse them as examples of an everyday text genre (Al-Ali 2005). Instances of a text genre display common structural features and components that may, but do not have to, appear in precisely the same order or form, as instanced by the analysed death notices. All notices name the deceased though this may be because the *Herald* will not accept a notice without the deceased's name. Most notices include 'Date', 'Place', and 'Circumstances' (of the death), the deceased's 'Age', and 'Relationships'; much as if the writers, like journalists, sought to prioritise the Who, What, When, Where, and How (Tucker 2001). Those elements appear at different rates than observed in English notices (Fries 1990a; 1990b). A substantial majority include details of the funeral service which should be seen as a distinct section rather than being bundled into the 'Other Information' miscellany as we, following Fries (1990a), did.

Compared to notices in the *Times*, New Zealand writers rarely utilised the two slots 'Origin' and 'Occupation' that most closely relate to the social class and status of the deceased. Less than four percent of the notices provided any information about the origin of the deceased and most mentions of an occupa-

tion involved references to a long-past military service. The remaining source of variation came in the 'Other Information' slot, where, as well as funeral service details that, in local death notices, should be treated as a separate component of the text genre, many included: directions on how to get messages to or make enquiries of the family; personal statements about or to the deceased: a request for donations to a relevant charity; and a smaller number expressing the family's thanks to those who had cared for their loved one. While these comparisons to death notices published in *The Times* suggest the exercise of much greater freedom for writers of these death notices, we consider that to be an artefact of analysing the notices as instances of a template text. Most of the observed variation related to the order of template 'slots' rather than major differences in 'components' included or what was said.

In Eid's (2002) classification, death notices in Aotearoa New Zealand are oriented to the deceased and prioritise the announcement, yet they position the person within their immediate family rather than prioritising their role and status outside it, a practice that limits impacts of the wider gendered society on the notices. Eid (2002) showed that obituaries in the United States, Egypt, and Iran, were affected by the gender relations of the wider social world naming family authors as the reason for this. Others analysing United States death announcements and obituaries (Halbur and Vandagrif 1987; Kastenbaum, Peyton, and Kastenbaum 1977), like Ondimu (2014) in Kenya, showed that societal sexism was expressed in death notices although these authors did not identify the family as the conduit. In Aotearoa New Zealand men currently dominate the commercial and political sectors of society so we expected to find a pattern of sex bias in the local death notices, however the freer form along with the almost complete omission of 'Occupation' and 'Origin' slots from the notices, appear to have rendered such bias less overt. It is conceivable that a fine-grained, forensic analysis of the language and structure of New Zealand death notices would demonstrate evidence of the systemic sex bias of this society in local death notices, yet other aspects of the colonising settler-society (Belich 2009) were much more evident in these notices than any patterns of sex bias.

The local social order

Death notices are expected to reflect, or be shaped by, the local social order and we identified four aspects of the Aotearoa New Zealand social order impacting on these notices. The first, and most obvious, is the gulf fixed between the past and the present, between the deceased who is now of the past and the surviving family members who wrote and populate the notice. In these notices the

chasm between past and present follows directly from the need to situate each person's death within the European conception of time as a flow of homogeneous, empty instants (Anderson 1991), a positioning that instantiates the cultural understanding that deceased persons are no longer present being permanently separated from the reader. Of the analysed notices, most positioned 'death' as the cause or instrument separating the deceased from the survivors, whereas in Ghanaian death notices, where a similar gulf between present and past occurs, 'death' is assigned an enabling role, the means by which one passes 'from the present world of the living to the past world of ancestors' (Afful 2012, 126). One notice in our sample similarly enjoined the deceased to go to the world of their ancestors – 'Haere atu ra ki o tūpuna'. In our sample the small number of notices in which the deceased was addressed directly as if they were present with or to the survivors, exposed the cultural character of the normal, 'taken-for-granted' separation of past from present. Despite that, the understanding of an unbridgeable chasm between present and past naturalised by and through countless repetitions, as in these notices, underpins three rhetorically self-sufficient (RSS) arguments (Wetherell and Potter 1992, 177–178). Those RSSs are: 'You cannot turn the clock backwards'; 'Present generations cannot be blamed for the **mistakes** (our emphasis) of past generations'; and 'We have to live in the twentieth century' each utilising the image of time as a never-ending flow to close discussion in favour of the colonising status quo.

The second aspect of the local social order affecting these death notices is evinced by 'Relationships' being confined to the deceased's immediate family of which they are cast as progenitor. Very few notices offered any information about the deceased's work, colleagues, friends, activities, or achievements so the life portrayed was effectively that of an a-social individual: entirely consistent with Margaret Thatcher's claim: 'There is no such thing as society: there are individual men and women, and there are families' (Brainy Quote n.d.). Comparison with a few notices published by Pacific Island families throws that cultural representation into sharp relief. Pacific families often included parents, sometimes grandparents of the deceased along with links to church and/or village. Among other notices a very small minority included details of their loved one's work and workmates. Such differences highlight and challenge the habituated ordinariness of the dominant cultural representation of the deceased as a rather a-social individual. Announcements of a person's death on national news will differ in this respect from death notices, as the deceased's death is rendered newsworthy by their social involvement, achievements, community participation and contributions. However, it is likely that the cultural ordinary of a-social individuality will inflect the portrayal of that more social persona.

The third aspect of the social order is the place, or more precisely absence, of overtly religious language in public texts. Death notices in Jordan (Al-Ali 2005), Ghana (Afful 2012), Kenya (Ondimu 2014), and Malawi (Matiki 2001) routinely include 'God' and other religious images and language in death announcements and obituaries whereas those in Britain (Fries 1990b; 1990a) and Anglo-settler colonised lands (Halbur and Vandagrif 1987; McNeill 2007; Moses and Marelli 2004) rarely utilise overtly religious language. Unsurprisingly, the latter pattern occurs in New Zealand where writers use a rather secularised vocabulary of death and living. Most of the observed 'God talk' had Christian origins although less than a third of the funeral services were in a church. These observations are consistent with the widespread understanding that, in a secular society, religious faith or spirituality is a matter of personal choice and unobtrusive practice. The small subset of notices offering glimpses of the spirituality informing tikanga of tangihanga (protocols of funeral practices) and a social order in which spirituality plays a more overt role presented explicit, although limited, challenges to this aspect of the dominant social order.

The final aspect of the dominant social order evident in the local death notices is an overwhelming preference for representing the deceased as a 'good bloke' or a 'fine woman', a goal generally achieved through adjectival modifications or comments made about or to the deceased. A few notices, in which the absence of adjectival modifications hinted at unresolved tensions, stood apart from this mainstream. The positive tenor of most representations appears to reflect the desire to represent the deceased as one who deserves to be mourned (McNeill 2004) and assumptions that the deceased chose to be the positive person being portrayed. We see the assumption that the deceased chose to live positively as resonating with neoliberal notions that people can, and should, take personal responsibility for their lives.

For the great majority of those writing death notices these aspects of the social order appear unproblematic. Despite the brevity of each notice (six online lines, NZH) and constraints of the text genre they inform readers of the death and how they can honour the deceased, revealed as the special person the family knew and wish to remember. Routine performance of this important emotional work within a form that is both familiar and accessible encourages easy acceptance that this is how death notices are. Although that comfortable familiarity may be disturbed by the few notices that introduce a language other than English, assert the deceased remains part of their present life, or, variously step outside the commonplaces of the genre, the frissons they trigger only serve to underscore just how naturalised the dominant form is. Fur-

ther, descriptions of death notices in other societies, rather than presenting a challenge to the dominant social order here, are recognised as expressing that people's culture and, because that is their culture, the described practices can be deemed irrelevant to us in Aotearoa New Zealand (Moewaka Barnes *et al.* 2012). Death announcements in te Ao Maori (the Maori world) are part of a different social order of which some notices that included elements of nga ti-kanga of tangihanga and te reo Maori offered glimpses. English is the language of these death notices although the *Herald* offers a procedure for languages like te reo that employ macrons. Notices that include te reo or another language gently remind readers that the taken-for-granted primacy of English is a par-ticular expression of the dominant social order.

It follows that the social order we identified through these notices came with British colonisers (McCreanor 1997) who would have been familiar with simi-lar death notices (Fries 1990a). As the settlers gained substantive sovereignty (Belich 1986) their social order became the everyday reality for most people and their families. Being heavily influenced by the Enlightenment (Billig 1982; 1995) that social order placed the individual at the heart of everyday real-ity. As noted previously, widespread adoption of neo-liberalism, or economic fundamentalism (Kelsey 1995), privileged that a-social conception of person and family. A political shift that appears to have furthered naturalisation of the identified aspects of the social order rather than directly affecting form or content of death notices. Consequently, we conclude that analyses of paid public announcements of peoples' deaths show the notices are shaped by four identified aspects of the local social order: firm separation of past from pres-ent; simplified imaginings of people as individuals; minimal use of religious or spiritual language; and eulogising the deceased as 'good person'.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of 334 'main notice' death announcements from *The New Zealand Herald* has shown that the notices are better analysed as a text genre than as an example of a template text. The latter approach does not cope well with the flexibility writers displayed in these notices. Further, our work showed that the short newspaper notices informing readers of who has died do contribute to naturalising aspects of the dominant social order in this modern society. A less thorough analysis of more than 200 secondary notices confirmed our decision to focus on the 'main' notices. Finally, we identified two aspects of the dominant social order shaping these death notices that play significant roles in naturalising economic rationalism and the associated neoliberal social order.

NOTES

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